

Trauma, Identity and Memories in the Partition of 1947: A Critical Study of Hasan Azizul Huq's *Agunpakhi* (*Fire Bird*)

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Abstract

This research explores how trauma, memory, identity and historiographies of the 1947 partition affects refugees' migration and the aftermath of the partition difficulties faced by the refugees' both sides of the borders in Hasan Azizul Huq's novel *Agunpakhi*. The protagonist is a woman who undergoes psychological traumas and memories of the 1947 partition and she realizes the complexity of capturing geographical identity transformations, the historiographical and cultural perplexity. This article is mainly based on content analysis method and it attempts to divulge the remarkable influence of trauma, memory, identity and historiographies on establishing her trans-national identity which is based on religion and political turmoil. It is a critical investigation on applying Cathy Caruth's trauma theory on the protagonist who experiences the traumatic situations of partition of India and Pakistan (East and West). Huq portrays the realistic scenario of communal riots of the Muslim and the Hindu communities, displacement, feminine of 1943, exclusion of British products, and socio-political crisis of the twentieth century Indian and East Pakistan Subcontinent. Many migrant people become the victims of displaced from their ancestral house gathered their traumatic memories that clearly focused on their compositions. The objective of this research is to find out how the migrant people experienced traumatic memory which represents the process of diaspora experience, dislocation, adjustments, humiliation, identity and historiography in the post-partition period. This study critically explores how the historical partition has traumatic effects of the memory of the people's displacement in the changing geographical locations.

Keywords: Partition Trauma, identity, traumatic memory, displacement, insecurity and historiographies.

Introduction

In *Agunpakhi* Hasan Azizul Huq focuses on the turbulent political condition based on communal riots. The migrant people are experienced traumatic memory which represents the process of diaspora experience, dislocation, adjustments, humiliation in the post-partition period. This novel depicts the characters suffering from the haunting memory of their past because the historical Partition destroys the socio-political harmony among the people of the religions. The novelist portrays how the socio-political conflagration affects the people's lives and memories.

The Partition of 1947 Act of Indian Independence divided into two parts in territory. Hindustan or India is for the Hindus and the Muslims for Pakistan (East and West). This type of Partition of the territory consequently ignited the social, cultural and political instability in the religions leading with the mass killing, communal riot, migration and displacement of many people. Huq shows the impacts of Partition on the character's lives, their traumatic experiences, uncertainty and psychological implications of the event. The instances of trauma has been explored as the consequences of the Partition. The family members were migrated and dislocated from each other where they were born.

Huq describes the Partition, displacement, Hindu-Muslim riots of the contemporary period. The turbulent reality of Partition shows social criticism, religion, boundary and diaspora witnessing the cruelty and merciless activities. The migrant people do not know the political crisis and trauma of Partition. They move to a new land sacrificing land, property and livelihood. Due to the communal politics of the selfish and greedy politicians, Partition has created a new post-colonial milieu in the mind of people. They experience trauma and identity crisis in both sides of the India and Pakistan. The Refugee crisis has become a great problem of the Partition. The protagonist expresses her cogitations and cognitions of sovereignty. Her memory is confined to the map of rath, culture, people, nature and struggle. The narrator is a simple village woman who has no hate of the Hindus. This communal riot destroys the unity, belief and reliance on the two communities. The Protagonist says, "What needs did she have, belonging as she did to a low caste Hindu community, to show undue affection before the higher caste Hindus? Yes,

there, no doubt, are a handful of Hindus who hate the Muslims from the core of their hearts, who would also like to butcher all the Muslims in the world.” (Huq 270)

Traumatic Experiences of the Migrant People of the Partition of 1947

During the period of the Partition of 1947 people experiences the diaspora movements. There were dislocation, acculturation, relocation, and an adjustment in the new country after the partition brings Diaspora experiences. Women experience of physical, emotional and cultural violence of partition and Diaspora. However, the migrant people especially women become the victims of the prevailing issues of caste, class, gender and religion. They present their resistance of this rampant violence which articulated through their resilience in the post-partition. In *Agunpakhi*, the protagonist says, “Our eldest son has written to say that all of them are now in East Pakistan. There no longer is any talk on whether the country belongs to the Hindus or to the Muslims”. (Hoq 293)

Trauma, Identity, Dislocation and Rootlessness of People

The partition of 1947 resulted in trauma which permanently disrupting the people’s identity, cultural roots, locationality, social, political and economic stability. Moreover, Partition and Diaspora dominated the tormented co-relationship among the people, society, nationality and history. The history of partition is divided into two parts: the first partition in 1905 when India was under colonial rule, and the second partition was in 1947. (Ghatak, p.vii) In *Agunpakhi*, Huq portrays the loss of the roots and belongings in the people’s existence in their migrant land. There are also agony, traumatic experiences and relocation of their identities in the past and in the present.

Huq describes the narrator’s self-negotiation, trauma, and memories of her past life at Yavagram, in the Katwa subdivision of Burdwan. Huq was only seventeen years old when his family shifted to East Pakistan. His mother was unwilling to leave Burdwan and she suffered from a traumatic loss of insecurity and mental balance for her last three years of her life. She rarely relates her present and she remains in her past memory. She recollects her memory of her childhood, youth, marriage and family life before the partition. Huq says about his old mother, “This person, whom we have dragged by force to this country.” (Biswas, p.320) He asserts that her escape from imbalance is a way to enter her personal space, to find a balance in her own terms. Moreover, it is a retrospective journey to rediscover her self-identity, so long suppressed. In *Agunpakhi*, Huq deliberately represents his mother’s traumatic experiences of partition.

The narrator of the novel is a female protagonist who belongs to the diaspora trauma of displacement. Before her marriage, she was a motherless girl who remains at a corner of her father’s house. She enters a larger network of patriarchal-feudal structure of a landowning Bengali Muslim family after her marriage but she remains nameless under the hierarchical identity marker, ‘Mejo Bou’.

Mejo Bou is a sacrificing character who learns to suppress her individuality to become a perfect housewife in a joint family. She does not have any idea and awareness of what happens in country, society, state and politics. Her husband is a politically conscious liberal Muslim gentleman who has knowledge about the tensions of the Hindu-Muslim. He becomes the President of the ‘Gramin Union’ and the activities of the Union Board gradually brought the idea of modernity in the village. After the Second World War the change and disturbances in the long-sustained, complacent feudalistic structure of the rural society became realized in India.

Methodology

This study uses the content analysis method to analysis the contents of Hasan Azizul Huq’s *Agunpakhi* novels and the secondary materials on going. The qualitative research techniques have been applied in this article. The research work is mainly based on content analysis. A detailed analysis extracted from the primary and secondary sources has been the process of reaching to a conclusion. Different techniques of historical method have been applied essential contexts sociological, anthropological and cultural analyses have been brought under observation. The data has been studied in three phases: preparation, organization and reporting. In the first phase, the primary sources have been carefully pursued to understand the texts in detail. In the second phase, data has been categorized and organized in detail. In the last phase, research report is prepared on the basis of the data assembled from both the sources.

For source citation, the APA style has been followed. British English for spelling and simple transliteration rules for transliterating Bangla expressions are followed.

Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to find out how the migrant people experienced traumatic memory which represents the process of diaspora experience, dislocation, adjustments, humiliation, identity and historiography in the post-partition period. The specific objective of this research is to explore the impacts of Partition and social, cultural and political instability which altered the aftermath situations of the characters' lives and haunted their traumatic memories.

Review of Literature

Pritha Kundu and Sanchayita Paul Chakraborty's "Surviving the Partition: Women, Agency and Relocation in *Agunpakhi* and *Dayamoyeer Katha*" describes the Partition of Bengal in 1947 and the traumatic diaspora experiences of the people. This article also presents the process of dislocation, relocation, acculturation and adjustments in the post-Partition era. People suffer the violence, dual process of Partition and Diaspora. The rapid changing socio-political relations after the Partition dismantled the prevailing relationships of caste, class, religion, gender and Diaspora. This article shows the trauma, dislocation and rootlessness but it has missed history and identity formation of the Partition.

Irina Ishrat's "*The Firebird: A Literary Projection of Socio-Political Cogitations of Hasan Azizul Huq*" shows the socio-political crisis, communal riots of the 20th century, displacements, civil war, genocide, poverty, famine. In *The Firebird*, Huq describes the corruption in politics, unsocial activities of the contemporary time and the traumatic experiences of the people. His novel focuses on freedom of movement, exclusion of British products, Partition of 1947 and the riots of the Muslim and Hindu communities. Partition is not only a political or geographical concern but also it has rape, killing, abduction, envy, loot, displacement, oppression, condemnation, eviction, refugee crisis, trauma, identity crisis and sufferings with literary cannon. In this article there are many elements of trauma, communal riots, displacement but there is not clear reference of history and memory.

Theoretical Framework

The study attempts to investigate the impact of trauma in relation to identity crisis. In this study Cathy Caruth's trauma theory will be used to trace down the traumatic experiences of the Protagonist. Caruth's work is distinguished by its emphasis on the intrinsic incomprehensibility of trauma. She claims that trauma is a crisis of meaning that occurs when an individual is confronted with an overwhelming incident that cannot be fully comprehended or absorbed into their existing cognitive and emotional frameworks.

Cathy Caruth's trauma theory is based on the premise that traumatic events are not accessible to conscious memory but rather are experienced as flashbacks, overpowering anxiety, nightmares, and physical symptoms. Trauma is a loss of meaning that occurs when a human witnesses an overpowering incident that cannot be fully comprehended. Traumatic experience contains a paradox: the most immediate impact of a violent encounter can develop as an inability to comprehend it. Trauma is thus equivocal on an individual level, as an experience of excess that overwhelms the subject metaphorically or literally. Caruth also highlights the trans-historical or intergenerational nature of trauma, arguing that history is how people are implicated in one other's traumas. Furthermore, she claims that trauma is a crisis of meaning that arises when a person witnesses an overpowering occurrence that cannot be fully comprehended. Caruth's work has influenced literary text analysis, and her theories have been applied to real-life trauma in an attempt to make sense of people's suffering.

To identity crisis here Ericson's theory of identity is used, where two stages are needed: Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion and Intimacy vs. Isolation to establish the arguments. The theory of identity formation is based on the idea that identity is a lifelong process that involves a series of crises or conflicts that must be resolved for healthy development.

Identity vs. Role Confusion stage occurs during adolescence, from about 12-18 years, and is the primary psychosocial task of adolescence. In this phase, teenagers delve deeply into their own values, beliefs, and goals in an attempt to find a sense of self and personal identity. They experiment with several roles and identities in order to develop a consistent sense of self and a unified identity. This stage is defined by confusion and experimenting with one's identity and life direction.

Intimacy vs. Isolation stage occurs during young adulthood and is characterized by the need for close relationships and intimacy with others. Individuals in this stage seek to form deep connections with others and

establish a sense of belonging. However, they may also experience feelings of isolation and fear of rejection, which can lead to a crisis of intimacy. This stage is crucial for the development of healthy relationships and a sense of self-worth.

The theory has been influential in understanding the process of identity formation and has been applied to various aspects of human development, including adolescence, adulthood, and interpersonal relationships.

Memories represent the Place, Mobility and Memory of Partition in *Agunpakhi*

Memories are significant elements in the partition history. People were coming and also similarly migrant both in India and East Pakistan based on religion which is a process of psychologically uncertainty of the uprooted persons. There were deep anxiety, frustration, agony and insecurity in the minds of the uprooted persons. Many migrant people become the victim of displaced from their ancestral house gathered their traumatic memories that clearly focused on their compositions. They were in a vulnerable condition in East and West Bengal.

In *Agunpakhi* Huq focuses on the turbulent political condition based on communal riots. The migrant people experienced traumatic memory which represents the process of diaspora experience, dislocation, adjustments, and humiliation in the post-Partition period. The protagonist has a nostalgic remonstrance of her childhood days and memories of Burdwan. She describes the Hindu Bengali refugees were bound to go to West Bengal which is a challenging journey for their survival in their new abode. Their new life in West Bengal, especially in Calcutta was riddled with hurdles. The memory of recollection of the narrator has expressed in this novel because she recollects the memories of communal harmony which persisted in pre-partition. However, the communal violence was an act of both violence and an act of sacrilege against everything which stood for beauty and purity. Partition is nothing but an offshoot of religious fanaticism. This religious fanaticism was the diplomatic policy of the political leaders to build up their political supremacy. There were severe riots which accompanied by the exploitation of women also.

Communal Riots and Socio-political Crisis

This novel represents the real picture of communal riots of the Hindu and Muslim communities, civil war, poverty, displacement, famine of 1943, Partition of 1947, and socio-political crisis. The colonial politics of religious discrimination affects the peaceful co-habitation of the Hindus and the Muslims. Earlier in this novel a massive fire broke out in the Hindu para, the Muslim neighbors stood by them. After the communal riots politics a Brahmin boy of the village gets murdered by the Muslims in the Kolkata and the protagonist is also a bereaved mother becomes sympathy for another mother. Her husband who was once respected by both the Hindus and the Muslims, has lost the last election. He becomes frustrated and aloof because previously he was the President of the 'Gramin Union'. The Union Board's activities sequentially become modern in the village. After the Second World War, the feudal rural society has changed and disturbance in the influence of modernity.

The colonial politics of religion affects the peaceful harmonious relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. From the very beginning of the novel, a massive fire broke out in the Hindu para, the Muslim neighbors stood by them. A Brahmin boy of the village gets murdered in Kolkata, and the bereaved mother gets sympathies of the protagonist. She is Muslim and the trifling quarrel between Shaikh and Hazra are fired of communal riot. The 'fire' is metaphorically meant a prophetic and symbolic poignancy:

Time has left me, as I can see it. It is such a fire as cannot be controlled by myself
—nor by any leader — Hindu or Mosalman. They tried to play with fire. Now they
must see that the whole nation gets to ashes in that the whole nation gets to ashes in that
fire. (Huq 225).

In his lament there are losses of authority, a defeat of feudalistic patriarchy, the radical change in ideology and time. The collapse of the Hindu-Muslim relationship drives humanity into a traumatic upheaval of postcolonial partition history. The narrator points out how the partition and hostility affects her family and nationality. Her extended family breaks up brother-in-laws quarrel among themselves and her husband's authority of the family is no longer existed. However, her brother-in-law gets interested in the anti-Hindu politics and he joins in the crazy clamour, "Looke lenge Pakistan". This slogan says in Hindi language which is unfamiliar to the Bengali Muslims in rural Burdwan. Moreover, he believes that this concept of the new land is exclusively for Muslims' worthy investment of their emotions and energy.

Nation is an imagined 'construct' and it can be an illusory as well as negative idea. The idea of the 'imaginary homeland' is formulated by Salman Rushdie. In his writings, he critically presents the utopic possibility

of Muslim identity which considers Pakistan as the land of Muslim. The protagonist Mejo bou, is unable to realize the validity of this type of fanaticism for a new nation which she thinks as an amorphous construct. She says, “Well, having own it by fighting, what will you do with it?” Her simple but thought provoking insight proves to be true when the madness of religious fundamentalism dies out. Her crazy brother-in-law supports Pakistan but he was not interested to go to Pakistan any longer. After the Partition she says to brother-in-law, “You have done enough of *lorke lenge Pakistan*. Do you know where that country is, and what kind of country?” (Huq 235) She cannot tolerate the ill-fitting artifice of constructing a new nation is based on religion. She thinks that the Muslims and the Hindus cannot be strictly contained in two nations, and a third division is required for the Bengali Muslims. She asks the questions about the logic behind the Partition. The simple question is very surprising for the half-literate woman because she understands the Partition-politics. There are similarities between Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, and Huq’s *Agunpakhi* of the anonymous wife became aware of the divide politics, the lands, the people and the religions.

The Trauma of Displacement, Diaspora Experiences and Identity Formation

The Protagonist remains anonymous and identified as author’s mother. She has an ethnic identity as a narrator who is under the paternalist rule. Her identity has changed after the Partition. As a Muslim, she is bound to move East Pakistan but she rejects this. She wants to live in Burdwan. In *Agunpakhi* Huq presents the irony of the ethnic identity of the Bengali people. Their identity is changed under the political authorities and only based on religion. They have little touch with their original motherland, roots, feelings, love for the country and needs. They suffered a loss which would not be revived. There are identity crises of the people especially the migrant people. They become bound to leave their homeland where they born and brought up. The diaspora experiences are so traumatic and struggle.

There have been two parts of the Partition-experience. The people who left their motherland and became ‘diaspora’ and the people stay in their motherland that refused to go other country. In *Agunpakhi*, the female narrator’s children and husband leave for East Pakistan but she stays in India. Her rejection to become a ‘diaspora’ and she reinforces the trauma of displacement by many refugees. The narrator’s final resistance of persuasion, threads by her husband and family members represents a distinct kind of survival. She gains the virtue of survival which compares her to a mature tree without its native soil. Her husband asks her: “When have you learnt so much to stay?” (Huq 245) Her reply is simple, “All my life you have taught me things and had me say whatever you want. Now perhaps, I have learnt one or two words on my own”. (Huq 245) At the end of the novel, she is alone and she has faith in a newly-awakened selfhood, come out as a voice of that indomitable spirit of an ordinary Bengali woman. She has no threats and no socio-political pressure. She says,

Man loses something to get something ... what have I lost, and for what? I thought much. Finally one thing came to mind. I have left so much to get myself. I have not been stubborn, or obstinate to anyone. I have only sought to understand everything on my own. (Huq 244)

There is a process of claiming ‘space of one’s own’. The woman is disrupted by the patriarchy. She does not protest against her children’s choice to leave for East Pakistan and her husband’s decision to join them. She always obeys her husband’s order unconditionally but she was reluctant to go East Pakistan. Her resistance is evident in three steps. Firstly she says, “Nobody could convince me why all this hotchpotch of a separate country—where only Muslims will live, but Hindus, Christians also may”. (Huq 252) Secondly she says, “none has been able to convince me that, only because I am Mossolman, that is my country, and not this”. (Huq 252) Thirdly she says, “Nor could they convince me that I have to go to a separate place because my children have gone there. What can I do if my husband goes? My husband and myself are not one but two different individuals. Very close, very intimate, yet a different being”. (Huq 252)

Her resistance is against the shrewd separatist policy of religious discrimination, against the Post-colonial crapulence of the “Two-nation theory”. The patriarchy manipulated the women in the traditional Bengali society. The women’s position is always vulnerable like wife or mother to someone. Women seek for own identity in the conventional patriarchal society. In *Agunpakhi*, women play the role as house wife who abide by the rules of her husband or sons. At the last part of the novel, she gains her identity and the agency as well as she refuses to change her country.

The Significance of the Title *Agunpakhi*

In *Agunpakhi*, the protagonist shows her individualism in the complicated procedure of losing all those who have been beloved to her. She has her strong voice about leaving Bardwan and she remains anonymous throughout the novel. This novel symbolically represents how such nameless people suffer in the history of Partition. Moreover, the novel is *Agunpakhi*, which mythically means the “Phoenix”. The significance of the title is the powerful inner sense of integrity which can be destroyed. However, the Protagonist suffers for the domination and suppression of patriarchy in society. The traumatic history is metaphorically burn herself in the fire of suppression like the mythical bird and the burnt-up residue of her reconstruction of self and her live in a new light.

She observes the rootlessness of the migrant people and their alienation in the new country. She becomes separated from her family and her family members left her alone but she survives in India. Her sense of belongings is perfect with the land, the village, and the nation. She knows the motherland which gives her the strength to stay alone in her home. She says, “I am alone. It does not matter; I will also be able to draw others to my bosom.” (Huq 303)

The Agony of Holocaust is a vibrant field of Historiography

The term ‘holocaust’ means the intimate connection with the history of partition and the struggles and sufferings of the people. In *Agunpakhi* Huq describes the agony of holocaust and the euphoria of emancipation buried under the debris of torture, fear, killing, uncertainty and insecurity. The ‘holocaust’ is a blooming field in partition which represents the growing significance of subaltern or post-colonial studies and marginalized languages in history writing as well as the traumatic experiences of the narrator has delineated in *Agunpakhi*. The sporadic and separate traumatic experiences of displacement, riots and the struggles for existence have delineated in the history of partition with the development of this trend. However, this partition history in reality presents the conglomeration of the sufferings of individuals. The miserable conditions, pathos and wound of the people give a new vision of history which has brought a dynamic change in historiography.

This paradigm of experience based on history has given a new lens in this novel Haq’s *Agunpakhi*. The migration becomes the cause of sufferings of the people and the characters are fictitious but their sufferings are immense. Partition was the division of a subcontinent and the division of India was concerned as East and West Bengal. In *Agunpakhi*, Hasan Azizul Haq represents the painful story of partition in different perspectives. It is an autobiographical writing of his personal life. He was born and brought up in Burdwan and he has childhood memories there. After the partition, he was bound to shift East Pakistan for better life and job facilities. The entire story carried out his personal life and his family life which reflected his suppressed consciousness. The narrator is an illiterate old lady who has spent her whole life in West Bengal because she wants to stay in her motherland until her death. She observes the contemporary issues of famine, riot, Partition etc. She is the silent eye witness of the tragic incidents of the partition time. Though she is not ready to accept and welcome the partition of India and Pakistan, she watches her whole family move to East Pakistan except her.

The historic event of partition of India and Pakistan has enriched English and Bengali literatures to their highest peaks. The literatures of West Bengal and Bangladesh are claiming a wider and international significance. Moreover, the literary voices are remembering the historical Partition and the consequent diaspora experiences deserve a global demand through translation. These are contributing to the reconstruction and expansion of the English literary map in South Asia. Both *Agunpakhi* and *Dayamoyee Katha* are welcome additions to the wealth of such literature. These are creating new possibilities and challenges for the readers, critics and translators. *Dayamoyee Katha* or *A Life Long Ago* are completely withdrawn from the present reality to rebuild the past. It becomes a strategic role for the author to complete the process of relocation in a new socio-political and cultural existence.

The Process of Traumatic Relocation, Survival through Memories: Expression and Experiences

The trauma of the denied pleasure is innocent, placid childhood and the deep-rooted pain of rootlessness people’s experiences. She misses her foster-mother and other neighbors who left their homeland in tears as well as lamentation. She realizes their nostalgia and memories of her consciousness. This type of negation of memory and nostalgia of the protagonist proves one’s existence became a burden on her soul. She feels a sense of loss in the negation. The agony of her mind is terrible but she stays in her motherland. Her new existence is her own identity in Partition. *A Life Long Ago* discusses a life which witnessed Partition of Bengal; the inhabitants of one state, without their wish, suddenly found themselves divided into two lands. The lands are divided into two parts of two countries. The narrative is a ten years old girl.

In *Agunpakhi* and *A Life Long Ago* both the narratives are from the perspectives of two female protagonists. They revisit the Partition in retrospect and their experiences of the deep trauma of dislocation, the struggles for existence and the reliving journey of survival through memory and textual narratives. Since the 1950s, and during and after the Liberation War of Bangladesh, the Partition and its consequent diaspora literatures in Bengali have been a rich and passionate area of expression for the nation-building project on both sides of Bengal. In the late 1990s, UNESCO recognized the International Mother Language day of Bengali as its international status. The Bengali people struggled for their language, country and culture in history.

Conclusion

Partition of India and East-West Pakistan was a revolutionary incident which produced literary masterpieces. Hasan Azizul Huq has depicted the massacre during the refugee migration, their sufferings and agony on both sides of the borders. In *Agunpakhi*, Huq delineates the political, economic, psychological and social effects of partition. The trauma of Partition is the resultant dislocation as well as the disintegration of one's world and the pains of sudden uprooting do ring in the leaves represents the main theme of the novel. However, the pulverizing presence of the past, the resistance to patriarchal judgments, the anonymous female narrative's decision to stay back in her native village in *Agunpakhi* and the delightful deviations of memories and nostalgic moments present a world of her own.

Unlike most of the previous Partition novels, they do not end in loss and fragmentation. This novel frames her own resistive voice, emerging from the ashes of the trauma of Partition and reclaiming their spaces of agency, surviving experience, articulation and relocation. The historical reality of Partition is that the novelist artistically represents the fact that the people became geographically and politically isolated but emotionally and culturally they were united as well as indivisible.

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