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History as the Culprit of the Fractured Past and Present in Gulzar's *Two* **Sneha Lata Sharma**

Abstract

Seventy years after the subcontinent went under the blade of History to suffer the Partition, a sensitive poet, lyricist, short story writer and filmmaker like Gulzar feels compelled to write a novel on the same subject. Partition Literature has had a long tradition, in various genres, and Gulzar himself has authored a number of poetic and non-fiction writings on the Partition. Yet, the subject remains beyond artistic representation, and once again the pain and suffering of millions as a repercussion of the event force the literary artists to arrest and assess the problematic with new perspectives. In *Two*, Gulzar takes up the historical event as a subject of his fictional art and depicts History as a protagonist still actively working on it without becoming history. The present paper attempts an analysis of the novel *Two* as a Partition novel, and the author's treatment of History in relation to the individuals victimised in its course.

Keywords: Partition, Gulzar, Transnational Literature

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History is erroneously thought of as a record of wars and war heroes. It is inadequately represented if it does not take stock of the causes and consequences of an important event, and its impact on the general public during and after it. Tolstoy, in his introduction to *War and Peace* (1993), says that history proceeds inexorably to its own ends with mankind appearing an incidental instrument of the historical process. In other words, human beings and the events in which they appear become pawns in the sweep of history.

History has been personified and presented as the protagonist in *Two* (2017) by Gulzar. She is present throughout lambasting human beings. In the novel, Master Fazaldeen, who teaches History at a school, talks of the role of history like this:

History is on the rampage making giant strides. It is happening right in front of us. The Second World War ended and Germany was broken into two parts—East Germany and West Germany. The country was divided but then it divided people too...‘Six crore thirty lakh people lost their lives for this’. (19-20)

Master Fazal has a prophetic vision that history is going to repeat itself in India, too. He is apprehensive of the impending division and its aftermath:

Another giant step of history is about to fall here—in Hindustan. Some forces are contemplating another partition, of land, of people. Hindustan is to be divided into two and a new country named Pakistan created...Once again millions of lives will be at stake. (20)

When Gulzar writes about the Partition, it is not just the pain of the lacerating wound that becomes the driving force, it is the scar of the Partition that History scratches again and again and which gapes at the suffering humanity through Gulzar’s eyes. Partition literature has a great tradition in the writings of Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Chaman Nahal, Bhisham Sahni, Amrita Pritam, Kamleshwar, Saadat Hasan Manto, Raj Gill, Attia Hosain and many more. There are other records of the Partition of the sub-continent on the other side—the partition of Bengal, by writers like Sunil Gangopadhyay and Akhteruzzaman Elias. Partition literature has a flavour quite different from Partition history, as it relies upon personalised truths rather than generalised political and sociological discourses. As explained by Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint in the introduction to *Translating Partition* (2001):

What has come to be known as Partition Literature became a repository of localized truths, sought to be evaded and minimized by the dominant discourse on the Partition. These narratives offer insights into the nature of individual experience, and break the silence in the collective sphere. (xi)

In fact, the Partition has been an experience which still remains beyond expression. It is what may be called the sentiment of the sublime. In the footnote to Jean-Francois Lyotard’s essay “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism”, Saugata Bhaduri and Simi Malhotra explain the Kantian concept of the sublime:

Kant talks in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), of two kinds of aesthetic judgments, which come in the middle of the ‘pleasure scale’ moving from the sensual to the intellectual. One of this [sic] has form and boundaries and represents cognitive harmony and is called the ‘beautiful’. The other is formless, boundless, produces a sense of awe and terror, but can

lead to moral understanding and is called the 'sublime' is thus the unrepresentable...
(Bhaduri 337)

The most heinous crimes of history have been recorded again and again in literature, yet every record, every delineation remains incomplete, inexpressible. This is what Lyotard considers an essential feature of postmodernism:

According to Lyotard, it is therefore necessary that Holocaust remains immemorial—that it remains being that which cannot be remembered—but also that which cannot be forgotten. Thus, any art attempting to represent the Holocaust should continue to haunt us with its inability to represent the unrepresentable, to say the unsayable. It should continue to haunt us with the feeling that there is something other than representation.
(Powell 20–21)

Gulzar, too, relates the Partition to the Holocaust when he says, "Unlike say, the horrors of the Holocaust or the Second World War, which have now become history, the Partition continues to be a part of our social political discourse" (177).

In fact, there are as many versions of Partition narratives as the victims of Partition, be they composed in textual forms or not. Gulzar, the poet and novelist, who has had first-hand experience of the Partition, has worked on the subject in a manner which appears to be more subjective than objective. In the afterward, 'A note on *Two*', he himself claims, "This is a work of fiction, but the characters who inhabit it and the experiences they go through are not. They are the results of my imagination working on the people I have known, the stories they have shared" (178). A.J. Thomas, too, in his review of *Two* cites Rakshanda Jalil's remarks in her "Translator's Note" for Gulzar's other writing *Footprints on Zero Line: Writings on the Partition* (2018):

Gulzar sahib differs from the 'Partition generation' of writers such as Saadat Hasan Manto and Krishan Chander in many ways; for one, he has the benefit of hindsight and the luxury of introspection. He is not interested in chronicling the events that led to the division of the subcontinent or putting them in neat labels of 'cause' and 'effect' or even apportioning the blame. Instead, he wants to peel back, layer upon layer, the silence that had settled upon the lives of those most affected by the event. And it is this unpeeling of those long-held silences that he does in story after story in an attempt to make sense, retrospectively, of the horrors of Partition. (Thomas 202)

A.J. Thomas also comments, "Exactly the same thing can be said of *Two* as well" (181).

In *Two*, which is a novel of short length, Gulzar speaks about the rift created by a political event—historically known as the Independence, but which is also remembered with its twin event "the Partition". The rift has gradually transformed into a gulf, which is prepared to consume, to absorb in its depth, everything that comes into its orbit. The characters of the novel *Two*, the residents of a small town, Campbellpur—Lakhbeera, Rai Bahadur, Tiwari, Panna, the concubine, the grandfather and the grandson Kaka, the two sisters Soni and Moni—all are engulfed in the gulf

of the Partition. They take the help of Fauji, a Muslim truck driver, to travel to their destined land though they do not know where it is or what it is. The hope of these people to reach safely across the border is ironically reflected in Fauji's sudden outburst, "I'll drop you off whenever everyone feels we're at the border and safe. I have no idea where this border is and what it's called" (94-95).

What distinguishes *Two* from the other Partition novels is the treatment of the thematic and historical problematic. The novel does not have a compact, well-knit plot with a lover or a nationalist at the centre stage. As Tabish Khair says in his review of the novel, "Partition is narrated as a series of vivid cinematic vignettes" (Khair 2018). In the foreword, Gulzar says "I wished to examine the status of the refugees after the Partition" (x). In an artistically arranged series of narratives about the victims of the Partition, he does examine the trials and tribulations of the so-called refugees, but the real protagonist of the novel turns out to be History itself. In the opening chapter of *Two*, Gulzar complains through his character Master Fazal:

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. (4)

History has always had her ghostly presence in all the Partition writings. As Anup Beniwal says in *Representing Partition*, "These novels, by virtue of their being rooted in the phenomenon of Partition, ineluctably get implicated in Partition historiography...the spirit of the times is evoked through a factual (but fictionalized) fidelity to the historical data, through an incorporation of historical event and personae into the narratives" (181). Gulzar, too, names the significant political personalities but does not put the blame of the Partition, the bloody event, on them. He affirms:

History will keep on marching like this. The names of a few people will stick to her fabric. She will register those. There was Hitler, there was Mussolini, Churchill and Joseph Stalin, among others. This time, the names may be Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jinnah, Subhash Bose! But the names of all the lakhs and crores who have lost their lives will be nowhere. They will be mere numbers in which all of us will be included! (21)

Here, Gulzar realises that hatred and violence cannot happen unless a large number of individuals are involved in it. "If Fazal was being hounded by a Verma or a Sharma, Rai Bahadur had a Rahim or a Karim after him" (24--25). That hatred and violence are inherent in human nature became an unpalatable reality after the Partition of India. Violence erupted on an unheard-of scale and millions of men, women and children were done to death. Manohar Malgonkar, in his *A Bend in the Ganges* (1965), has advanced a Freudian explanation that violence long suppressed will find a volcanic outlet. In *Two*, this irrational fury itself has assumed the role of history, but does not cease to be a thing of the past. Pawan K. Varma in the introduction to the novel sheds ample light on the problem:

But *Two* does not end with the Partition. It carries us along, to decades later, where in the

strongest ways the strands that unravelled in 1947 come together. In that journey, the 1984 riots against the Sikhs became a metaphor for the continuance of hate and violence in societies. The same emotions that made the Partitions, one of the most gory chapters of India's modern history, are now repeated in an entirely different circumstance, only to prove the point that the irrational and warped furies that lurk just below the surface of 'civilized societies' can be easily triggered even when the past should have taught us to overcome them resolutely. (xviii)

The history of the Partition will keep reverberating with force till the day the onus of the fateful event is owned up to by everybody responsible for it. Ascribing it to wrong causes will lead humanity nowhere. As Leo Tolstoy philosophises about the 1812 war:

"... and in the same way the innumerable people who took part in the war acted in accord with their personal characteristics, habits, circumstances and aims. They were moved on by fear or vanity, rejoiced or were indignant, seasoned, imagining that they knew what they were doing and did it of their own free will, but they all were involuntary tools of history, carrying on a work concealed from them but comprehensible to us. (541)

In Chapter 1 of Book Nine, Tolstoy muses on 1812 war cruelties when "Millions of men perpetrated against one another such innumerable crimes, frauds, treacheries, thefts, forgeries, issues of false money, burglaries, incendiarisms, and murders" apparently accusing either Alexander or Napoleon for enforcing war conditions (477). However, Tolstoy makes a pertinent point:

To us it is incomprehensible that millions of Christian men killed and tortured each other either because Napoleon was ambitious or Alexander was firm, or because England's policy was astute or the Duke of Oldenburg wronged. We cannot grasp what connexion such circumstances have with the actual fact of slaughter and violence: why because the Duke was wronged, thousands of men from the other side of Europe killed and ruined the people of Smolensk and Moscow and were killed by them. (477-478)

Tolstoy makes an in-depth analysis of what the French and Russian historians are very fond of saying about the causes of the war or the fall of the war heroes. He analyses how history takes very small units for examination and seeks solutions to a problem, but still fails to relate how the will of many can be represented through the action of one:

The actions of Napoleon and Alexander, on whose words the event seemed to hang, were as little voluntary as the actions of any soldier who was drawn into the campaign by lot or by conscription. This could not be otherwise, for in order that the will of Napoleon and Alexander (on whom the event seemed to depend) should be carried out, the concurrence of innumerable circumstances was needed without any one of which the event could not have taken place. It was necessary that millions of men in whose hands lay the real

power—the soldiers who fired, or transported provisions and guns—should consent to carry out the will of these weak individuals, and should have been induced to do so by an infinite number of diverse and complex causes. (478)

Every individual who does not act against war is evidently committing the crime of war. The repercussions continue for generations and erupt at the slightest provocation. The various characters carry the baggage of their past along with them when they move towards the border. They hope to reach “their” Country. However, the journey once undertaken becomes perennial. Some of them, like Lakhbeera, finish their journey in death, others carry it on endlessly.

The foreword affirms Gulzar’s agitation, anxiety and agony when he says, “I am still not at ease with this. But then, I wanted this to be over as we complete seventy years of the Partition, this year in 2017” (x-xi).

However, will the subcontinent ever be able to get over the haunting violence that has accompanied the Historical incident? The question has its echoes in the past and future history, and returns to the subject without any answer. Gulzar also says, “For me, it is a novel; it has an arc of its own that has a beginning and which makes its way to an open end” (179).

The Partition is not yet over and it cannot be until each and every individual of the subcontinent resolves against the hatred it has spread. Tabish Khair, too, philosophises:

In typical post-colonial fashion, we have found and blamed the usual suspects: ‘the divide and rule policy’ of the British and the vested interests of some politicians. But we have not faced our own culpability. Bad things happen not because they are instigated by others, but because enough of us want them to happen and, even more, allow them to happen. (Khair 2018)

Just like *War and Peace*, where Leo Tolstoy makes an analysis of the Napoleonic War that continued from 1805 to 1812 and involved millions of killings in the name of the honour of a few, Gulzar, too, discusses the long history of the subcontinent that covers the event and the afterlife, “the ‘long partition’ described by Vazira Zamindar, (indicating that the event was not terminal but rather continues to unfold) bedevils the continent” (Jalil et al. xix).

Dealing with Partition and its aftermath, *Two* has been divided into three sections. Part One presents the Pre-Partition scenario and the devil-dance of death performed by the Jinn of the Partition that has come out of the bottle of history. Part Two delineates the Post-Partition woes of the displaced persons. Part Three is about the saner elements among the English, the Pakistani Muslims and Hindus exhibiting friendly attitudes.

Pavan K. Varma pictures the sad spectacle of the Partition and its aftermath in the introduction to the novel, “What was one land became two, separated by the unbridgeable gap that made millions refugees overnight. Some ten to fifteen million people displaced by a destiny they did not choose. It is estimated that some two million lost their lives in the frenzied bloodbath that accompanied this division” (xvi). However, sensitive writers, especially those having a face-to-face encounter with violence, take a wider view of human nature and shun the practice of referring to individual identities—national or communal, as culprits of hatred and violence.

Here, it would not be inappropriate to cite Bishwanath Ghosh who, in his review of Kavita Puri's *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories*, says "It may be strange, but not surprising: people who have suffered Partition first-hand are hardly the kind to raise anti-Pakistan slogans or think of Bangladeshi migrants as 'termites'" (Ghosh 25). Gulzar also belongs to the same category. In his novel, he neither blames Pakistan for the violence nor spews venom for the Muslims for the sufferings of Hindu refugees. Gulzar mainly deals with the sufferings of Hindus and Sikhs uprooted from the newly-created country Pakistan, yet in *Two* does not imply that Muslims were immune to the blows of the Partition. Gulzar takes a fairly impartial view in this respect. There is one incident referred to in the novel, but it is not a solitary case but one out of many. It is about the husband of Meera, the daughter of Umar Sheikh, a friend of Karan Singh. He is killed in the riots in Meerut. This is a clear indication that Muslims too suffered a lot. Pavan K. Verma reiterates, "The story that transports you to the agonies and dilemmas of ordinary people, both Hindus and Muslims who suffered as a consequence of the Partition" (xvii).

Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony before the cataclysm caught them unawares. The cordial relationship between them is exemplified by the friendship of Master Fazaldeen and Master Karan Singh. Fazal, who teaches History at a school nurtures patriotic sentiments and revolutionary plans to participate in the freedom movement, and unfolds them before his friend Karan Singh: "So if we do not teach science to our students, how will another Azad and Bhagat Singh emerge? How will we get independence?" (11). For Master Fazal, Subhash-babu is the hero of the freedom struggle and he quotes his words, 'Give me blood and I'll give you freedom' (14).

The headmaster of the school reports to the police the activities of Master Fazaldeen. A case is registered against him. His house is raided. After that a British officer ties Fazal to an easel and has him whipped in the school ground. Master Karan Singh rushes to shield Fazal and he too is given the blows of lashes. The crowd present there becomes unruly and chaos ensues. Karan Singh pulls Fazal out of the scene, flees carrying him on his back, and takes him to the house of a student.

While returning from his daughter's house, Karan Singh is surrounded by a hostile crowd baying for blood. Then a man with an axe in his hand comes forward and shouts, "Oye, hold on that's my prey. I have an old score to settle" (89). He takes Karan Singh to a village and pushes him into a house. This man is Hashmat, the father of Baqar, a student of Master Karan Singh. Thus, by this strategy Karan Singh's life is saved by a Muslim butcher.

The Partition becomes a reality. The atmosphere turns ominous, like never before. Anger and confusion stalk everywhere making people anxious as to whether they will live to see another day. The situation deteriorates beyond control. There is no law and order. People start leaving hearth and home. They are attacked on the G.T. Road. Camps with barbed wires are set up for them. People from nearby villages bring food and water for them but they run away from those who feed them. However, some people want to stay where they are. Their situation is illustrated by Lakhbeera's way of thinking: "What can Hindustan offer me? Why should I leave my country for another? If Pakistan, so be it this is my country" (61). Those who are leaving their places have a wishful thinking that they will return after the things settle down. Gulzar ponders over the advent of Independence: "Freedom arrived all right, but it came drenched in blood, wounded... The body slushed in different places. Some limbs were amputated, some left hanging, deformed, scarred"

(111). This is what Master Fazal had predicted: "Millions will be crushed under the feet of this conceited history. The wounds will take decades to heal, centuries to overcome the trauma" (111).

Gulzar also mentions, though very briefly, the Indo-China war: "In 1962 when India and China were at war, he (George Samuel) explained, 'See, this is Pakistan's war. They want Kashmir. They are preparing for that with China'" (152). Surprisingly, Gulzar omits the Indo-Pak war of 1965 altogether.

Next, the scene shifts to England. George Samuel, an officer of the British administration who devotedly worked for the welfare of the Indian people and appreciated their culture, feels like a refugee in England. His daughter Edna wants to marry Paul, that is Jaipal, the son of Rai Bahadur Des Raj of Campbellpur, also called Attock, now settled in London. She wants to go to Hindustan and see the place in Rajputana where she was born.

Those who have migrated to England greet one another like long-lost brothers. Saleem Siddique, a son of Master Fazal, runs Fazal Food Centre in London. On meeting Paul he says, "I have found an Indian brother" (153). Paul corrects him: "I am Pakistani, from Campbellpur, a Pakistani refugee from India" (153). Saleem feels as if he is able to see someone from his own motherland.

Then Gulzar moves on to 1984. Sikh riots erupt in Delhi and spread to various parts of India within hours. Trains are stopped and thousands of Sikhs are massacred for the crime of one Sikh who assassinated the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. During these riots Kartar Singh, the child Kaka of the Partition days, is rescued by a Muslim truck driver, Jafar Miyan.

Lastly, history marches on to bring the twentieth century to its end. There is a passing reference to the Kargil War of 1999. Fauji, the Muslim truck driver who carried many Hindus and Sikhs across to India during the Partition days, is still alive, living in a graveyard. He hears the boom of gunfire and the deafening roar of explosions. He mutters, "There they go again, the rascals. They did not let me sleep all night" (172). The valley, too, has been divided. Fauji does not know which side he is in—Hindustan or Pakistan. His predicament is much like that of Manto's Toba Tek Singh.

Though every episode records some horrendous act perpetrated on the helpless, Gulzar does not overstate the acts of communal hatred with rebounding force. Rather, he makes the reader, along with his own self, suffer silently, as if it were a private grief. Fauji, a Muslim, performs the last rites of his Hindu passengers. Panna, a concubine, owns an orphan, Kaka. But in other cases, humanitarian concerns are at an ebb. Tiwari's daughter-in-law fears her own people. As Pavan K. Varma says in his introduction to the novel, "Time erases wounds, but memories remain, like smouldering embers below the ash even when the fires of history appear to have died" (xvii). In 1984, during the riots that ensued following Indira Gandhi's assassination, Kartar or Kaka has to face the same old trauma; only the faces of the rioters change. His shop is set on fire. His life is endangered. He runs for his life and a Muslim truck driver 'Jafar Miyan' helps him for some time. Finally, Kartar has to hide himself in a pile of garbage:

Twenty-four hours had passed since he had jumped into the pile of garbage. He had spent a day and night in the same way in a haystack once, when his father and mother were killed in front of him. He was very young and Baba, his grandfather, had carried him to the

cowshed...Baba had urinated in the truck, he suddenly remembered. Scared, he felt his pyjamas and found they were wet. He could smell nothing because he was covered in filth. (167--168)

This filth, this garbage symbolises the stink of the violence and the repercussions of the Partition that have not yet gone. History will take a long time to get over it. In his interview with *The Times of India*, Gulzar laments, "All day long I keep wishing, let Partition be a past now. It should only remain a part of history" (*Times of India* 2017).

Women are the worst sufferers in communal disturbances. They end up being victims of rape, which is a heinous crime, an act of humiliation. In extreme cases, as Gulzar suggests, it results in derangement of the mind. In this respect, the pathetic story of Moni, that is Manjit, deserves to be discussed in some detail. Soni and Moni, the two sisters, come to India and are alone with no one to escort them. Life is not easy for these two abandoned, young women. They drift from place to place. Moni grows sickly. Her face turns pale. Soon she begins throwing up. This is when she realises that she is carrying the child of her rapist. There is no way to abort her pregnancy. She would beat her belly and cry, "This is my enemy growing in my belly. What should I do? It will die only if I die" (119).

Soni and Moni reach the Bundi fort in Rajasthan. Bebe, an elderly woman in the fort, takes them under her care when Soni convinces her that their whole family, including Moni's husband, got killed on the other side. After some time, a baby boy is born to Moni. Bebe looks after him. One day Moni says, "Soni, see! His face is like that one's...doesn't he look exactly like the one who used to rape us everyday" (130). Soni looks at the deepening horror in Moni's eyes. It seems as if she has lost her equilibrium. Then, one day the child's body is discovered in a well. Moni is nowhere to be seen. A couple of days later, Moni is arrested. She is charged with the murder of her own son and put behind bars. When Soni comes to see her, Moni says, "He killed many Hindus in Campbellpur. So what if I have killed one small Musalman" (134).

To trace the uninterrupted course of history, Gulzar seems to have dwelt upon the Bangladesh War quite comprehensively when he makes the pronouncement, "George was right. The division wrought by religion never lasted. The '60s had just wound down when Pakistan broke up. A part of it became a new nation, Bangladesh" (158). This historical development was, after all, closely connected with the Indian subcontinent. The army men from West Pakistan and the pro-West Pakistan goons killed the people of East Pakistan, set their property on fire and raped their women—a replay of the mayhem of 1947.

Gulzar relates the events of 1947 with those of 1984 when thousands of Sikhs were savagely butchered. In 1947, Hindus and Sikhs were fighting against the Muslims but in 1984, Hindus and Sikhs were killing each other, something that had never happened in earlier history. Gulzar then makes a passing reference to the Kargil War of 1999, leaving a vast gap that could have been filled by the hard stroke of history in 1971 when Muslims killed Muslims, proving beyond doubt that religion is not a binding force to keep people together. Here, the following lines from Tarun K. Saint's Poem "Cyril's Map" seem to echo the overtones of the historical irony (Cyril Radcliffe was assigned the task of drawing the boundaries of the newly formed states at the time of the Partition of India in 1947):

Map becomes mapmaker, makes cracked earth
 a mirror in which new maps appear.
 Myriad map images: go forth and multiply. (Gulzar 16–18)

Thus, Gulzar's novel covers the history of the subcontinent from 1946 to 1999 – the Kargil War. What ensues from the stories of the most ordinary characters is that those who set out for home and security have not yet finished their search. The History of the Partition repeats itself: "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" (137). A.J. Thomas also points out in his review of the novel, "The characters developed in this open-ended novel do not settle down anywhere; neither are they free from their traumatic memories" (Thomas 178). Hence, the nostalgia of the Partition does not provoke Gulzar to write a historical novel with historical events and characters, offering the writer the temptation to comment upon or blame certain ideologies or political decisions. In fact, no historical figure appears in the novel. Similarly, the novel remains a long poem allowing the reader multiple interpretations. The characters' identities do not have rigid frames and communal identities hardly matter; what matters is their victimisation at the hands of history, which keeps expanding without any qualms.

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