

# What Is In A Name? : Partition, Language, Identity and Lepers Analyses of Anwar Kamar's Short Story "of Lost Stories"



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## Abstract

The Indian tradition of plural culture, harmony and fraternity between different communities was dashed into pieces by the Partition of India. The genre of short fiction writing itself became the symbol of the partition of India because of its fragmentary form. Many creative minds were inspired by Partition violence to create literary/cinematic depictions of Partition. While some creations concentrated on the aftermath of the partition of India in terms of difficulties faced by the refugees in India and Pakistan, others depicted the brutal butchery, massacres, and violence during the refugee migration. In fact, millions of innocent people lost their lives during partition riots. The Sikhs and the Hindus died demanding their freedom and separate state on the basis of their religious principles and The Muslims lost their lives chanting the slogans- "Pakistan Zindabad". This paper is an attempt to analyze Anwar Kamar's short story "Of Lost Stories". It is about some lepers. This paper attempts to analyze how lepers got affected by the partition of India as well as to explore some other issues like colonialism and identity politics by applying postcolonial and structuralism theories.

**Keywords:** Partition, Binary, Identity, Survival.

## Introduction

In the sub-continental history, the partition of India in 1947 was a chaotic, tumultuous and restless event. In the history of India, this period was more terrible, chaotic and difficult than all the other times. This period was a time of vengeance, hatred, bestiality, violence, brutality, dislocation, death, defilement and destruction. Nowhere in the country there was peace and stability. This time was overpowered by bestiality, violence, chaos and inhumanity. Nothingness, sense of ruptured existence, meaninglessness and despair could be witnessed everywhere. Kindness, humanity, compassion and concern had completely disappeared. The partition of India wrenched those refugees or migrated people away from the land where they were born. These people were living in constant threat of loss, death and devastation and had lost all that was dear to them. Nothingness and violence are the two polarities, in the world of Partition. Vengeance and Violence were synonymous with life. To live was to face chaos, trouble, vengeance and violence. Shattered existence, Nothingness and meaninglessness are appropriate appellations for the enigmatic emptiness which lies beyond the irrational and illogical borders and boundaries of vengeance and violence.

The horrible picture of ghastly violence and vengeance flashes across the mind of the hearer, when the word partition is heard. The two words Violence and Partition have become synonymous with each other. The most important theme of the partition short fiction is the theme of violence, hatred, vengeance and its ramifications. Those short stories which were written in immediate reaction and response to the shocking acts of violence, vengeance and hatred which were perpetuated by the Indian partition present the partition violence in all its forms. In these short stories the ugly acts of bestiality, bloodshed and barbarism have been presented realistically. These short stories are full of horror and violence. According to Alok Rai 'rational behavior and aesthetic imagination are infected by the incomprehensibility of monstrous upsurge of violence and horror. And one of the consequences of this process, he says, is a kind of literary indulgence in describing the violence and horror, which he calls the

*pornography of violence*. Representation of vengeance or violence was essential to extinguish the fires of violence and to curb further actions of vengeance so it can be said that it is not pornography of vengeance or violence. These short stories also deal with the plight and sufferings of those people who became victims of vengeance and violence during the Partition of India. All the acts of annihilation, sensational acts, utter chaos and scenes of carnage find an artistic and realistic presentation in these short stories. Even though these short stories about the partition of India had less artistic quality, they were as important and essential at that critical time as they are at present. While discussing about the artistic quality and its absence in Ahmed Abbas' play, 'Main Kaun Hun'? (Who Am I?), Ismat Chughtai comes to the conclusion that the burning times urgently needed only water and not fruit juice to quench the fire. This was the moment when writers provided ammunition in the form of plays, sketches, stories and poems, scattering them everywhere. Ahmed Abbas scribbled his play, 'Main Kaun Hun'? in ninety minutes, rehearsed it, and that same evening arranged performances in several parts of the city. Abbas did not have time to consider the fact that his haste might compromise his art, that it might belittle the power of his pen, that a writer's greatness might be diminished. If he had thought about all this, he might have turned 'Main Kaun Hun'? into great art, but then it couldn't have doused the fire blazing at this time. This burning world needs dousing more than it needs works of art. The haste might not have compromised his heart but his art.

#### **Aim of the Study**

"Of Lost Stories" is an interesting short story by Anwar Ali. This short story reinforces and reflects upon the idea that at the time of the Partition of India in 1947, all those people who were on the bottom of the socio-economic-political pyramid, the partition of India made very little difference as their survival always comes first for these people. All those people remained lepers after 1947 as well, who were lepers before 1947 and these helpless and miserable people exchanged their Muslim names for Hindu ones and then became Hindus after chanting 'Ram Chandarji di Jai!' for Saussure, language constitutes our world, it doesn't just record it or label it. Meaning is always attributed to the object or idea by the human mind, and constructed by and expressed through language: it is not already contained within the thing (barry). In this way this single phrase "Ram Chandarji di Jai!" or "Allah Ho Akbar!" constitutes a particular community as Hindus or Muslims. Meaning of these phrases is always attributed to the object or idea by human mind and constructed by and expressed through such phrases. But for these miserable lepers these phrases are just means of their bread and butter and survival. This paper attempts to analyse how lepers got affected by the partition of India as well to explore some other issues like colonialism and identity politics by applying postcolonial and structuralism theories.

In this short story the author has presented and reflected upon various issues such as colonialism. Colonialism comes under postcolonial

studies. An important text in establishing the theory and practice in this field of study was 'orientalism' (1978) by the Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said, which applied a revised form of Michel Foucault's historicist critique of discourse (see under new historicism) to analyze what he called "cultural imperialism." This mode of imperialism imposed its power not by force, but by effective means of disseminating in subjugated colonies a Eurocentric *discourse* that assumed the normality and pre-eminence of everything "occidental," correlatively with its representations of the "oriental" as an exotic and inferior other. The term Orientalism is now sometimes applied to cultural imperialism by means of the control of discourse, not only in the orient, but anywhere in the world (klages).

Edward Said argues, the West (or occident) produced the non-white, non-western cultures and peoples as inferior through a variety of discourses which stated the terms of their existence as inferior (klages). In this short story "Fieldganj was officially called wilfriedganj. It is said that at some point there was a house there that belonged to Wilfred sahib. No one really knew if he was English or American. But he was definitely white. And because of the fear of white men, thieves and robbers stayed away from his house. The natives began to build their houses near his house. Then land dealers raised the price of land and before land became too expensive, many people built many houses nearby. Noticing the increasing number of new houses, the people from the committee moved their post beyond the railway track, noticing this place down in their accounts as wilfriedganj. The illiterate natives simplified this English name into Fieldganj and they themselves became Fieldganjia or people of Fieldganj." <sup>(jail)</sup> These lines throw light on the themes of orientalism, colonialism and color politics in the mind of colonized people and how the name 'Wilfried' creates cultural imperialism. This word 'Wilfried' works as a hegemonic word which makes the people of a particular place feel the presence of white colonizers and creates a hegemony which is based on black and white binary relationship in which white stands for power and superiority and black for fear and inferiority. This binary works on the minds of people to such an extent that the place where very few people used to live become Fieldganj and the people of a colonized country call themselves 'Fieldganjia' which signify colonialism. These people feel that they are secure and protected if they live in Fieldganj which shows and throws light on how a colonizer feel that he needs to be protected by the powerful colonizers.

When a nation colonized a non-western region, it exported its own legal, religious, educational, military, political and aesthetic ideas along with its economic regime-what Marx would call the superstructure, or ISA. In places like Africa and India, British colonial rule meant teaching the indigenous people about the superiority of western practices: through setting up systems of police and courts and legislatures following British laws, through sending missionaries to convert natives to Christianity (largely the church of England) and establishing churches and

seminaries, and through setting up schools to teach British customs, British history, and the English language to children and adults in order to make them more like British citizens. And with these ideological exportations came British/Western 'culture', in the form of music, art and literature, so that regardless of the ancient literary traditions of India, China, or the Arab world, inhabitants of these colonized areas were taught that Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton were the 'greatest' authors who ever wrote. In short, British cultural standards were upheld and all other notions of culture, of art, literature or philosophy, were denounced as inferior and subordinated to western standards (klages). "Every 15 days the Meems from the mission would visit the slums of the lepers. The Meems would always come in threes. Two black and one white. The black one would be really black but their saris would be extremely white, like milk. Their white shoes were made of cloth. One of them had a brown cloth bag in her hand. The other held a bundle of rolled photographs. The white one held a long stick in her hand. She would often ask one of the black Meems to hold this 'pastor'. 'Here, hold my pastor'. The white Meem was tall and well-built. She looked like a creature from another world, with a white solar hat on her head, a white coat with half sleeves, a white skirt, long white socks and a pair of brown manly boots up till her knees. The black Meems would nail some wooden pins on the wall of a hut and hang the unrolled pictures. The white Meems would select an image and tell its story. She would point at different places on these photos with the end of her stick. The stories would be about sheep and goats or about the Lord and Messiah Jesus. In these pictures, he was either bringing light back into some one's eyes or restoring the health of a sick person...Then the white Meem would close her eyes and, addressing her heavenly father, she would pray for the safe return of the lost herds and the health of those who are sick. After every prayer, the black Meem would say 'Ameen' and the children would repeat loudly after them. The Meems would wait for the children's voices to die down. When there was silence at last, the black Meems would open their cloth bag and take out worn and used Frocks, skirts, blouses, waistcoats, pants and socks; the white Meem would go about distributing these among the lepers...The children were given cards from last Christmas. While leaving, the Meems would also leave some medicines and bandages for the lepers. They would take the bag and the roll of pictures along with them. Even the wooden nail would go. Since the time Fieldganj became a settlement and lepers began to live there, the missionaries began to arrive from foreign land and the Meems came to the leper colony every fifteen days, showing pictures, telling stories, distributing medicines and used clothes and giving old cards to children...But no leper had ever converted from Islam to Christianity and this is how things remained till the end or till the creation of Pakistan at least (jalil).

"Fieldganj spread itself onto the other side of the canal. There were graves on the other side of the canal. This series of graves would have continued to spread had the railway track not interfered. Hindus

and Sikhs lived on this side of the track. A colony of lepers lived behind the graves. God alone knew if the people of Fieldganj had erected these graves to bury corpses or to distance themselves from the lepers. And no one really knew if the lepers had always been there or if they had arrived and settled in the area later. But it was known that the lepers were definitely Muslims. They had their own well and their own mosques. They also had muslim names Deen Mohammad, Fazal Deen, Nazeer Hussain, Mohammad Sadiq and others (jalil)." Here the author emphasized on the word 'Muslim' as these Muslim lepers changed their names to Hindus for the sake of their survival. "What is in a name? That which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet." This is a profound quotation from "Romeo and Juliet", a very famous play written by Shakespeare that suggests that names themselves do not hold worth nor meaning, and they simply act as labels to distinguish one thing or person from another. Juliet applied this metaphor of a rose to Romeo: even if he had a different name, he would still be the man she loves. This quotation is related to identity or we can identify it with identity crisis as one person is known by a name which gives him his identity that is based on a religion, cast, gender and country and it relates him with a particular culture. Here all these Muslim lepers belong to a particular religion which determine their situation and community in the society in which they live. Particularly if we talk about the partition times, names worked as a signifier of religion that was the most important thing during the partition of India. These lepers changed their names for the sake of their survival as the people gave alms to those lepers only, who belonged to their own religion. Meaning of their lives comes only if they survive and it is their life and existence in this world which matters first and other things like religious identity that is signified by their names comes only after that. "The people called Sadiq as Sadiq (Kodha). At his age the signs of laprosy could not be detected on Sadiq's body, but the older lepers believed that the later the disease shows, the more intense the pain is. Sadiq did not look like a leper from any angle and someone would rebuke him. "you seem all right" Are'nt you ashamed of begging? Sadiq had attached the word Kodha or leper to his name. This way no one would be mistaken."(jalil) for Saussure, language constitutes our world, it doesn't just record it or label it. Meaning is always attributed to the object or idea by the human mind, and constructed by and expressed through language: it is not already contained within the thing (barry). It has been said that there are three versions of every story, your version, my version, and the truth, but the case here is more complicated than that, since all the available terms are purely linguistic, there is no truth about these matters which exists securely outside language. Language is arbitrary, relational, and constitutive, and this way of thinking about language greatly influenced the structuralists, because it gave them a model of a system which is self-contained, in which individual items relate to other items and thus create larger structures. So for being alive they change their names (barry). Thus it can be

said that Shakespeare's words about name can be applied on these lepers as who you are or if you exist or not is determined by the survival and not by a name. In this way we can conclude that either we call Sadiq by his Muslim name or his Hindu name or we call him Sadiq Kodha, what really gives meaning to his life is his existence. After partition on the other side of the canal, there were homes instead of graves. Those who lived and stayed in these houses said "the living needs home more than the dead" The lepers were still living in their slums but their clothes and appearances had changed somewhat. They wrapped their dhoti in a different fashion and wore red loin clothes. Sadiq Korha was now Ram Prakash but everyone calls him Prakash only Prakash because now the signs of leprosy were visible on his body....Sadiq narrated his story to the people of Fieldganj who had come to visit from Pakistan. When Fieldganj was attacked we took shelter in our slums hoping that you all will come to take us along. Then we realized that someone will come to take us, no one will let us sit in their vehicles...When the chants of Allah-o-Akbar ceased, we began to wait for Hindus and the Sikhs. They did not come either...By then all our supplies had become depleted and our children had started crying. Their mothers tried to distract them again and again. But they would not stop crying...When the 60' clock express passed us, we had crossed the railway tracks. A Hindu priestess, Mai Faujaan was standing in front of us. She was holding a stick with a colorful variety of small flags attached to it. She said in a nasal tone "say the sacred word." And all of us, adults and children alike, began to repeat after her, "Ram Chandarji di Jai"...As we moved down the slope of the tracks, we began to walk towards the houses of the Hindus and Sikhs, who on seeing us, went and hid in their houses, and continued to stare at us, we stopped at a distance from their houses and began to declare "Ram Chandarji di Jai" our voices were affected by the leprosy and the children's whining cries were interrupting the chants. They did not understand what we were saying. Later when they understood, they came out of their houses and brought some leftover food for us. Some roti, rice and lentils. They left these for us in front of their houses and went back inside...The next day, they came across the railway tracks on their own and left some lentils, rice, rotis, jiggery, salt and chillies for us, along with some oil and soap. One day along with these supplies, they also left a statue of their God—it was white as milk. We placed it in our mosque, mister. It would only have gathered dust and smoke if it had been left there on the tracks (jalil). Hence this story gives a very important message that there is nothing in the 'name' which became so important at the time of the Partition of India.

The feeling of imagined communities was prevalent in each community, during the time of partition. People of each community were imagining the people of their own community as their brothers and had a strong feeling of comradeship towards them (parveen). In this short story "When the theft of chicken among lepers became an everyday occurrence, Sadiq applied the strength of religion to

his appeals "Brothers in Islam" Assalamaliekum "May the faith of the brothers in Islam remain intact." (jalil) The language in these lines used by the author seems to be ironical as religion is used and manipulated by Sadiq to fulfill his own selfish desires and for making communities on the basis of religion which can give him alms. The irony of the situation is that this feeling of imagined communities vanishes, when the people of wilfredganj move towards Pakistan and does not allow these lepers to sit in their vehicles lest they should be infected by their disease. "When Pakistan was created, the Muslims of Fieldganj left their colony and went away to Pakistan. No one asked the lepers if they would go to Pakistan. So no one knew what became of them." (jalil) According to Jean Paul Sartre, the famous French philosopher, every man decides his own morality in Existentialism. Here in this short fiction Muslims who were supposed to help these Muslim lepers decide not to help them so the famous concept of communal groups at the time of partition is deconstructed. The binary Hindus/Muslims, no more works here as the first thing for people is their individual well being. Where is community, formulated on the basis of religion? Where is religion itself which teaches to help the needy?

The children of lepers waited for leprosy to strike them so that they could then visit the city, begging for alms. According to structuralism, Things cannot be understood in isolation - they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures, they are part of (hence the term 'structuralism'). Secondly, Saussure emphasized that the meanings of words are (what we might call) relational. That is to say, no word can be defined in isolation from other words. The definition of any given word depends upon its relation with other 'adjoining' words. For example, that word 'hut' depends for its precise meaning on its position in a 'paradigmatic chain', that is, a chain of words related in function and meaning each of which could be substituted for any of the others in a given sentence. For Saussure, language constitutes our world; it doesn't just record it or label it. Meaning is always attributed to the object or idea by the human mind, and constructed by and expressed through language: it is not already contained within the thing (barry). These children of lepers see themselves in the context of the larger structures they are part of and wait for leprosy to strike them. They fail to identify themselves as different from their context but see themselves as part of a structure in which all are lepers.

#### **Conclusion**

The incredible suffering that partition caused in some areas through exchanges of population has become a favorite topic for Indian, Pakistani, and Sikh writers. Dealing in various ways with the human tragedy, endured by people on both sides of this newly created border, these writers, argues Alok Bhalla (editor of one major collection of these stories), which informs nearly all the stories written about the Partition and the horror it unleashed, a note of utter bewilderment" (Partition.1). Most of the writers who have written about partition, had themselves witnessed the holocaust and the violence, blood and

terror it caused. perhaps this is the reason that they have given us a painful but honest perspective of what the politics of borders can do to human lives and civilization and They want to propagate the message of peace and prosperity to the people, by showing them the way that leads them to a land, where there is no division in the name of religion, where liberty, equality and fraternity predominates and where wind blows only to disperse the fragrance of Shantih, Shantih and Shantih (Thakur 221).

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