

Ques-It is time to focus on the atrocities of Partition, instead of playing the blame game. Discuss.

Answer: The historiography of Partition studies has tended to focus on the chain of events that led to the partition as well as the organizations and individuals that were assigned blame in different degrees for the partitions. But, new subaltern studies have changed the focus areas of partition studies. Instead of playing the blame game, they are now increasingly talking about experiences of partitions from the perspective of class, gender, caste, etc.

We know that the socio-religious reforms movement had seeds of both, modern nationalism as well as communalism. Consequently, communalism passed through its three stages, culminating in the partition holocaust.

Different schools of historiography have only been different in their interpretations, but their focus areas were more or less the same. They have tended to focus on increasing trends of communalisation, the organizations, and persons that stoked its fire from both sides, the parties and individuals who failed to fight communalism effectively, the rapid turn of events in the phase of mass politics, the transfer of power, etc.

The death toll of almost a million and many millions more migrants is almost a footnote to this approach of studying partition. **Communal holocaust is taken as incidental to a rapid and confusing partition.** But, the subaltern historians mainly focus on who suffered due to the partition and how. Although communal riots had been a regular occurrence for some time, they acquired a whole new meaning with the Direct Action day announcement by Muslim League. It led to mass killing and brutal rape of women in Kolkata. With partition, even Punjab got engulfed in the communal riots.

People, irrespective of gender faced the brunt of partition. But, women were an easy and obvious target. **Zan (woman) and Zamin (land) had always been connected to the family pride; now it was connected to the religious pride too.** Appropriation of zan and zamin was considered an ultimate form of triumph over the communal enemy and a shame beyond description for the losing side. This social assumption led to some ghastly outcomes.

E.g. **Thoa Khalsa, a village in Rawalpindi was a Sikh village.** Ninety women are said to have 'voluntarily' jumped into well rather than fell into enemy hands. Glorifying such acts of mass suicide raises some serious questions that Indian society may not be able to answer even today.

Recently, journalist Rahul Pandita said in a media event that one filmmaker had once told him that so much violence had happened, not due to the partition, but due to the desire on part of men to commit a sexual crime.

Urdu and Punjabi poets like Saadat Hasan Manto and Amrita Pritam had lamented over the tragedy in their poetic verses. Amrita Pritam even asked the poet of Heer- Ranjha, Waris Shah, to get out of his grave and save the daughters of Punjab burning in the flames of partition. Authors like Amrita Pritam (Pinjar) have tried to present the human side of the partition. And, historians like Gyanendra Pandey (Remembering

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Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India) and Urvashi Butalia (The Other Side of Silence: Voices from Partition of India), etc. have tried to study the partition from below.

In conclusion, we can say that instead of just focusing on causes, accused and chain of events of partition, we should actively look towards victims, their victimization, and the social causes of their suffering. Teaching partition should be replaced by remembering partition as an event of human misery.



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