

Observing partition horrors remembrance day

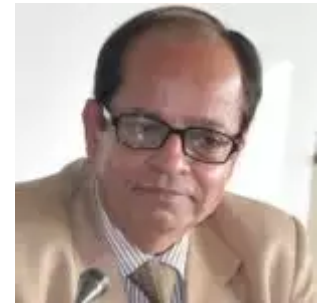
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Jagdish Batra

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Dr Jagdish Batra is a senior academic, currently working as Professor of English at O.P. Jindal Global University, India. He has nearly four decades of teaching and research e [... MORE](#)



The announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the institution of Partition Horrors Remembrance Day on August 14 is being interpreted by different people according to the political affiliation which one has. However, it needs to be delinked from political motives and studied for the impact that this move will have in the long run.

There is no doubt that the Partition was no less in terror than the holocaust in the memory of which 27th April is observed as the Holocaust Day by the Jewish community all over the world. There are holocaust museums spread all over Europe. The magnitude of the human loss suffered during the two world wars pales into insignificance when we compare it with the figures related to the violence during Partition. Literary historian William Dalrymple, writing in the New Yorker had placed it at one million dead and fifteen million displaced – the largest human migration in world history. The number of women violated and property looted is beyond any estimate whatsoever.

But it should be noted that the Partition as a traumatic experience has found sufficient cathartic expression in history and literature. A number of historians like Bipin Chandra, Mushirul Hasan and social scientists like Gyanendra Pandey, Ashis Nandy, O.P. Bhalla, and literary writers like Chaman Nahal, Saadat Hassan Manto, Amrita Pritam, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Intizar Hussain et al have written on it. The emergence of New Historicism has given an impetus to fiction based on historical events. Playwrights like Gurcharan Das, Mahesh Dattani, et al have put out Partition themes on stage.

Some years ago, a Partition Museum was built through the efforts of Kishwar Desai and others at Amritsar. It has been doing wonderful work in affording opportunity to the survivors on both sides of the border to get in touch. Oral versions have been obtained from the survivors and their kith and kin and preserved in online libraries which are accessed by people from across the world. Of late, this interest in creating and critiquing Partition literature has seen a rise. The number of Ph.D. aspirants taking up Partition literature for study is an indicator. These are all educational and social ventures. Do we need to add political dimension to it?

I concur with the Hindi writer Krishna Sobti who wrote once that Partition is difficult to forget but dangerous to remember. There hardly appeared any need to observe such a day because the people who migrated from across the border created in 1947 are, in many

cases, no more. Those still living have faded memories of the traumatic experience. Through the dint of hard work, they were able to re-establish themselves and fend for their families. Their enterprising nature was well-acknowledged by all. As has been brought out by many interviewers, and I can support it from personal experience, coming as I do from such a displaced family, that the elders chose not to discuss the trauma of Partition with the young people and instead encouraged them to move on in life.

It is worth considering as to what impact the added emphasis through observance of a Day will have on the psyche of the nation, particularly the youth. It is said that one must learn from history but that learning has to be hedged so as not to create further animosity in society; rather pledge to shun the mindset that brought about this holocaust upon us. The Partition wounds have healed but suspicion remains. Our effort should be to remove that suspicion and to that end the institution of a Partition Horrors Remembrance Day does not seem to contribute. However, it all depends on how our leaders and society observe the day in future. Whether they seize the day to atone for the atrocities perpetrated on the basis of religion or do the vote-seeking politicians whip up identity politics and alienate a section which has been well amalgamated?

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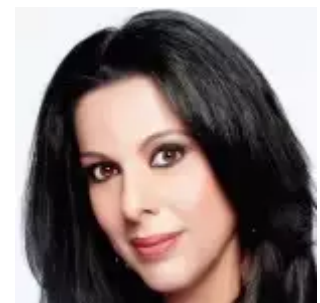
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