



Rewriting the Nation: A New Historicist Reading of Partition Narratives in Shahnawaz's *The Heart Divided* and Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*

Amir Iqbal Abbasi

Lecturer in English, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan. amirabbasi@numl.edu.pk

Itrat Zahra

The Government Sadiq College and Women University Bahawalpur, Pakistan. itratzahra79@gmail.com

Hassan Bin Zubair*

PhD English (Literature), Head of English Department (BS Programs) Superior College Mian Channu, Pakistan. Corresponding Author Email: hbz77@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study examines the ideological underpinnings of South Asian Partition novels through a New Historicist framework, proposing that such narratives often reinforce the dominant discourses of the states from which they emerge. Focusing on *The Heart Divided* by Mumtaz Shahnawaz and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain, the research explores how literary texts interact with non-literary historical documents to sustain or contest national ideologies. Two significant political speeches—the 1947 presidential address to the All-India Muslim League by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the 1940 Congress address by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad—serve as contextual anchors for this inquiry. By correlating these political narratives with the fictional representations in Shahnawaz's and Hosain's novels, the study reveals how both texts reproduce the “discursive practices” sanctioned by their respective national ideologies. The analysis further suggests that such textual constructions contribute to an “epistemic transformation” of consciousness—operating simultaneously as a form of ideological poison and medicine. Ultimately, this research underscores how Partition fiction participates in the production of state-sanctioned knowledge systems, blurring the boundaries between historical truth and literary representation.

Keywords: Partition Literature, New Historicism, Discursive Practices, Ideology and Nationhood, Epistemic Transformation, South Asian Fiction

Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most defining and tragic events in the history of the subcontinent, that has shaped not only the political landscape of the region but also its cultural and literary consciousness. The literature that emerged from this historical rupture offers deep insights into the ideological, emotional, and social transformations that accompanied the creation of new nation-states. Among such works, Mumtaz Shahnawaz's *The Heart Divided* (1957) and Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) occupy a significant space for their nuanced portrayal of identity, nationhood, and gender during the Partition era. Both authors, writing from distinct national locations—



Pakistan and India respectively—reinterpret the historical event through the lens of their nations' ideological trajectories.

This study proposes that Partition fiction does not merely document historical trauma but often participates in reinforcing the dominant discourses of the state. It argues that literary representations of Partition are shaped by the ideological narratives that emerged from political power structures and continue to define postcolonial national identities. In this context, both novels are not neutral narratives of the Partition experience; rather, they engage with and reproduce the ideological positions sanctioned by their respective national contexts. The analysis situates both texts within the larger cultural and political frameworks of their nations, tracing how the interplay between history and fiction contributes to what may be called an epistemic transformation of the collective consciousness—where ideology acts both as a binding force (“medicine”) and as a limiting construct (“poison”).

Background of Study

The years surrounding 1947 were marked by competing nationalist discourses that sought to define the cultural and religious identity of the soon-to-be partitioned subcontinent. The ideological divide between the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress culminated not only in political separation but also in the production of divergent historical narratives. The 1947 presidential addresses delivered by Muhammad Ali Jinnah to the Muslim League and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to the Congress in 1940 exemplify these conflicting visions. Jinnah's speech articulates the Two-Nation Theory, emphasizing the incompatibility of Hindu and Muslim identities within a single state, whereas Azad's address calls for a unified, pluralistic India.

This research brings these political texts into dialogue with the fictional representations offered by Shahnawaz and Hosain. Both novels, though written by women and deeply attentive to private experiences, remain entangled in the broader ideological structures of their respective nations. Reading them alongside these foundational political speeches allows a deeper understanding of how literature and ideology intersect—how the literary imagination participates in constructing, reinforcing, or subtly negotiating the discursive practices of the state.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how *The Heart Divided* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* engage with the political ideologies of Pakistan and India by reflecting and reinforcing the discursive practices established during the Partition era.
2. To analyze the interrelation between literary and non-literary texts—specifically, how the 1940 addresses of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad serve as ideological subtexts that shape the fictional representations of nationhood in the two novels.
3. To investigate how both authors' narratives contribute to an epistemic transformation that internalizes national ideology as both a source of identity formation and a mechanism of ideological conditioning.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do *The Heart Divided* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* mirror the political ideologies articulated in the 1947 address by Jinnah and in the



1940 address by Azad?

2. How does a New Historicist reading reveal the intersection of history, politics, and literature in shaping the narratives of Partition and nationhood?
3. Do these novels subvert or reinforce the dominant state narratives of their respective nations, and what implications does this have for understanding the ideological construction of postcolonial identity?

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the principles of New Historicism, primarily informed by the works of Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault. New Historicism views literature as a cultural product deeply embedded within the political, social, and ideological structures of its time rather than as an autonomous creative act (Greenblatt, 1988). It recognizes that texts are produced through the circulation of power and discourse and that meaning emerges from their interaction with historical conditions. Barry (2009) describes New Historicism as a method of reading literary texts by placing them with non-literary text of the same historical age.

In this regard, Foucault's concept of discourse provides a crucial foundation. Foucault (1972) argues that discourse is not merely a linguistic construct but a system that defines what can be said, thought, and known within a given cultural moment. This theoretical position enables the study to trace how political power and ideology infiltrate literary production, transforming literature into a site of both resistance and reinforcement of dominant narratives.

The presidential addresses of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad function here as *non-literary discourses* that authorize specific historical and ideological interpretations of nationhood. When read in relation to *The Heart Divided* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, these speeches reveal how both novels participate in the reproduction of state-sanctioned ideologies. Thus, drawing on Foucault's idea of power/knowledge and Greenblatt's notion of the "circulation of social energy," the research demonstrates how literary texts contribute to an epistemic transformation—where ideology operates simultaneously as a form of control ("poison") and a mode of cultural preservation ("medicine") (Greenblatt, 1988; Foucault, 1980).

Literature Review

Partition literature occupies a significant position within South Asian literary history, reflecting the intersection of personal memory, collective trauma, and ideological construction. Scholars across disciplines have examined the Partition of 1947 not merely as a political event but as a discursive moment that generated competing narratives of nationhood and identity. The literary representations of Partition reveal how writers from India and Pakistan have internalized and interpreted the political rhetoric surrounding their nations' origins. This section reviews key critical perspectives on Partition narratives, the ideological function of literature, and the relevance of New Historicism as a framework for understanding the interplay between text and history. The discussion situates the novels *The Heart Divided* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* within this intellectual context, highlighting their participation in the broader discourse of nation-making.

The Partition of India has been frequently debated domain in South Asian fiction because it encapsulates the crisis of identity and the redefinition of belonging.



Writers such as Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa, Saadat Hasan Manto, and Intizar Hussain have represented Partition as a human tragedy shaped by communal violence, migration, and disillusionment. However, as critics such as Pandey (2001) and Butalia (1998) observe, Partition narratives also serve as ideological texts that reproduce national myths and justify state formations. The creation of Pakistan and India was accompanied by the construction of parallel historiographies—each defining itself through a selective remembering and forgetting of the past.

In this regard, *The Heart Divided* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* illustrate how Partition literature contributes to the ideological articulation of nationhood. Shahnawaz's narrative, emerging from the political landscape of pre-Partition Muslim nationalism, echoes the aspirations of the Muslim League and aligns with the discourse of separation. Conversely, Hosain's text, written in postcolonial India, reflects a secular, humanist vision consistent with Congress ideals. Both narratives thus reinforce the political imaginaries of their respective nations while portraying the complex emotions of those who experienced the rupture. Feminist scholars have significantly contributed to re-evaluating Partition literature by foregrounding the gendered dimensions of national identity. Menon and Bhasin (1998) argue that women's bodies and lives became symbolic territories on which nationalist ideologies inscribed notions of purity, honor, and sacrifice. Female-authored Partition narratives, therefore, provide crucial counter-perspectives that challenge the male-centered nationalist historiography.

In the works of Shahnawaz and Hosain, women occupy central roles, not merely as victims of Partition but as agents navigating ideological, religious, and social boundaries. Shahnawaz's protagonist, Zohra, reflects the contradictions of elite Muslim women torn between tradition and modernity, while Hosain's Laila embodies a more introspective, liberal consciousness shaped by her hybrid education and moral dilemmas. Scholars such as Butler (1999) and Spivak (1988) have emphasized that women's voices in colonial and postcolonial narratives are often mediated by power structures that both enable and silence them. This study builds upon these insights to argue that even when women speak from within the nationalist frame, their narratives may still reinforce the ideological premises of their respective states.

The adoption of New Historicism as a theoretical lens provides an effective means to explore the relationship between literature and ideology. Rooted in the work of Stephen Greenblatt (1988) and influenced by Michel Foucault (1972), New Historicism posits that literature and history are interdependent and that power circulates through all cultural productions. Rather than viewing texts as autonomous aesthetic objects, New Historicism situates them within the "circulation of social energy," emphasizing that they both reflect and reproduce the dominant discourses of their time.

In the South Asian context, this approach allows a reinterpretation of Partition fiction as part of a larger network of ideological exchanges. The political speeches of Jinnah and Azad, when read as non-literary texts, represent powerful discursive sites that shaped national consciousness. Greenblatt's idea that "no text is free from the conditions of its production" (1988) aligns with the present study's argument that literary texts such as *The Heart Divided* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* are shaped by—and in turn shape—the ideological environments of their nations.



Furthermore, Foucault's (1980) concept of power/knowledge elucidates how discourse constructs and sustains systems of authority. In both novels, the negotiation of women's identity, religion, and national belonging reflects the internalization of these power structures. The texts demonstrate how ideology operates as a subtle but pervasive force that determines what can be known, spoken, or silenced within a given cultural context.

The concept of discursive practices is central to understanding how states create and maintain ideological coherence. According to Foucault (1981), discourse functions as both "an instrument and an effect of power" – it produces subjects that conform to the norms of the system. In the context of Partition narratives, these discursive practices manifest through language, education, religion, and cultural representation. Similarly, Spivak (2012) traces the manifestation of discursive practices in literature and considers it as "medicine" and "poison" at the same time. *The Heart Divided* reflects a discursive alignment with the political and religious ideology of the emerging Pakistani state, portraying Islam as the unifying principle of the nation. In contrast, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* situates its narrative within the secular-humanist discourse of Indian nationalism, yet it too participates in reaffirming the cultural ideals promoted by the postcolonial Indian state. Both novels, therefore, demonstrate how literature reinforces what Foucault (1972) calls the "regime of truth"—the system through which certain interpretations of history gain legitimacy while others are marginalized.

While Partition literature has been extensively studied for its thematic concerns of trauma, displacement, and memory, the ideological dimension of female-authored Partition narratives has received limited attention. Most feminist readings of Shahnawaz and Hosain focus on the representation of women's agency, social reform, or domestic space, yet few have examined how these narratives are shaped by the larger political ideologies of their respective nations. Moreover, existing research rarely places literary and political texts in direct conversation to explore their intertextual and ideological correlations. By juxtaposing *The Heart Divided* with *Sunlight on a Broken Column* through the lens of New Historicism, this study fills a crucial gap by demonstrating how both texts function as cultural instruments that sustain state narratives. It reorients the analysis of Partition fiction from individual trauma to collective ideology, emphasizing that the literary representation of Partition cannot be separated from the political discourses that gave it meaning.

Review of literature reveals that Partition narratives operate as complex cultural texts where history, politics, and ideology intersect. Feminist and postcolonial scholars have expanded the interpretive space of such works, yet the specific relationship between national ideology and literary representation remains underexplored. New Historicism, with its focus on power, discourse, and historical embeddedness, provides conceptual tools to decode this relationship. By bringing together the speeches of Jinnah and Azad with the fictional narratives of Shahnawaz and Hosain, this research moves beyond conventional literary analysis to reveal the ideological mechanisms that underline the formation of postcolonial consciousness. Ultimately, it argues that Partition fiction, far from being a neutral reflection of history, participates in rewriting the nation through the reinforcement of discursive practices sanctioned by the state.



Analysis

The Heart Divided

Written between 1943 and 1948, *The Heart Divided* was published in 1957 posthumously because of Shahnawaz's accidental death. Despite portraying a diverse Indian culture, the novel implies that the major communities living in India – Hindus and Muslims – cannot live together anymore due to their different ideological bases. So, separation is the only solution for peaceful existence in the subcontinent.

Jinnah (1947), the then President of All-India Muslim League, while representing the Muslims living in India and demanding a separate homeland for them on the social, religious and political bases pronounces his reservations on Hindus' misconstruing Hinduism and Islam as merely religions and not as different social orders. He believes that the difference between Hindus and Muslim is not limited to religion only, rather, their varied social and cultural practices make them distinct. This argument implies that the demand for a separate country for Muslims is justifiable. Mr. Jinnah thrashes one-nation theory proposed by the Hindus or Congress and claims that both are two different nations and they have their own 'social orders' which do not define them as one nation. Their social institutions like marriage also reveal that they can never mingle with each other despite having a long history of two civilizations living together.

Nawaz (1957) in her novel seems to follow the similar idea proposed by her leader or representative. She seems to reinforce the idea to two-nation-theory as the narrator says that India is a heterogeneous country accommodating multiple ethnic groups, belief system, diverse cultures and plenty of languages. Every individual living in this country is desirous to lead a free life. These are the words uttered by a Muslim on an occasion when Congress puts up its demands in front of the rulers but not considering the demands of Muslims due to which the Muslims have boycotted any movement led by the Hindus. The author projects the image of Muslims as a different community which has its own problems, and it may not be taken as merely a minority going-to-be-ruled by Hindus. Hence, freedom of this large part of the Subcontinent is impossible without the contribution of Muslims.

Marriage is another indicator of unity among the communities living together in any region. As Jinnah (1947) in his address has said that these two different communities; Muslims and Hindus cannot intermarry. He backs his arguments by drawing differences in religious beliefs, social norms and narratives, and above all social institutional practices that include non-flexible stance on interfaith marriages. Nawaz (1957) also endorses this political ideology in her novel. Her main characters, Habib and Mohini, a Muslim and a Hindu respectively, are not allowed to marry due to the social order despite they love each other. Habib's father tries to make him understand the impossibility of his thinking and says that the Hindus are very rigid in their caste system. He further convinces Habib saying that in a situation in which a Brahmin Hindu is reluctant to marry in any other Hindu caste, thinking to marry a Muslim is almost impossible.

Hindus are a community which is a staunch believer of caste system. So, the question of interfaith marriage is useless. The author has provided a powerful argument to show how apart these two communities are. The author not only gives Brahmins or Hindu's perspective on such type of marriages, but also



Muslim's law through Habib's aunt's mouth:

Tell me how can Habib marry Mohini? She is not a Muslim; she is not even of the Book? No Muslim can marry her under Muslim law; and no Hindu girl can marry a Muslim under Hindu law. Then, how can they marry? (Nawaz, 1957, P.181).

Muslim law does not allow any Muslim to marry anyone who does not believe in any one of the Holy Scriptures. If any male Muslim wants to marry anyone not following the Book, he has to convert the female to Islam; otherwise, the jurisprudence does not permit.

Muslims think themselves engulfed in real trouble when it comes to have their share in ruling class, because they are of the view that freedom from British on terms of Congress means nothing but change of masters. Congress, the representative of Hindu rights, is bent to achieve its target of self-rule, giving a little share to Muslims. On partial freedom, Jinnah (1947) in his presidential address says that there is no objection on the freedom of India from the British, but this freedom should not mean to empower one community over the others, i.e. to promote Hindu's supremacy over Muslims and other minor communities living in India. Nawaz (1957) also pens down this apprehension in her novel and seems to raise this question of partial freedom through Zohra when she says that freedom is useless if it is just an exercise of replacing master from the British to Hindus.

The Heart Divided through the love story of Habib and Mohini points to an ideological distance between Hindus and Muslim that may not be reduced due to their different social and religious order. The novel seems to portray that despite strong ties between Hindus and Muslims, they are like a stream whose two banks cannot unite. The novel portrays it as, "national tragedy" (Nawaz, 1957, P.246).

Thus, the novel aligns with an ideology or narrative set for an emerging state in which arguments of both All-India Muslim League and Congress are presented but in favor of the former and in counter to the latter. The novel ends with a sentence which reveals the goal of not only the character, but also of the author, as it suggests the Muslims to attain their goal. The narrator vows to achieve their common goal and that is to get Pakistan.

Sunlight on a Broken Column

Published in 1961, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a novel by Attia Hosain covering the era before the partition of India. It is the story of an aristocratic family that enjoys its privileged life in pre-partition India, but after the partition the family disintegrates, and their wealth also dwindles. The main character of the novel, Laila, an orphan, lives at her aunt's house. The family with whom Laila resides is very conventional and adheres to Islamic principles strictly. But when she grows up, she starts living with her uncle who is quite liberal and autocratic. Meanwhile the stories of independence and partition become a common talk, and Laila's friends quite eagerly participate in such discussion; however, Laila is least concerned about these stories. She confines herself into the "values" with which she grows up. Even she does not feel comfortable choosing a person of her liking for marriage. But her uncle helps her in this pursuit and approves her wishes.

The author, despite portraying a neutral story, becomes complicit with the Congress narrative, as it does not like the division or partition. The Presidential



address of Azad to Congress as cited in Zaidi (1985) reveals the policy of nationalism over two-nation theory. He announces that without India he is incomplete and without him India is partial. He says that he takes pride in calling himself as an Indian and being a crucial component, he will never detach from India.

Azad, being a Muslim, does not like the idea of partition, rather, he strongly believes in Hindu-Muslim unity for a greater cause of governing India and winning freedom. Hosain (1961) also gives the same nationalistic feelings to one of her characters, Kemal who does not compromise on his jingoism no matter what chances are given to him, as he claims that both Pakistan and India are same for him. Since he belongs to this country, he is not ready to bargain between India and Pakistan. This shows that Kemal is not even ready to digest Pakistan and India as two different countries. National identity and pride strengthen nationalism. The novel reflects the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity and subscribes to Azad's realism that urges the Indian to detach themselves from romanticizing the past and face the realities around them. Azad, as in Zaidi (1985), warns Muslims to come out of their romances and stop glamourizing the past. He says instead of focusing on their historical connections with Central Asia and Iran, they should focus on their present.

The novel seems to extend on the above-mentioned idea when Laila sarcastically reminds the Muslims who devoutly wish for a separate homeland for Muslims that the origin of those Muslims is not Pakistan but somewhere else. She debunks the argument of the glorious past as the bases for Muslim nationalism. She says if the argument is to reclaim history or fight back ancestral land, Muslims should return to "Arabia, Turkestan, Persia" (Hosain, 1961, P.289).

Suspicion or apprehensions of Muslims being treated as minorities in new setup is another theme that Azad seems to address. He gives hopes to Muslims of the Subcontinent of security if they do not pay heed to the British "divide-and-rule" policy. He is of the view that if the Muslims are confident, they will not have to face the troubles but if their doubts overcome their confidence the result might be different. Azad, as in Zaidi (1985), asks Indian Muslims if they see a united India with suspicion or with confidence. He suggests opting for separation only when Indian Muslims lack confidence. The novel apprehends that doubts take control over confidence. Saleem, the main character of the novel, apprehends that the Indian Muslims will be discriminated against the other Indian citizens. Even if Saleem has migrated to Pakistan still he thinks that Muslims not quitting India will face discrimination. It shows that the Muslims who long for Pakistan have doubts that they may not be treated equally in a united India.

Thus, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* may apparently be narrating the tension of an upper-class family before and during partition, but it still sides with the popular narrative of Indian Congress on partition and its consequences. It places its narrative within the secular-humanist discourse of Indian nationalism and at the same time contributes to reiterating the cultural ideals promoted by the postcolonial Indian state.

Conclusion

Literary texts may have both aesthetic and ideological function of transformation simultaneously. These texts not only result in "epistemic transformation" but also assist the dominant discourses by reinforcing them to achieve a hegemonic control over the subject. In this way they negotiate with non-literary texts to



voice certain ideologies and involve in discursive practices through fictional outlook. By embedding these non-fictional discourses, literary texts legitimize certain “epistemes” by associating with them symbolic and emotional depth. This blurring of fiction and reality paves the way to circulate ideology. Therefore, behind a tale may be a rearticulation of religious, political, institutional or social power that shapes readers’ perception of reality.

The Heart Divided by Mumtaz Shahnawaz reinforces the state narrative of Pakistan on partition, as the author proposes the inevitability to the tormenting partition owing to the different political, social, and religious orders of the Muslim society. Developing her story from a pre-partition unity among the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and showing the disunity while-partition between two major communities, the writer ends her novel proposing Pakistan a better place for Muslims. Similarly, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain follows the state narrative of India on partition. The author highlights the futility and obscenity of partition, which not only decimates the material landscape of both countries, but also leaves a traumatic effect on the people living in them. Laila, the central character, finally, decides to leave her country because she does not see any charm in living in a divided country. Thus, both novels subscribe to ideologies of the states where they have originated.

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