

Drawn into two which way home?

“A line, small or big, possesses ample power to distraught the future of a whole nation. Closer home, the scar of that line is still young, bleeding and painful”.

1947, was the time my motherland, India woke up to the idiocracy of a crumbling British government. Freedom at the cost of a division was a harsh price paid by a nation that took the torment of revolution together, irrespective of any polarity. The Radcliffe line, as it is called, is a projection in the physical realm of a nation evolved from the partition which left a dreadful and catastrophic mark on the contemporary history of the subcontinent shaped by killings on communal grounds and mass displacement. The horrors are unheeded by generations who have grown up during this period in the subcontinent.

But seventy nine years down the line, standing on the threshold of becoming a world power, the picture of the state of Punjab, hardest hit during the pre and post India-Pakistan partition struggle is still convulsive in India. The pandemic social issues staring past the modern Indian society, especially in the state of Punjab puts the largest democracy in the world at a questionable spot. Today, two billion out of seven billion people on this planet have been affected by this apocalyptic event as per the research conducted by Harvard University.

Drawn into two, which way home?, is a newfangled visual journey of the present-day reality of Punjab that is somehow ignored, hidden, or unreported by the mainstream media. The project tries to depict the everyday yarn and grapple of identity crisis, drug issues, depredation, violence, Indo-Pak wars, breathing stories of love across borders, religious fundamentalism, displacement crisis, family rescue stories, tales of longing, division of humanity, geopolitically affected communities, terrorism and moaning issues of female oppression, which still breaths in the eerie silence within the precinct of, if not all, then most of the households around the India-Pakistan border in the state.

The work is a tale of a state of Punjab that is in constant search for its identity within the social and cultural understanding of present-day diegesis. It is a modern-day approach towards the ramifications of the biggest displacement that world history has ever witnessed, standing afoot and drawing a contextual frame of the life of victims and survivors along with their reformed identities and corroded memories. Drawn into two, which way home? also embraces images that are a metaphorical depiction of the essence of the lost memories and experiences of the people throughout the partition, people who have desperately longed to cross the border just to have a rendezvous with their families or pay a visit to their native places. Shaping up today's Punjab, these images resonate with the past acting as a prominent source of the portrayal of the struggle and sacrifice.

In what ways can the stories of displacement and trauma from the Partition be used to foster a deeper understanding of the human race, challenging contemporary societies to rethink their philosophical perspectives on life, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the cyclical nature of hatred?

Wars and battles are notorious for not respecting boundaries and the intricate intertwining of centuries can hardly be undone in one stroke. The leaders who came up with a solution to divide the land imagining that the territorial separation between India and Pakistan would solve everything were blinded by a tragic irony. The irony as to how this solution, the so-called partition would be a beginning of a lot of socio-political and economic problems. The geo-political wars, the communal tensions and the massive displacements of communities followed by massacres and social injustice were all a by-product of this solution.

As Mr. Khushant Singh, rightly states in his book, Train to Pakistan.

Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis.

*The visual project has been inspired by the writings of Urvashi Butalia, Anis Kidwai, Anam Zakaria, Saadat Hasan Manto, Nonica Datta and Khushwant Singh.