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## **Time, Memory, Partition and Mental Health of Immigrants: A Cognitive Study**

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### **Abstract**

The perception of 'Home' is deeply rooted with individual- 'belongingness' or identity. The displacement creates a psychological state of 'un-homeliness' or 'double-consciousness' and transforms the individual into diasporic entity. A strained uprooting of an approximate eighteen million people was the cost of the partition of India in 1947. Families were divided; forcefully relocated, and the root of culture was struck. Time has fled by; more the six decades are gone. But the questions still prevail, can rehabilitation provide emotional fulfillment? Has the weight of 'un-belongingness' on the consciousness of refugees been assessed or acknowledged properly? Have the once fragmented identities be mended? Or still the lines are indelible? The paper is a sincere endeavour to analyze the explicit, episodic memory of the Bengali immigrants and tries to re-unfold their interiors to know whether the sting of separation still haunts and affects their psychological and emotional well-being.

**Key Words:** Partition; diaspora; memory, cognition; mental health

### **Introduction**

India celebrates its Independence Day every year, every time it digs the hidden unplumbed wounds of the innumerable immigrants who have still pains of partition buried deep in their hearts. The historic juncture in 1947 holds incredible significance in the lives of the people of the subcontinent. For the immigrants, the division meant expulsion and relocation and it created a void, a loss or alienation caused by the displacement or dislocation. It seemed that in the newly constructed 'home', the new identities were clinging to 'live in between' or 'living on the border'. After the flight of time, it is expected that after six decades, the feeling of 'un- belongingness' is settled and rehabilitated. The generation who witnessed partition, are in extreme old age or have left behind the physical home already. But the question is how they are now. Do the hearts beat faster when someone pronounces a familiar name of a person or place which was there in Bangladesh? The sound of blowing conch at sun set, the kite runners, the narrow muddy roads of village, the spreading of fish net in the pond, the grains in the field, sound of thunder- rain, boat in the river, forgotten fragrance and semi-forgotten, old acquainted faces- do these peeping still create a sudden remembrances of past and create an unfathomable pain? If yes, then the wounds of division are still palpable and if partitioned lives still in the reminiscence of the immigrants, their psychological and emotional well-being is affected by that explicit memory.

### **Objectives of this study is to analyze**

- Prevalence of partition in the psyche of immigrants.
- Impact of Diaspora on the mental health of the refugees.

And to focus on

- The emotional and psychological well being of the immigrants.

### **Time and Memory**

Human memory is a unique and complicated phenomenon but it is baffling as it is still an impenetrable realm and researchers have limited knowledge of exactly how it works at the physiological level. However, this extraordinary attribute is essentially the capacity for storing and retrieving information. It is done through three processes like encoding, storage, and retrieval. Collectively, these three processes decide whether something will be kept in mind or forgotten. After encoding, when information enters the brain, there is the next process called 'storage'. As per the 'Three-Stage Model' which was anticipated by Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin, information is stored sequentially in three memory systems like Sensory memory, Short-term memory, and Long-term memory.

Amongst these three memories, long-term memory has an almost never-ending capability and information in long-term memory generally stays there for life long. Conversely, this doesn't mean that a person will always be gifted to remember the events or information stored in the long-term memory but the perplexity is that he may not be able to retrieve information from there. Long-term memory systematizes information by the information's acquaintances, significance, or connection to other information. It is also observed that the laypeople can easily recall 'lost memories' when hypnotized. It proves that information stored in long-term memory is usually not lost because it can be hard to retrieve.

### **Migration and Memory:**

Migration is a worldwide happening, which existed with the survival of the human beings on earth and it will be a continuous flow. There are so many probable reasons behind the shift from one place to another but unquestionably it influences human life and if it is abrupt and impulsive dislocation, throwing out of the social root and experience of social unrest, it causes trauma. Now it is also widely accepted that such trauma can make people more inclined to grow physical and mental health problems. The partition of India in 1947 resulted of large-scale migrations, death of nearly half million people, hostility, looting, sexual assault, destruction of property and the collapse of recognized civic life in huge parts of the region. It is obvious that the high-cost freedom had left an indelible mark and impacted the refugees psychologically whether in short or the long term. The studies of Dipesh Chakraborty on partition and memory reveal that memory is a multifaceted phenomenon which travels far beyond the historian's reach. It is more than what human intellect can bear in brain or document about the left behind time. In fact, it is an amalgamation of conscious and beyond. (Chakrabarty, 1998)

After so many years, if now, the psyche of the refugees of partition is retrospect and analyzed, two types of memory will be identified; first, the nostalgic and second, the traumatic. Though in abundance and present comfort, the pain of separation from root pulsates the heart of any refugee heavily. The reminiscence of the past instantly throws into an intense isolation even in the crowd. It's a sense of fragmented identity or exile at home. The distant land, remembrance of every microscopic happiness or sadness in own 'home' over the visible border evoke feelings of nostalgia. Through a tiny flash bulb, the brain cognizes the deep stored memory. On the other, the traumatic memory brings back the unbearable torture of time which each refugee tries to forget but cannot. Approximated estimation is that nearly one million men, women and children lost their lives, seventy thousand women were raped and twelve million people had to leave behind their homes. Arundhati Roy, the eminent author, in perspective of the terrorist attack in Mumbai, expressed her angst in this way,

On this nuclear subcontinent, that context is Partition...Each of those people carries, and passes down, a story of unimaginable pain, hate, horror, but yearning too. That wound, those torn but still unsevered muscles, that blocked and those splintered bones still lock us together in a close embrace of hatred, terrifying familiarity, but also love... (Roy, 2008)

The traumatic blow was so grave and terrifying on the mind of the refugees that the strains still persist and it seems that the routes to roots are still unlocked and the painless traverse through memory is done frequently.

Actually the strongest memories are connected with human emotions and these are intensified and deepened by concentrated emotional experiences. Intense emotions coupled with going away from root, compulsive rehabilitation, and question of belongingness, unsecured future, and quest for self and mental and physical hurt-all collectively produce strong memories and the sense of loss has created a sense of incompleteness or absence of complete contentment. Though not remembered each day but both nostalgic and traumatic are declarative, explicit, episodic long-term memories which are stored in the brain consciously or sub-consciously and play a vital role in emotional and psychological well being of the immigrants.

### **Conscious and Sub-conscious Memory: A Cognitive Function**

Long-term or the conscious memory depends on Hippocampal - Neocortical connectivity. The hippocampus plays a key role as it forms an imperative part of the limbic system, the region which regulates emotions. It is connected mainly with memory or specifically said, the long-term memory. On the other, neocortex serves as the center of higher mental functions for humans. At the same, sub-conscious memory which is a part of conscious memory, lies underneath the layers of critical thought functions of the conscious memory. The sub-conscious mind keeps a victim of partition thinking under the layer of conscious line that what has been done by him in the past. Sometimes it creates a vacuum, a feeling of guilt and makes the life miserable.

The consequence of partition confirms that a lady at the age of thirty-one, develops a feeling of guilt because she witnessed her family burnt alive and she could do nothing to save them. The dark night becomes a horrible nightmare to her because the deep rooted memory, conscious or sub-conscious, continually cognizes her inability to rescue her root. The unbearable pain, anger, anguish, dejection, shame and guilt all are because she saved herself by climbing a tree at her backyard and veiled herself in the dark with her childhood maturity. But she is unable to forget the scream of the live burning bodies of her closest ones and now she considers herself responsible for that disgraceful event; the screams stir her every night though she tries hard to shut the memory out. (Butalia, 2017)

The Statesman, 26/10/46 reports the incident of 10<sup>th</sup> October, in this pathetic way:

In Ramganj, Noakhali, East Bengal, on 10<sup>th</sup> of October, a small refugee girl witnessed the most horrifying event of her life. It was a time of riots; a mob entered her house and threatened the family for 500 rupees. The father, to save his family from butchery by the crowd paid the money. But the mob beheaded a member and asked for much more money. The little girl witnessed her grandfather killed by the mob; her grandmother received a heavy blow by iron rod on her head and her unconscious body was thrown away. Her father begged life, the daughter ran inside the house and brought four hundred rupees more and the jewelries and pleaded her father's life. The blood hunters took the belongings with left hand and beheaded the father with right hand. How traumatic the life of that alive girl will be, can be imagined distinctly. Can this genocide of Hindus of Noakhali be forgotten?

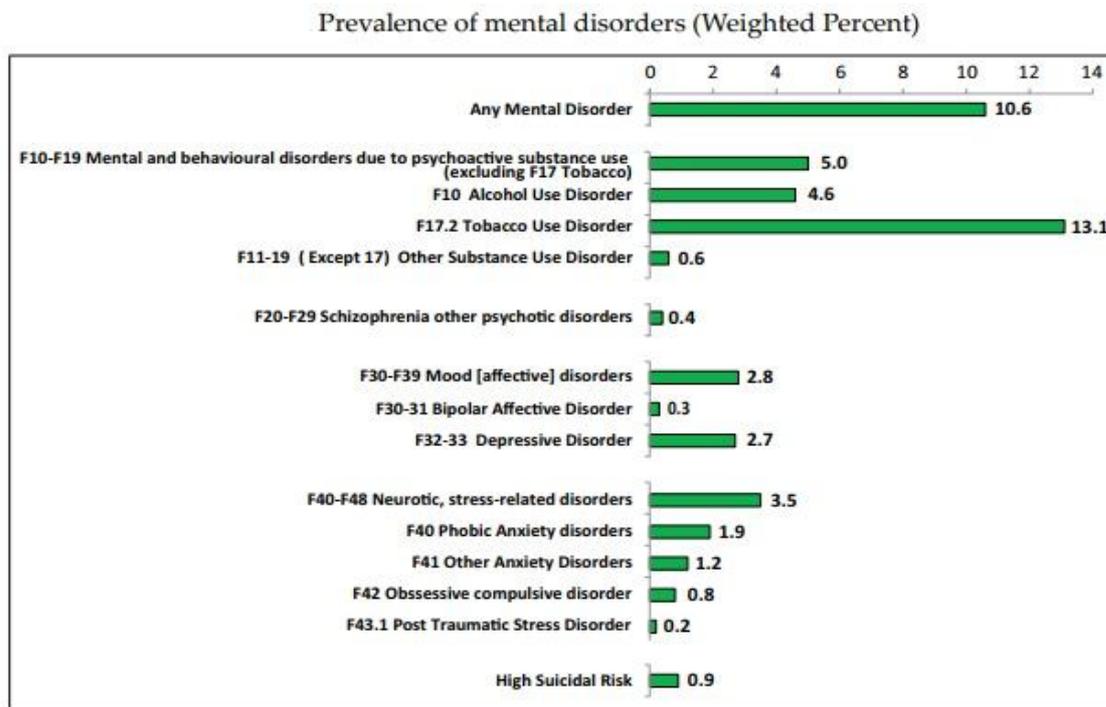
The testaments of trauma due to partition are innumerable. Each immigrant has a history secretly stored inside but the memories are deeply ingrained, unforgettable. It reveals automatically and proves that they still have in their extreme old age, the strong mental pull from their roots, East Bengal or Bangladesh but routes are lost. A vivid description of psyche is revealed by Gyanendra Pandey,

We live in a fragmented universe... We used to know whose children we were; now we are the children of no one and everyone. Since the past now be constructed out of virtually anything, and no one knows what tomorrow's past will hold, our anxious uncertainty turns everything into a trace. With the disintegration of memory-history... a new kind of historian has emerged, a historian prepared, unlike his predecessors, to avow his close, intimate, and personal ties to his subject... (and) entirely dependent on his subjectivity, creativity and capacity to re-create. (Pandey 2001)

So now in 2017, after six decades of partition, if the mental health and psychological well being of the immigrants are investigated, it can be visible that the first or second generation refugees in their old age, apart from physiological constraints, may be suffering from neuro-degenerative diseases. As per the report of University of San Francisco Memory and Aging Center, memory constraint is one of the reasons of Alzheimer’s disease (AD). Memory problem can create a condition called Amnesic Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI); it means the people suffering from MCI have more memory problems in compare to the normal people of the same age but not as severe as AD.

Pent-up emotions, accumulated acute lesion, torment of interior, yearning toward abandoned root, vulnerable compromise with present- all may give birth to psychiatric, psychological or mental disorder. Diaspora can be the cause of Communication Disorder, Attention deficit/hyperactivity Disorder (ADD or ADHD), depression, Bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder, Paranoid personality disorder (PPD), Hallucinations, Delusions, Agoraphobia, Trauma and stressor-related disorders, Post Traumatic disorder, Stress and adjustment disorder, Dissociative amnesia etc.

For any prolific society, health is essential and it is accountable for joyful and healthy life throughout the globe. As per the World Health Organization, health does not mean the nonappearance of disease or infirmity but a combination of physical, social, spiritual and mental health. As per the survey by National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, Bengaluru Title: National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015-16: Summary, The research agrees that the affected mental health is responsible for mental disorder.



(National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015-16

by National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences Bengaluru)

The above statistics strengthens the point that the unhappy mental state may be the root cause of mental disintegration and be analyzed at the beginning to stop severe mental disorder. The angst of dislocation and forced relocation, compromise with time still prevail with the pulses of the immigrants and the weight of prevalence of partition still in the memory may lead to

psychological disorder. Hence it is desired to retrospect, revisit history and discover the deep link between diaspora, and mental health of the immigrants who are now in their old ages. In the 'Preface of National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015-16,' the team of National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences Bengaluru, recommends that the country should join together for 'Finding solutions together'. Hence a scientific approach towards the aftermath of a momentous historic episode after six decades of its occurrence is suggested to be implemented to analyze the causes of prevalence of partition in the memory of the refugees. The aim is to decrease the weight of partition, burden of pain, load of loneliness and to help the diasporic divided identities to rehabilitate in a true sense. The cognition which still triggers nostalgia, trauma, inner conflicts and unwilling mental negotiation, should be handled at proper time for the sake of physiological, emotional and psychological well being of the immigrants.

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