

Rape and the Imprint of Partition in Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days*

Nazia Akhtar

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad

In 1947, the transfer of power from the British Raj to Indians was accompanied by the Partition of British India into India and Pakistan (West Pakistan, now known as Pakistan; and East Pakistan, now known as Bangladesh). The demographic upheaval and the ensuing “communal” (sectarian) violence between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs that Partition constituted resulted in the largest migrations, dislocations, and dispossessions in human history as well as the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people. Numerical estimates of the migrations vary between eight million to ten million people; there were also anywhere between two hundred thousand and two million people killed (Butalia 3; Menon and Bhasin 35). The gendered nature of the violence of Partition is evident in the fact that approximately seventy-five thousand women are reported to have been abducted and raped (Butalia 3).

The situation in princely states such as Hyderabad, which was the largest and wealthiest of the five hundred and sixty-five princely states in India, was no better than in British India.¹ Ruled by Osman Ali Khan (1886-1967), the seventh Nizam of the Muslim Asaf Jahi dynasty (1720-1948), Hyderabad was home to great inequalities by the 1940s. Although the Muslim population was only twelve percent, the administrative set-up consisted of an overwhelming ninety percent majority of elite Muslim officials (Sundarayya 8). Many thousands of Hindus migrated out of Hyderabad after being systematically persecuted by the Razakars, a paramilitary group associated with the *Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen* (“Council of United Muslims”) that emerged in 1946. The same year, the peasants and workers of the nine Telugu-speaking Telangana districts of the state had revolted, setting off an armed struggle that went on for five years. Furthermore, large numbers of Muslims poured into the state looking for sanctuary from communal violence by Hindus and Sikhs in British India (Gour 66, 70; Smith 19; Munshi 1, 137).

Additionally, repeated demands were made by the new Congress leadership of India that the Nizam must agree to join India and hand over power to its government. After months of protracted negotiations and heated debates, Indo-Hyderabad relations had deteriorated to such an extent that India invaded Hyderabad on September 13, 1948, ignoring the fact that the latter had approached the UN Security Council with an appeal

to put the matter on its agenda for September 15 (Eagleton 64-5). The invasion took less than five days, for the obsolete arms, maps, and equipment used by Hyderabad's army and the scantily armed Razakars were able to do little in the face of an organized, four-pronged attack by an efficient Indian army. Following the Nizam's surrender, there were major crackdowns by the Indian army and police on Muslims as well as peasants, workers, and progressive individuals and intellectuals who had participated in the Telangana Armed Struggle (Sunderlal Committee 373; Smith 20-1; Sundarayya 9; Reddy 59). Sources, such as the "Report on the Post-Operation Polo Massacres, Rape and Destruction or Seizure of Property in Hyderabad State" (1949), state that the military regime particularly targeted Muslims, and that many hundreds of Muslim women were raped and approximately thirty to forty thousand Muslims were killed by local Hyderabadi Hindus and Indian police and armed forces (Sunderlal Committee 373). The report is believed to have been commissioned by the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself, but its existence and/or content has not been officially acknowledged by any Indian government thus far. Its importance is underscored when we realize that no other official record of the actions of Indian state apparatuses in Hyderabad in 1948 is known to exist.

The devastating inter-generational trauma and haunting memories such upheavals generated inform Hyderabadi-American writer Samina Ali's autobiographical novel *Madras on Rainy Days* (2004). Situated in late 1980s and early 1990s Hyderabad city, the novel explores the thoughts of nineteen-year-old Layla, a naturalized American citizen who was born in Hyderabad city and has been brought to India to marry Sameer. The first-person narration traces not only Layla's thoughts about her impending marriage, but also represents an insight into the post-Partition lives of her extended family, who live in Hyderabad after having been driven away from their ancestral property during Partition. Layla's maternal grandfather, a Nawab, loses his feudal estate in Miryalguda in the erstwhile Hyderabad state around this time; it was seized by his own workers and, subsequently, appropriated by the government. Layla's family lives in exile, haunted by displacement and loss. This sense of injury persists for decades, and is sharply highlighted and its expression violently and suddenly silenced with the gang-rape and murder of Layla's cousin Henna during a communal "riot" in the late 1980s.²

Since Partition, communalism has been continuously evolving and strengthening its hold over India, particularly under the guidance of the powerful Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – which carries more and more weight with middle-class, upper-caste Hindu voters – and its Sangh Parivar allies. In light of the urgency with which we must confront the advance of communalism in India, I focus in this essay on the meaningful and symbolic scene of Henna's gang-rape and murder and its subsequent traumatic impact on those around her. As part of this process, I examine where the contemporary Hyderabadi Muslim woman's body stands in connection with the patriarchal, nationalist discourses that define the

rhetoric of communalism, and that are ultimately and incontrovertibly enmeshed with Partition. Further, I show that these discourses not only closely affect successive generations of people living in India, but also chase transnational subjects like Layla, who are too young and distanced from the socio-historical milieu of Partition to understand its full magnitude. My argument is that the rape and death of Henna not only sharply, dramatically, and irrevocably imprints upon the face of the present a link to its partitioned past, but also influences the way Partition-related property disputes and troubling memories are resolved in the novel. In this process, I hope to demonstrate how studies of inter-generational, transnational, collective trauma nuance the relationship between history and memory as it endures across time and space, and further the debate on how gender and gendered violence create and connect personal/individual and public/collective trauma in postcolonial contexts. In addition to this, I acknowledge Ali's novel as an example of how West-based South Asian diaspora address the politics of the Indian subcontinent by inserting alternative narratives of history and memory that enable the public sharing and mourning of personal and collective traumas.

In June 1948, three months before the invasion of Hyderabad by India, an arresting metaphor appeared in an *Indian Express* editorial on the dispute over Hyderabad's friendship with Pakistan—India's arch enemy—and its reluctance to accede to the Indian Union like most other princely states had already done. The editorial asserted:

Doubtful "friends" abroad are already indulging in evil counsel. There are no doubt leaders among Muslims who resent much evil counsel, but others still emit more heat than light ... Whether negotiations are resumed or abandoned, Hyderabad cannot defy the forces of progress and democracy for all time. *And India cannot nurse an enemy within her belly.* (British Information Services, "Daily Press Summary [date illegible] June 1948"; emphasis added)

This sinister image of Hyderabad, ruled by an autocratic Muslim prince and a hegemonic Muslim minority, an enemy within India's belly who is perceived to be loyal to predominantly Muslim Pakistan, runs parallel to the metaphors of reproduction and birth used by leading statesmen, some state workers, and journalists in discussions about the problem of "recovering" women who had been abducted and impregnated by men of the Other community during Partition. The official rhetoric suggested that children born to Hindu or Sikh women, but of Muslim paternity, were taboo in Indian society (Butalia 128, 213-9; Menon and Bhasin 119-22), although there is evidence to suggest that communities themselves often stretched their codes of kinship to accommodate "mixed children" (Das 76-8). The state's solution for pregnant women presented them with the option of either delivering their children at a discreet location and putting them up for adoption, or aborting them and (thereby) getting "cleansed" completely (Butalia 128). This purification process was called *safaya* (which, in Hindustani, means "cleaning up") and, significantly, was also

used to refer bluntly to the physical elimination of Muslims in the Mewat region of present-day Rajasthan, where forty thousand Meos, who professed a hybrid faith dominated by Hindu and Muslim rituals and practices, were killed during Partition (Mayaram 129, 140). Thus, the metaphor of *safaya*, indicating a systematic ridding of not only sexual and reproductive contamination by Muslims but also Muslims themselves, was a commonly known concept at the time.

When the state's solution to purify sexually and reproductively contaminated women is extended to accommodate the *Indian Express* quotation, Hyderabad becomes figuratively constructed as the malignant child of the enemy residing inside a previously pure, now violated Hindu body. The imagery is striking. Embedded in its landlocked position within India, the princely Hyderabad state is seen as an illegitimate, dangerous child growing in the belly of Mother India, with clearly visible genetic characteristics of its father—a masculinized, menacing, Muslim Pakistan who has violated India and deposited its bad seed in her womb. When the state's solution (enabling the retrieval of national honour and the restoration of Mother India to its legitimate Hindu fold) is applied to Hyderabad, there emerge two options. India-as-mother and the Indian men protecting, or more precisely, controlling her maternal body, should allow Hyderabad to come into its own (or be "birthed" into its own?) in terms of its primary "Muslimness" and also grant it the option to accede to Pakistan or be an ally of Pakistan. The other option is that Hyderabad must be "aborted" and its allegedly pro-Pakistan (because Muslim) identity must be eliminated in some way. It was the metaphor of abortion that was used against Hyderabad, through the assimilation and subsequent official erasure of its Muslim culture from public domains. The Muslim identity of Hyderabad, an important part of Hyderabad and Deccani ("southern") culture, was uprooted from its bearings, affecting a kind of figurative abortion. After Hyderabad's "absorption" into the Indian Union in such a way that it lost all semblance of its independent Deccani cultural identity, the *safaya* of India-as-mother was complete and her body became whole and inviolate again.

Furthermore, just as debates in the Indian Parliament over the recovery of women became an opportunity to slander the moral character of Pakistan and visualize India as a benevolent, protective, moral state (Butalia 140)—the opposite of its malevolent, dangerous, immoral Other—the Indian invasion of Hyderabad in September 1948 sought to do the same for India in relation to Hyderabad, owing to Hyderabad's friendship with Pakistan and the Muslim religious affiliation of its minority ruling class. In other words, to speak in the rhetoric of sexual reproductivity current at the time, on account of its Pakistani Muslim "paternity," Hyderabad became othered too. What this meant in everyday terms was that Hyderabad Muslims became doubly othered because, first, they were Muslim and, second, they were Hyderabad. This had serious implications for the way they were treated by the Indian government, as Ali's novel shows.

In *Madras on Rainy Days*, the metaphor of the abortion of Hyderabad, i.e. the symbolic annihilation of its identity by its forced integration into India, is transformed, but results in the same ramifications for Hyderabadis when Henna, a pregnant Muslim woman, dies along with her unborn child after being gang-raped and mutilated. Ali has explained in an interview to Shauna Singh Baldwin that the scene is based on the rape and murder of a Muslim woman during the communal riots in Hyderabad city in 1990. She recalls how the gang never made it to the house in which she was living with her husband and in-laws; the author feels that it was at the cost of the murdered woman that she was saved (Ali, "Every").

Riots have occurred in India regularly since independence, and thousands of people have died or been displaced. At the receiving end of this violence stand Muslim women like Ali's character Henna, who are raped and murdered to illustrate and propagate the ultimate ends of communalism, i.e. the subjugation of marginalized communities through the oppression of women. Indeed, all the instances of post-Partition communal riots mentioned above prominently feature rape and gang-rape. The 1978 riot in Hyderabad was triggered by the gang-rape of eighteen-year-old Rameeza Bi by three Muslim and one Hindu policeman (Kakar 47). Some of the most horrific violence in Gujarat in 2002 occurred in the Naroda Patiya area of Ahmedabad, where Muslim women and children were raped, gang-raped, tortured, and mutilated by mobs incited and supported by BJP MLA Maya Kodnani (Bhan, "Naroda"; "Gujarat Riots"). And at least six women are reported to have been gang-raped during the Muzaffarnagar "riots" in 2013 (TNN, "300 Booked"; Anand, "Muzaffarnagar").

The centrality of the female body in patriarchal discourses, such as Hindutva and Wahhabism, is represented by persistent references to it in *Madras on Rainy Days*. In addition to demonstrating how the female body is construed by many Hyderabadis Muslims as the locus of patriarchal domination, the novel also shows how it is systematically theorized as the repository of "honour" for the family and (religious) community and how the loss of that "honour" brings personal and social shame that points to the culpability of the individual woman or group of women in question. This construct of "honour" necessitates the strict policing of Layla's and Henna's bodies and sexualities by close family members. Besides the occasions when Layla's parents call their daughter a "whore" (4) or a "randi" (90; Hindustani for "slut") for expressing her independent thoughts or feelings, another vivid incident that illustrates how this patriarchal anxiety about "honour" is preserved in collective memory occurs when Layla visits the fort of Golconda, capital city of the Qutb Shahi sultans (1518-1687). Referring to the Mughal conquest of Golconda in 1687, Layla tells us how she had "passed an ancient well inside which, I overheard a guide saying, the women of the harem, the women of the Qutb Shahi family, had drowned themselves, unwilling to let their bodies also be invaded. This was the heritage I carried" (180). In other words, Layla

feels the weight of the overwhelming legacy of honour when she visits Golconda, and is made aware of local folklore that contextualizes within a wider framework the oppressive patriarchal restrictions she lives with. This collective memory serves to construct the centrality of honour in Hyderabad culture as well as provide an example for present-day Hyderabad women to emulate. In this patriarchal world-view, it is the women who uphold family and community honour better than any other symbol can. The female body is thus formulated as the object of a crystallized, codified patriarchal narrative of tyrannical regulation/appropriation, where the most effective way to not only strip a woman but her family and community of dignity is to do it verbally and/or physically through her body.

It is these perceptions that emerge in the specific form taken by the gang-rape and murder of Henna by eight armed young men during the “riot.” Henna’s nine-month pregnant body is mutilated with a broken whiskey bottle (290-91), and her baby is “whole” when it is “sliced out” by her attackers (293). This information comes from Layla’s husband Sameer, who witnesses the event and reports also that Henna’s attackers were “snickering at her body. They said her breasts were engorged, all juicy like mangoes—and just as sweet. Baby, they drank her milk!” (293)

Henna’s situation is both different and similar to the rapes and pregnancies that women suffered during Partition. Like but also unlike many of these women, Henna is raped after she becomes pregnant. She is a married Muslim woman carrying a Muslim child, so there is no communal or official anxiety over the taboo of violated virginity or “mixed” reproductivity as there was during Partition. Furthermore, Henna’s rape takes place four decades after Partition. But Layla’s mother-in-law Zeba compares the danger that Layla herself is in during this riot to the danger Layla’s mother faced as a child, when she witnessed the decisive attack on her family’s feudal estate in Miryalguda by workers and/or “invaders” in the 1940s. Zeba tells Layla how her mother was much younger than she when “this happened to her” (285). In Zeba’s mind, the current threat of violence against Muslims by Hindus in the late 1980s is directly comparable to the violence committed in 1940s Hyderabad state by peasants, workers, activists, and intellectuals, as well as the persecution of these groups by Indian state forces during their invasion of the state. She connects the rapes, looting, and murders that were perpetrated by various groups against each other in the 1940s to the threat of rape, looting, and murder that looms over them now. Elsewhere in the novel, she refers to the events of the 1940s in Hyderabad specifically as “Partition” (125-6).

Scholars such as Urvashi Butalia (4), Amrit Srinivasan (310-1), and Hasan (307-8) have noted that post-Partition events, such as the 1984 anti-Sikh communal “riots” after Indira Gandhi’s assassination and the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the subsequent communal “riots,” have been connected in traumatized survivors’ memories to Partition. Older Sikhs told Butalia, as she assisted in citizens’ relief efforts in 1984,

that the recent murderous attacks were “like Partition again” (4). This connection to Partition in collective memory is not only borne out by survivor testimonies, but also in the ideological propaganda distributed by aggressors. In his discussion of how violence against Muslims is justified by Hindu nationalists as a pre-emptive measure to curtail what is imagined to be imminent Muslim aggression, Gyanendra Pandey has reproduced a leaflet meant to mobilize Hindus against Muslims in Bhagalpur before the riots of 1989-1990 (“In Defence” 566-7), in which 982 people died (People’s Union, “Recalling”). This document refers repeatedly to issues connected with Partition, such as the dispute over Kashmir as well as the creation of Pakistan, which is where, it is suggested, all Indian Muslims should go, leaving India for Hindus (“In Defence” 566-7). The idea that all Indian Muslims should go to Pakistan is a common refrain in Hindutva propaganda, the most recent example being the sinister comments made by BJP leader Giriraj Singh during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections (cf. “Those Opposing Modi”). Other references to Partition during post-1947 communal riots include the rumours that were circulated amongst Hindus after Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984. Srinivasan writes that Sikhs were, ironically, suspected and accused of crimes that were actually being committed against them. These rumours neatly evoked formulaic images of Partition violence, for they alleged that trainloads of dead Hindus were coming in from the Punjab, and that Sikhs had poisoned the water in Delhi (314-5).

Thus, the testimonies of the Sikh survivors of 1984 as well as communalist propaganda against Sikhs in 1984 and Muslims in 1989 show that current communal riots draw upon the events of Partition for their program. Partition is, therefore, very much alive in collective memory, and some recent events may be read and understood in its context. It is in this framework that Henna’s gang-rape and murder—a crime committed during a “riot” that Zeba compares to Partition—must be analyzed. Gayatri Spivak’s and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s theoretical formulations about *sati* (“self-immolation by widows”) are particularly relevant in this regard. Spivak treats nineteenth-century *sati* and contemporary dowry deaths by burning as “displacements on a chain of semiosis with the female subject as signifier” (313). Following her cue, Rajan treats nineteenth-century *sati*, contemporary dowry related deaths, as well as contemporary *sati* as different but related phenomena (33). I propose to treat the gang-rape and murder of Henna in a similar fashion, and my argument proceeds from the premise that the rape, mutilation, impregnation, and murders of women during Partition, and the gang-rape, mutilation, and murder of a heavily pregnant Henna are two different points on the same semiotic chain, with the maternal female body as signifier. The argument that rape is a political statement is indispensable to this analysis.

According to Sudhir Kakar, communalist identification is accompanied by the firm conviction that the interests of one nation “not only diverge from but are in actual conflict with the interests of other[s]”

(13). Purshottam Agarwal takes this point further when he argues that communalism is motivated more by politics than by religious or socio-economic strife and, for the participants, “every riot is actually a battle in the unfinished war not between two religious communities, but between two racially defined nations” (32). He attributes the transformation of the religiously constructed identity of Hindus—i.e. Hinduism—into Hindutva, a politically constructed, racially and territorially defined, and historically shared identity, to the discourse of V.D. Savarkar (1883-1966), the oft-quoted, chief ideologue of the contemporary Hindutva right (40-1). It is this stripping of morally, religiously conceived consciousness from the traditional Hindu identity by forcing the abdication of God or a divine head, and the subsequent coronation of the territorially defined nation as the absolute divine, that serves to eliminate any qualms about rape as a political weapon against Muslims, who are singularly defined, in spite of great regional diversities and political differences, as the “internal enemy who can be blamed for the humiliations and defeats of the nation” (43).

This construction of a national enemy stems from Savarkar’s body of so-called historical scholarship, which is rife with narrative elucidations of how Hindu women were repeatedly ravaged across history by Muslim conquerors (47) who thought of rape as an essential tactic in order to increase their numbers. Thus, besides being considered the medium through which communal honour is preserved or desecrated, women are the ground where communal reproduction and growth takes place (49). For Savarkar, this sexual motif of conquest connecting land, religion, and women is a consistent pattern, in spite of the fact that it does not exist in representations of the medieval Muslim invasions and governance of India in Persian court chronicles for nearly six centuries starting with the twelfth century, and appears to have been constructed later (Mukhia 29).

Indeed, Savarkar’s discourse is marked by an “obsession with the semiotics of sexuality” (Agarwal 44), so that the logic behind patriarchal world-views that locate women like Layla and Henna as defining symbols of family and communal honour leads to the metamorphosis of women into metaphors of both sacredness and humiliation in struggles between communities. Furthermore, in an organized aggression (as all contemporary “riot” situations are in India), rape becomes a spectacular ritual of victory in which the solidarity and virility of the perpetrators is publicly established through collective participation and witnessing, and the solidarity and masculinity of the vanquished, enemy community is demolished through physical disempowerment and the ultimate defilement of its honour (Agarwal 31; Mukhia 31). Within this logic, the historical and legendary rape of Hindu women by Muslim men as well as the supposedly imminent rape of Hindu women by Muslim men in a foreseeable future must be avenged and prevented (respectively) by Hindu men raping Muslim women (Kannabiran 33; cf. Sarkar 2874). And it is because Savarkar carefully and dialectically constructs his patchwork narrative of history about the atrocities of Muslim rulers and soldiers upon Hindu women, through reference to stereotypes and subconscious

prejudices, that the past tense collapses into the present in the minds of a receptive audience and furnishes them with a present course of action (Agarwal 49).

It is in this context of rape as a permissible, even encouraged, political act that Henna's gang-rape can be read. Agarwal's observation that not only is rape important as a retributive or pre-emptive measure, but it is also a "nationalistically moral method to achieve ethnic cleansing" (43), is also relevant here. Impregnating a woman from the enemy community through rape ensures that the community's lineage is genetically "contaminated" or "diluted." Tanika Sarkar has also observed in the context of the Gujarat "riots" of 2002 that beatings and mutilations of the vagina and the womb indicated the symbolical destruction of reproduction amongst Muslims (2876). This pattern is also seen in the extraction of unborn foetuses from women's pregnant bellies with swords and the killing of children during the Gujarat riots (2875-6). The drive to commit such horrendous acts comes from deeply engrained Hindutva narratives that breed fear about the supposedly superhuman virility of Muslim men and the incredible fertility of Muslim women that will result in Muslims taking over India and driving out or annihilating Hindus. Indeed, sexual torture also becomes a way of punishing Muslim women for their fertility and consequent ability to ensure the community's future (2875-6).

Kakar too makes the same point, emphasizing that similar violence during Partition, such as the castration of males and the chopping off of female breasts, "incorporate[s] the more or less conscious wish to wipe the hated enemy off the face of the earth by eliminating the means of its reproduction and the nurturing of its infants" (30). He points out that in addition to this conscious wish, there is also a more subconscious perception occasioned by the fear of violence to one's own self, that "the castration of the enemy may be viewed as a counterphobic acting out of what psychoanalysis considers as one of the chief male anxieties: that is, a doing unto others—castration—what one fears may be done to one's self" (30). By this logic, rape becomes an elaborately conceived gendered form of genocide or ethnic cleansing.³

This historical pattern of rape as ethnic cleansing is seen in the language of the violence inflicted upon Henna, i.e. its *modus operandi*, which parallels the violence suffered by women during Partition as well as subsequent communal "riots." Rape or gang-rape is not the only common factor, but the mutilation of Henna's body, the marking of her Othered (female and/or Muslim) body by men, the violent extraction of her whole, unborn female child, and the comments and actions that focus on her lactating breasts as an indication of her sexuality, reproductivity, and maternity are remarkably similar to the specific formulae adopted by sexual perpetrators during Partition as well as today to isolate, identify, and mark individual women within their specific social and representative value as biologically, sexually, and reproductively female, as distinguished from men in all three categories. Furthermore, the function

of nurturing and sustenance provided by lactating female breasts to children, the future of a community, is arrested by the violence done to the breasts. In Henna's case, by drinking her milk, her rapists blaspheme symbolically against her motherhood and, consequently, mock and humiliate her community, usurping her breasts and depriving the future community of sustenance.

Layla's father-in-law's concern over Layla and Sameer's proposed trip to Madras is an articulation of the anxiety born out of this formula of violence that targets the individual to destroy the collective: "'A young couple,' he paused, his eyes drifting away, his fingers tapping the table, 'a young couple is always a good target for these gangs. They symbolize hope to a community; killing them is like putting out a candle flame'" (259). Layla vividly recalls this metaphor of an extinguished candle after Henna's death and remarks, "[t]he light of a community had been blown out" (296). In this way, Henna becomes a synecdoche for the Muslim community, for "[t]he enactment of violence targets the whole through the part; a few or more victims became substitutes for the community" (Mayaram 149). The gang-rape of one woman is interpreted as a decisive attack upon the existence of a social group, which, consequently, lives with fear and trauma.

Hence, Ali locates Henna's death within the larger ideological context of communal genocide through the specific targeting of youth, women, and children. Additionally, Henna's mutilation and death as well as the death of her unborn child function as a spectacular warning to the Hyderabad Muslim community in the novel, whose profound demoralization figures prominently as one of the closing images of the novel. This image consists of the depiction of Taqi Mamu's utter and complete dejection after Henna's death. The narrator tells us that

[w]hen the cemetery came into view, Taqi Mamu handed his corner [of the wooden litter on which Henna and her child were carried] to someone else and stepped aside, and the small procession went on without him. After a ways, I turned to see him stick his arms out as he fell to the ground. Without picking himself up, he crawled to the edge of the road and sat staring ahead, his jaw moving as though chewing on something. People passed on foot or cycle or car and did not seem to notice him. (308)

Taqi Mamu's obliviousness to his surroundings is an indication of the weight of his grief, and the fact that passersby also remain oblivious to him points to his social, political, and historical isolation as a member of a persecuted religious minority that has experienced profound individual and collective loss.

He is not the only character to be dramatically altered by the violence done to Henna. In fact, the concrete immediacy of her gang-rape in the narrative means that Henna's death is seen by her family exactly as it is: rape and murder. Contrary to everything we have seen so far in the novel, there is no sense of violated "honour" that her family and kin believe is a matter of "shame" and/or must be avenged. Instead, her pain and terror are

felt acutely by her parents, who go into severe shock, and the entire family experiences a crushing sense of loss.

The details that Sameer eventually provides about the gang-rape serve to demystify Henna's experience and enable the recognition of her pain. And not only does this pain constitute Henna's experience, but it also defines the horror that Sameer feels as he gradually begins to comprehend what he has witnessed and the trauma that afflicts Layla as she learns what Henna's last moments were like. The acknowledgement in discourse of the "subject of/in pain" (34), writes Rajan in the context of *sati*, is what makes intervention possible. Thus, the acknowledgement of pain in the discourse on rape demystifies rape by bringing home its reality and physicality. As a result, the representation of Henna's pain makes it possible for other characters as well as readers to experience moral and political rage. Her pain becomes an indicator not only of her victimhood but also becomes, paradoxically and significantly, a "specific, gendered ground for subjectivity" (35), indicative of the agency located in her body (34). Hence, it is possible to generate an interventionist feminist politics from a conception of female subjectivity "generalized from the inherence of pain in the female body" (34).⁴

Henna's death devastates her family and community. They suffer from the kind of trauma Kai Erikson describes as issuing not only from a discrete event, but also from a "*constellation of life experiences*," sustained consistently over a period of time (185). Others have also formulated trauma as an insidious, long-term phenomenon that afflicts certain groups who suffer long-term marginalization and oppression on account of their religion, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and class (Root 240; Burstow 1308; Brown 107). Erikson argues that traumatized communities are not aggregates of traumatized people. Instead, traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals in a group can "combine to create a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma... has a social dimension" (185). This collective trauma "damages the texture of community" (187), the "tissues of community" (185), making it weaker with each blow it receives. This social dimension of trauma is represented in Ali's novel in the utter dejection and powerlessness Muslims feel, as the memory of repeated onslaughts on their political, social, and economic existence during and since Partition grows stronger and stronger with each successive blow to the community.⁵ Although poorer Muslims are more vulnerable to this crippling discrimination, members of the middle-class are also very much at its receiving end.

Such denial of justice and consequent demoralization is seen in Ali's novel in the helplessness of Henna's family after the culprits, who have influential political connections, are released without being brought to account for their acts. For Layla and the rest of the family, Henna's unpunished rape and death also emphasizes the state's failure to recognize or protect Muslims as full citizens. This sense of being let down by the Indian state in the text is amplified by its context and inspiration: as Ali

has said in an interview (“Every”), the fictional rape of Henna is based on the rape of a Muslim woman during the communal violence that took place in Hyderabad in 1990. This violence was triggered by the ongoing, unabashedly anti-Muslim *rath yatra* (Hindi for “chariot procession”) undertaken by then BJP President L.K. Advani from Somnath to Ayodhya. Three hundred people died and thousands were wounded during these “riots” (Kakar 51). The aim of this campaign across North India was to garner widespread support for the demolition of the Babri Masjid in order to build a temple dedicated to Ram at the same site. That Hindu nationalist organizations were eventually successful in demolishing the mosque in 1992 and the Indian state was powerless to stop them or hold the chief political actors accountable explains why Muslims are and do feel persecuted in India.

This awareness of a trauma that extends beyond the self and is shared by and affects many generations over an extended period of time is most vividly represented in Layla’s meditations about the layout of the family cemetery and the way it memorializes her family’s history, starting from her grandfather, shifting to her brother who died in infancy, and ending with Henna and her unborn child. She notes, “[n]ext to my aunt’s feet lay Nana’s grave, and I stared at it, silently informing him that this was what was left of his hopes for the future” (311). Layla also meditates upon the fact that for the family, she is now “the sole heir of their collective sorrow” as well as their only hope (311). Thus, Layla recognizes that the family, which shares the trauma of Henna’s death as well as other injustices that it has experienced over the years since Partition, sees her as a repository of hope, as the only person left who can carry the bloodline forward and represent them. This acknowledgement is another indicator that Layla not only sees her own experiences as synecdoche for the experiences of Muslims, but also realizes that she is the “holder of the family’s postmemory” (Hirsch, *Family* 30) of Partition.

Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory particularly in connection with the children of Holocaust survivors, who live in the perennial shadows of their parents’ narrations of their traumatic experiences (127). Perhaps it is only through the transmission of trauma across generations as postmemory that trauma can be “witnessed and worked through” (Hirsch, “Surviving” 12). Although postmemory differs from memory because of its generational distance from the traumatic event (*Family* 22), it is extremely powerful because “its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (22), through “representation, projection, and creation” (“Surviving” 9). Postmemory is indirect, displaced, vicarious, and delayed (*Family* 13; “Surviving” 9); it is mediated by the survivors’ narrations but determinative for their children and other people of the next generation, who grow up “dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (*Family* 22). These notions derive from the fact that traumatic memory is

itself delayed in its recognition of trauma as having occurred, a point made by Cathy Caruth (10).

The images and narrations that transmit trauma from one generation to others are “so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch, “Surviving” 9). This is why Layla’s individual problems and concerns, which are otherwise obsessively pursued in the text, become relegated to the fringes of the narrative whenever Zeba or Taqi Mamu eloquently voice their traumatic experiences during Partition. The work of postmemory is a “particular mixture of mourning and re-creation” (*Family* 251). Like the ambivalence of Art Spiegelman in his graphic novel *Maus* (1991) towards his father’s memories of the Holocaust, as understood by Hirsch (13), Layla too is both affected by the injustices narrated by her family as well as inevitably distanced from them and unable to understand them. Like the children of Holocaust survivors, her postmemory of Partition is also conditioned by exile from “the space of identity” (Hirsch, *Family* 243), “a world that has ceased to exist, that has been violently erased” (243), where there now stands a dam, and which, for her parents’ generation and her Uncle Taqi in particular, is no longer there. In this way, Layla is twice-exiled: not only does she live in exile in the U.S., but she also cannot return to the Miryalguda of her mother’s time, simply because it physically does not exist anymore. And even if she were to return to Hyderabad, Layla would still psychologically remain in exile, interminably affected by her family’s persistent memories of displacement and trauma. In Hirsch’s words, “[t]he children of exiled survivors, although they have not themselves lived through the trauma of banishment and forcible separation from home and the destruction of that home, remain marked by their parents’ experiences: always marginal or exiled, always in the diaspora” (243). Like Hirsch, who has not visited her parents’ Czernowitz (268), Layla too never goes to Miryalguda.

Furthermore, *Madras on Rainy Days* also “represents the aesthetic of the trauma fragment” (Hirsch, *Family* 39), which is found in the intermittent and occasionally vague testimonies about Partition reproduced by Layla. The “unassimilable loss” (40) incurred by people during Partition is appropriate in its incongruity to the “aesthetic of postmemory” (40), which involves both “incomprehensibility and presence, a past that will neither fade away nor be integrated into the present” (40), a “practice of mourning [that] is as determinative as it is interminable and ultimately impossible” (245). Thus, Layla’s representation of Partition belies who she is, a young woman born in post-Partition Hyderabad who cannot fully understand what Partition was about nor escape the obsessive memories her uncle and her mother-in-law have about that event. Additionally, her Partition-related postmemorial trauma is sharply qualified and reinforced by the fresh outbreak of communal violence in which Henna dies. Since this violence now affects her so intimately, Layla’s mind is imprinted not only with her postmemories of Partition, but also her memories of present-day communal violence. Both memory of contemporary violence and

postmemory of Partition violence buttress each other, only aggravating Layla's trauma.

Moreover, not only is Henna's gang-rape a terrible manifestation of this continuation of Partition trauma into the 1980s, but this trauma is also connected to material loss associated with Partition. Taqi Mamu is embroiled in a legal battle against the government over reasonable compensation for his ancestral estate in Miryalguda. Seized during the upheavals of Partition and passed through various hands, the estate is finally taken over by the government. This dislocation echoes the general trend in property loss during Partition in other parts of the subcontinent as well; people were forced to migrate under pain of death, and many left behind everything they owned. Some middle-class people in other parts of India such as Delhi were able to exchange their standing property with departing people in their new country and were, therefore, compensated relatively easily; the state too lent a hand and often helped these refugees to obtain compensation for their loss. However, Taqi Mamu's inability to extract compensation from a state which has not only refused thus far to accommodate him, but has also usurped his estate, represents the callousness and communalism of post-Partition administrations towards internally displaced Muslims, who were discriminated against with regard to protection and rehabilitation (Kidwai 42, 65, 110, 197; Pandey, *Remembering* 139). In fact, in many cases, local administrations actively colluded in aiding refugees to occupy property that belonged to internally displaced communities and persons (Kidwai 250, 181-90).

This treatment at the hands of the Indian state is the reason Taqi Mamu always bitterly resents his father's refusal to migrate to Pakistan during Partition. Disgusted, he says, "[e]ven after they've stolen his home he says this is his home" (298). This statement indicates that as a Muslim, Taqi Mamu feels that he would have more rights and justice as a citizen in Pakistan; his predicament validates Partition by suggesting that India does indeed treat its Muslims as second-class citizens and that, therefore, Muslims should have a separate homeland. In spite of living in a house that belonged to his father and that he has rightfully inherited as his home, Taqi Mamu exemplifies the sense of rootlessness that many Partition survivors experience, so that "[n]either at home in the space of relocation nor in the defamiliarized homeland ... [they] felt displaced whether they migrated or not" (Gera Roy and Bhatia xviii). In fact, for Taqi Mamu, the dam the government has built on his land *is* Partition (148-9). His statement—"Ar're, that's not a dam. It's Partition. That is what Partition looks like" (149)—suggests that the edifice of modern India with its emphasis on infrastructural development and technological paraphernalia is built upon the open wounds and unsolved problems of Partition. He is hurt and disappointed to find that his Muslim identity hinders the process of extracting a reasonable compensation from the government, thereby reinforcing the prolonged history of communal discrimination on the part of the state.

Henna's violent death turns out to be the last straw for Taqi Mamu, and in spite of fighting ceaselessly for years, he makes an abrupt decision to accept whatever compensation, no matter how inadequate, the government wants to give him. The attack on his, his family's, and his community's identity finally breaks his strength, ridding him of his righteous anger and allowing a submissive impotence to set in. And so, he "bowed his head and announced, 'I've taken the money. Just now, I phoned. I told them, two *lakh*, three *lakh*, whatever they want to give me for my land, I'll take it. No more fighting,' he mumbled, backing out of the room" (298). In what is clearly a very sad state of affairs, Taqi Mamu succumbs to his disadvantaged place in the scheme of things, and his final decision to accept whatever compensation he is offered without a fight suggests that those wounds and problems of Partition will remain open and unsolved. It is made vividly clear to him both by the compensation dispute and Henna's violent death that he belongs to a minority that "might be allowed to be part of the nation, but 'never quite'" (Pandey, "Citizenship" 101). In this understanding, Muslims stand in direct opposition to the "invisible" Hindus, whose belonging is taken for granted and needs no emphasis, since they are "the nation's natural condition, its essence and spirit. Their culture is the nation's culture, their history its history. This needs no stating" (120). In other words, unlike Muslims, Hindus are automatically Indian and, consequently, automatically entitled to the nation-state's compensation and justice, the normal privileges of citizenship in a democratic polity.

Taqi Mamu's devastating sense of defeat points to the fact that what happens to Henna not only connects the present to the past, but also seems to finalize the family's future through the way the present unfolds. After witnessing Taqi Mamu's capitulation, and reflecting upon the layout of the family graveyard, Layla registers the ineluctable connection of their present to their past. She traces the tragic trajectory traversed by her family since Partition in Taqi Mamu's passionate struggles and ultimate resignation in the dreadful finality of Henna's death. Lastly, even though *Madras on Rainy Days* does not confront questions of how life unfolds for women after rape and what strategies they, their families, and communities use to cope in case the women do survive the ordeal, such an end does echo the experience of women who were raped and killed during Partition riots as well as during communal violence in Hyderabad in the late 1980s. It reminds us of the devastating, irreversible reality of loss incurred, of the impossibility of knowing such experiences via personal testimony, and of the fact that the historian's or the scholar's archive or research will always be incomplete (Didur 139).

Through my analysis of a literary representation of gang-rape, I have shown in this essay how gendered violence with a clearly defined political aim connects an individual experience of personal and familial trauma to the experience, history, and memory of three generations of a family and community. Furthermore, such experiences many decades after Partition succeed in violently re-opening the old personal and collective wounds

and memories of Partition. This aggravation of Partition wounds is seen in relation to the “riot” in which Henna is killed: Zeba cannot help but compare the atmosphere of violence to Partition; Taqi Mamu is so completely disabled by his beloved niece’s death that he stops fighting for his rights; and Layla’s already weighty postmemory of Partition is overladen with new memories of communal violence. But it is through the intervention that Ali makes as a diasporic writer that we most vividly see the excavation of public wounds and the political contributions of *Madras on Rainy Days*.

As I mentioned earlier, the novel illustrates Hirsch’s theorization that the aesthetics of postmemory are actually “a diasporic aesthetics of temporal and spatial exile that needs simultaneously to (re)build and to mourn” (*Family* 245). Literature can serve as “a site of postmemory and mourning” (257), and so *Madras on Rainy Days* becomes the means to creatively memorialize the deaths of people during Partition as well as the deaths of people today from communal violence (Hirsch, *Family* 247; Gera Roy and Bhatia xiv). In addition to this, postmemory is not necessarily restricted to families (Hirsch, *Family* 254-5) and, therefore, may actually help build broader networks of people who can publicly share, mourn, and remember the trauma caused by Partition. Thus, Partition literature such as Ali’s novel also allows readers—Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis—who have their own troubling postmemories of Partition, or those who do not have any connection to Partition whatsoever, such as some of the American readers Ali hopes to attract (Ali, *Rediff*), to value the memories and postmemories of different characters in the novel, thereby broadening awareness and advancing the understanding of Partition and the trauma it generated for so many. Such reading practices would then contribute to what Das hopes for: the creation of “therapeutic spaces” of socially shared expressions of the trauma of Partition (192-3, 196). Besides this, novels like *Madras on Rainy Days* not only undo some of the official silences on Partition, but they also help to rebuild through the medium of writing and reading South Asian communities that were dislocated during Partition and whose members can personally relate to the book for that reason (Hirsch, *Family* 255).

It is such interventions that Papiya Ghosh refers to when she writes that Partition is a major reference point in diaspora, “both in installing and resisting Hindutva” (xxi). The narrative mediation of Ali’s novel in Partition-related politics in the subcontinent as well as the West-based South Asian diaspora becomes one of the many efforts amongst diasporic writers, scholars, activists, groups, and organizations to resist the divisive stance of Hindutva. Such efforts have become more and more urgent not only because the new Prime Minister of India is the BJP’s Narendra Modi, but because Hindutva organizations, such as the RSS and the VHP, are expanding the field of their influence not only across India, but also amongst Hindus in the diaspora (126-30). Through mediations like *Madras on Rainy Days*, diasporic subjects have not only engaged with the

politics of post-Partition South Asia as a whole, but also with specific localities such as Hyderabad, which were transformed during Partition but neglected in the hegemonic memory of Partition, which was sustained and transmitted across generations by the nationalistic Indian state.

In fact, Ali creates a literary framework about a socio-political milieu within which the related issues of organized, gendered violence against Muslim girls and women, compensation for internally displaced Hyderabad Muslim refugees, and citizenship of India's Muslim minorities can be discussed. It is in these socio-political contexts that Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days* makes its most valuable intervention: by revealing, sharing, coping, and enabling others to cope with the personal and public traumas of Partition and subsequent occurrences of communal violence in India.

Notes

1. The princely states were not ruled directly by the British, and existed somewhat independently on the basis of a patrimonial relationship with the British Indian administration.

2. Gyanendra Pandey points out the incongruity of the euphemism "riot" to situations that are beginning to look more and more like pogroms ("In Defence" 569) or even a form of communal genocide. In the absence of a more specific word, I will stick to "riot" and put it in quotation marks as an ironic reminder of how inadequate it is to describe communal violence in India.

3. The comparison of communal violence in South Asia (especially with reference to its viciousness in Gujarat in 2002) to genocide has been persuasively made by the Coalition Against Genocide (CAG), a group of thirty-eight Muslim, Christian, feminist, queer, and secular left-wing organizations in the United States and Canada (Ghosh 221). It has pointedly called the Gujarat riots a genocide of Muslims (Coalition, "Media") and charged the Modi-led state government with "actively and covertly encourag[ing] violence against women during the Gujarat pogroms when sexual mutilation and rapes of women and children" were used as ethnic cleansing devices (qtd in Ghosh 221). The International Initiative for Justice has also compared the Gujarat violence against Other women, "symbols of the community's honor ... the ones who sustain the community and reproduce the next generation," to genocide, and drawn parallels between the way women were treated during conflicts in Gujarat and Rwanda, Bosnia, and Algeria (Panel, "International").

4. The danger of identifying in such pain a necessary condition for the attainment and/or expression of female subjective agency is deflected by the isolation and consideration of context (Rajan 35).

5. Besides the experiences of Henna and Taqi Mamu, another example is the institutionalized discrimination that Sameer says Muslims like him face in schools, universities, and workplaces in India. In fact, this discrimination is one of his chief motivations for desiring to leave India.

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