

Text and Context: Classroom as a Site of Contention

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Abstract

This article presents pedagogical reflections on the experience of teaching fiction about the partition of India with Pakistan and Bangladesh and its long-lasting effects on local communities, especially along the borders. It shows how the long drawn out political movement for identity and territory, including the violence and social divisions it perpetuates, plays out in the classroom where students affected by the vestigial effects of partition encounter literature as a lived history. Using teaching strategies in this condition as a case in point, the article argues that the literature classroom can become a site of recovery and renewal, conflict and negotiation, and memory and uncovering of silenced history. The broader implications of this pedagogy for literary interpretation and classroom engagement with larger issues are further discussed.

Keywords: Students, classroom, migration, partition, literature, borders, conflict

Especially in the global south, English literature and literary theories in particular tend to be dominated by non-local texts and contexts. The tendency of English studies as a discipline of study in universities and other educational institutions is to find texts from and also to situate the discussion in a different and distant time and space. Even when the textual context is more or less familiar, the textual context receives a lot more attention than the context of the readers--how they face the issues of study

in their own lives, how they perceive the contents of study, or what they might do by learning about the issue at all. This article reports and discusses the experiences of using local, historical or social contexts and, more importantly, recognizing the salience of the histories or societies that students bring into the classroom allows the ensuing encounters to become educationally productive. It presents the experiences of teaching partition fiction viz. *Ice-Candy-Man* to master's degree students of the department of English, Bodoland University. The University is strategic to its location as it came into existence as a result of the struggle for identity of the Bodo community and has been a symbol of the long standing demand for progress and sustainable development in the BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area Districts) region, now BTR (Bodoland Territorial Region) of Assam. The sense of othering and neglect by the state and central governments continues to be a sore point in the consciousness of the people of the region. The University is located in the precincts of Debargaon, Kokrajhar, the capital of the BTR region and has been witness to a series of violent incidents and ethnic conflicts, illegal migration being one of the core issues. In light of this unique context for the teaching of historical fiction, the article argues that when literature engages students' own set of lived experiences as a part of the reading context, the positional aspect of their reading contributes to the production of meaning in the classroom. The broader implication of the classroom encounters of my students with the sample text that I discuss in this article is that literature isn't, or shouldn't be, just about intellectual and theoretical representations of society; literature serves its educational goals best when the students we educate and the texts we teach them are paid sufficient attention.

By showing the engagement of the stories read with a greater focus on the students reading them, the article argues that foregrounding the local context and the local reader can help to highlight hitherto silenced or marginalized aspects of complex social issues in a literature classroom. The article foregrounds the necessity of paying scholarly attention to the impact of the intellectual issue on the physical/social lives of the people of marginalized or oppressed communities, especially if the power dynamic continues and is overlooked in mainstream society or education. And the article does so by bringing into focus the responses of students to a historical novel viz. *Ice-Candy-Man*. *Ice-Candy-Man* as a novel reflects the historical period of partition and Independence in the Indian subcontinent. The novel interrogates the efficacy of drawing boundaries for the sake of creating new nation-states based on religious

fundamentalism. While the novel is a fictional representation of partition and its bloody aftermath before and during 1947, the discussion of such events unleashes a whole lot of uneasy conversations as the students bring to light their own experiences of facing the impact of conflicts which can be traced to the event of partition.

The article also brings to light how engaging complex social issues through fiction allows students to encounter and explore complex and even difficult social issues educationally and more meaningfully. In the case of partition issues in my class, the discussions move from borders and borderlessness to issues of migration, or from the abstract and intellectual to the social and personal. While migrants are seen as a minority and conjure an image of powerlessness in dominant postcolonial discourses, exploring the issues through fiction allows students to interrogate how migrants may also assume agency and power by outnumbering mainstream society with their mobility in large numbers¹. The article shows how reading fiction against lived experiences exposes the pitfalls of homogenous understanding of complex and contentious social issues as it might involve a contrary set of values as opposed to the dominant rhetoric on the issue. Confronting issues that are often turned into abstractions into matters of life and community helps students engage with history and society with greater agency.

Interrogating Partition Discourse

The teaching of partition as a historical event in the Indian subcontinent entails a whole lot of discussion on the various socio-political movements which resulted in the creation of new separate independent nation-states. The rise of various religious nationalist imaginations which prompted the creation of borders brought in its wake the outbreak of massive violence and large-scale transfer of populations. The teaching of partition thus involves highlighting the serious problems vis-à-vis the creation of borders. The issue of national boundaries which ushered in ideas of citizenship and freedom from colonial rule also witnessed the spurt in issues of migrant and refugee crises. Such issues of migrant crisis not only characterised the moment of Independence but it also got spilled over the postcolonial times, the repercussions of which can be felt even today. Hence the teaching of *Ice-Candy-Man* as a partition novel is done keeping in mind the complex tapestry of history and politics

¹See ACHR Report. Also in Monjib Mochahari's article.

associated with the event of partition and subsequent creation of independent nation-states. Apart from the literature written on partition there is a vast body of scholarship on partition of the Indian sub-continent which aids in teaching partition literature. However, the classroom discussions unfold the limitations of Partition Studies in dealing with the issues of partition in an inclusive and sufficient manner. The deliberations of prominent partition scholars like Urvashi Butalia, Sukeshi Kamra, Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, Ayesha Jalal, David Gilmartin, Ian Talbot, Joya Chatterjee, Kavita Daiya, etcetera is mostly centred around the understanding of partition in relation to Punjab and Bengal. While Butalia's celebrated work *The Other Side of Silence* is important in showing the gendered aspect of partition by recuperating the silenced narratives of women survivors of the partition trauma, she herself acknowledges the major lack in her work and mentions it as “. . . one-sided; it relates only to one aspect of Partition – that is, the partition of Punjab” (Butalia 22). Sukeshi Kamra (2003) also analyzes the meaning it had for people who witnessed the end of colonial rule and survived the partition – the partition of Punjab. Ritu Menon (1998) justifies the choice of Punjab being the field of research for collecting oral testimonies of women refugees as both “personal and historical” (Menon and Bhasin 12). Such justifications point to the focus on Punjab attributed by partition scholars. Similarly, Ayesha Jalal (2000) offers a close study on partition where she revisits the crucial relationship between nation, region and religion “with special reference to Punjab” (Jalal 2013, 11). Again the titles of David Gilmartin's book on partition, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* and Ian Talbot's *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition* is itself suggestive of the understanding of partition limited to regions of Punjab and Bengal. Kavita Daiya (2008) examines the partition violence and transfer of populations through the representations of postcolonial Indian and South Asian literatures, mostly based on the impact of partition in Punjab. A fair deal of work has also been done particularly on Bengal partition. In this connection mention may be made of Joya Chatterjee (1994) who has extensively dealt with Bengal partition, traces the trajectory of Hindu communalism, the demand for a separate Hindu homeland. She (2007) studies the disastrous aftermath of partition in relation to migration, diaspora and politics in the context of Bengal. Bashabi Fraser (2006) looks at the partition of Bengal through the prism of literature. Again Jashodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan

Dasgupta (2003) draw on interviews of women who faced and survived the onslaughts of partition in the context of eastern India, that is Bengal.

The onus of partition scholarship has always been veered towards Punjab and Bengal. Willem van Schendel (2005) criticizes the tendency of Partition Studies to focus only on Punjab. With increasing scholarship being done on the Bengal partition he points to the lack of scholarly attention being received by places like Assam and “marginalized in accounts of Partition” (Schendel 28). However, some amount of work in recent years has also been done on the impact of partition on Northeast India in general and Assam in particular. Apart from Schendel, mention may be made of Sanjib Baruah (1999), Sanjoy Hazarika (1994, 2018), Chandan Nandy (2005), Madhumita Sarma (2015), Udayon Mishra (2014), etcetera who presented a well documented research on the history of partition and its impact on Assam with critical analysis being made on the nature and politics involved with illegal migration in the state. These writers also showed how the historical roots of partition are invariably connected to the various insurgency movements and identity politics concerning the Northeast.

Classroom engagements with partition bring in the realisation that although some attention has been given to Northeast with Assam facing the onslaughts of partition even much later but not much is mentioned about how specific borderlands are worse affected and do not get the scholarly attention they deserve and instead get subsumed in the larger debates on partition generated conflicts of a state or a larger territorial entity like the Northeast. The teaching of partition literature opens up possibilities for tracing and understanding the nature of conflicts afflicting the less discussed borderlands otherwise not featuring in dominant scholarly discourses. The location of the literature classroom provides scope to unsettle and revisit partition and bring in the awareness that it is not only about Punjab and Bengal, that scholarship on the impact of partition on Assam also needs to shift attention to borderlands like Kokrajhar which still bears the burden in a huge way. Teaching literature especially in the specific context offers the opportunity to address lingering history of violence and discrimination that the place and its people have been facing and as such carries the potential of producing knowledge regarding such historical events in an unprecedented way. The reading context thus lays bare the inconsistencies present in the textual contexts and opens up possibilities to interrogate the homogenous discourses unwittingly disseminated by texts.

While there has been some research done in order to highlight the impact of partition on Assam, there is very little scholarship available on the BTR region. Although this region is marked with ethnic riots and conflicts and is rife with issues concerning identity politics owing to the legacies of partition, the serious scholarly attention accorded to this region is very less. In spite of the fact that the region has faced a lot of backlash as a result of the infiltration of illegal migrants and is one of the fragile borderlands of the state of Assam, the place hardly received the spotlight in Partition Studies. Mention may be made of Udayon Mishra (2014) who in his book examines the rise of the Bodo Movement and showed how the identity struggle of the Bodo tribal community is a corollary of the burden of the history of partition. Again Hazarika (1994) charts out the grievances of the Bodos along with various other indigenous tribal groups over the policies of the Assam Accord on the status of migrants. The identity politics in Assam from the pre-partition days to the days following the partition which gave rise to the discomfiture within indigenous tribal communities like the Bodos, is well examined by Hazarika. Sanjib Baruah (1999) in his chapter “We are Bodos, Not Assamese: Contesting a Subnational Narrative” discusses the complexities involved in the sentiments of separation developed among the Bodos against Assamese subnationalism. The chapter on Bodos is preceded by the chapters on the demographic transformation of Assam before and after partition and the politics of illegal migration that accompanied herewith. There has been a number of researches done on the ethnic riots as a direct outcome of illegal migration but what is lacking is the fact that serious research needs to be conducted on the social history of the region from the perspective of partition which is still afflicting the region. It is the teaching-learning exercise of a partition novel which unfolded the bitter truth that border areas of Assam like Kokrajhar does not find enough space in partition scholarship in spite of the fact that the disturbances in the region can be traced back to partition which is responsible for the outbreak of ethnic riots and conflicts until very recently. The classroom as a site brings home the need for intervention in Partition Studies to look into the lesser known area of BTR and its repercussions of partition.

Borders or Borderlessness?

Whereas partition and Independence in the Indian sub-continent necessitated the significance of borders as an entity which was inevitable for ensuring the territorial integrity of nationhood, post-colonial writers

articulated their wariness over the changes which came along with the drawing of boundaries, the boundaries which produced conflicts thereby creating demarcations between cultures and national identities. The post-colonial writers examine the contours of nationhood manifested through the legitimisation of borders which stimulated conditions of marginalisation and creation of national 'others'. These writers employ this very status of marginality imposed onto the status of a migrant or the national 'other' by arguing about the position of borderlessness of the migrant in favourable terms, inducing it as a situation generating artistic consciousness. While *Ice-Candy-Man* as a novel is set in the backdrop of partition on the eve of Independence in the Indian subcontinent, around the time of 1947; the students' own time and space introduces questions about not only partition scholarship, it also poses challenge against the theoretical precepts of borderless universe advocated by key postcolonial writers like Homi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh which is otherwise widely celebrated in English Studies. Discussing the novel as a postcolonial text on the interrogation of borders invariably brings into focus the theoretical premises of these postcolonial writers. The readers not only resist the ideological dimensions of the text, but they also put under scrutiny the hallowed status given to the concepts of postmodern migrancy formulated by these writers which champions the position of a migrant. Bhabha celebrates the notions of hybridity and liminality closely associated with the condition of migrancy. He attaches importance to the status of ambivalence represented by the migrant when he states that "the truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision"(Bhabha 5). Such a statement not only implies the crossing of borders as an agency for cultural production but it is also suggestive of the migrant as a minority. He privileges the condition of the migrant when he mentions the interstitial identity of the migrant as a mode of challenging and remaking the borders. As John McLeod observes about Bhabha that it was ". . . part of his wider attempt to shape progressive epistemological possibilities from the experiential terrain of cross-border passage, "transnational histories, migrants, . . . or political refugees"(5). So the migrant according to Bhabha's contentions assumes a position of privilege on account of his condition of hybridity and marginality. Although the postcolonial concerns of Bhabha on hybridity and migrancy is aimed at destabilising the binary between the colonial and the colonised, between the centre and the margin and addresses the cause of minorities in an alien culture, the question arises as to what if the host population faces the threat of being a

minority as a result of migrancy? Similarly, Salman Rushdie (1981) also celebrates the migrant's position when he claims, "The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier" (125). This implies that the concept of borders is seen with suspicion and the crossing of borders is invested with a sense of power which allows the migrant to see beyond hegemonic bordered identities. However, such oppositional structure portraying the migrant pitted against a dominant majority may not always hold true for all times and places. Revathi Krishnaswamy critiques Rushdie's emphasis on cross-border experience of a migrant when she states:

. . . indeed, it is precisely along the border that Rushdie in an explicit gesture of exclusion opposes the migrant to the non-migrant, privileging the former over the latter . . . Although fractured, the migrant imagination is an imperializing consciousness imposing itself upon the world (136-137).

As Krishnaswamy pointed out, Rushdie's explicit favouring of the migrant's positionality carries within it the possibility of a migrant's perspective as imperialistic, imposing itself upon the world. The postcolonial tendency of considering the migrant occupying the periphery does not fit well with the apprehensions of the students who form part of a landscape repudiating such interpretations. Amitav Ghosh is yet another writer whose works contributed sufficiently to the rhetoric of a borderless world. Particularly, mention may be made of his novel *The Shadow Lines* which inevitably gets conjured in the classroom discussions on partition and the notion of borders. The novel is also a critique on partition and shows how the power of imagination can transcend borders and cartographic spaces in a seamless manner. The huge amount of research articles and books addressing this aspect of borderlessness as reflected in Ghosh's text contributes to the larger postcolonial discourses on the borderless world. For instance, research articles like "Borderless Spaces and Cartographic Places in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*" by K. Guejalatchoumy, "Imagined Communities: Questioning the Border" by Rituparna Roy, Subham Ganguly's "A Close Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*: Problematizing the Concept of Home and Nation" etcetera, dwell on the idea of borderlessness based on Ghosh's novel. The emphasis on borderless existence in these articles points to the critique of borders and national lines and implies a fascination for the situation of migrancy largely influenced by Ghosh's novel.

These writers' penchant for a borderless reality can very well be located in their own migrant condition which became conducive for their act of writing. Such a condition which propelled their artistic developments is nevertheless different from the image of a migrant in the reading context with an alternative meaning quite different from such fanciful terms. Although the invocation of a globalized, borderless world has become popular in the postcolonial arena, the grim realities associated with the concepts of border and migrancy in a borderland like Kokrajhar poses a challenge to such discourses.

The classroom deliberations initiated by the novel brings in the awareness that there is a clear disjunct between the expressed need for borders in the region and the critique of the idea of boundaries in the texts. Whereas postcolonial intellectuals emphasize on borderlessness, the region is a strong reminder of the serious demand for borders. The region is characterised with ethnic riots and conflicts mostly concentrated on the issue of borders, firstly, as a result of the bitter consequences of partition which is still afflicting the region and the people in the name of illegal migrant population and, secondly, the demand for separation from the state of Assam and the creation of a new state of Bodoland. The history of the rise of Bodo sub-nationalism and its subsequent trajectory has been well recorded by Sanjoy Hazarika. According to Hazarika (1994), the Bodos felt they were being treated as the 'other' and viewed the mainstream Assamese community as "essentially colonialists, a powerful community that had settled in Brahmaputra valley several centuries ago by ousting their forefathers. To them, the Assamese caste Hindu or Assamese Muslim was as much an interloper as a Bangladeshi" (Hazarika 1994, 151-152). The Bodo movement during the post-Independence period is marked by strong reaction against the imposition of Assamese as the official language. The resentments of the Bodos gained momentum, marks Hazarika, also as a result of the apathy shown by the then Assamese leadership and which led to the demand of the Bodos for a separate state for themselves by dividing Assam into half. The fear of getting assimilated into the larger Assamese tradition and losing their own identity and culture gave rise to the movement of Bodoland². This attitude of resentment and a consequent demand for drawing borders is something that continued until recently. Time and again, there were road blockades or rail 'aborodh'

²Mwshahary (2017) mentions this concerning the father of the Bodos Upendranath Brahma: "He made out the point that for protection of Bodo people from the animical Assamese people and their State Government a separate State is must for them" (3).

(blockade) by the ABSU (All Bodo Students' Union) for a separate state of Bodoland and the road from the Kokrajhar town leading to the University had signs with slogans of 'DIVIDE ASSAM 50-50'.

Over and above the issue of demand for separate borders from the state of Assam was that of illegal infiltration from Bangladesh as a result of the porous India-Bangladesh border through which the illegal migrants entered. The series of ethnic conflicts between the local Bodo population and the illegal Muslim migrant communities occupying large portions of the BTR region took place as a result of the historical error of partition. The ethnic Bodos perceived the encroachment of the illegal Muslim population as a threat to their respective land and unique identity³. Hence, teaching a class mostly populated by students from the dominant Bodo community, the task of discussing partition literature is not without its complexities. To explain the critique of borders and boundaries as a part of the nation building process that is outlined by Sidhwa through the perspective of the eight year old Lenny is challenging, especially to a group of students whose minds are perhaps pulled in several directions by the rhetoric of territorial demarcations and state apathy that they are exposed to. The students with their own sense of location which still bears the burden of partition resist the current scholarship on migration and hybridity which more or less emphasizes on a borderless universe.

Interestingly, the students respond to the discussion on partition by telling their own tales of woe and horror of conflicts and the naked realities relating to illegal migration. For example, the students particularly relate their experiences of facing such repercussions like losing their majority status in their own neighbourhood, because of the crossing of borders by these Bangladeshi migrants and gradually occupying and outnumbering the ethnic tribal people from certain areas of BTR. Whereas Sidhwa as a novelist questions the creation of borders in various parts of the novel, the students most of the time, express the need to maintain the borders effectively for the safety and security of the local population. As Nandana Dutta (2008) in her essay states:

. . the hallowed conditions of marginality, migrancy and liminality, .
. are not only the conditions of the migrant. It is often the recipient community that is already marginalized and views this influx into its

³The ACHR Report, Jason Overdorf's report in GlobalPost, [Basharat Peer's](#) article in The New Yorker, [R Jagannathan's](#) article in The Firstpost and Monjib Mochahari's research paper, etcetera mentions the illegal migration as the cause of riots in Kokrajhar.

spaces as a more or less result of its marginality, of a center/nation-state's neglect or lack of concern, and its willingness to use this area and people distant from itself to play out a cynical politics of numbers and votes (83).

Dutta mentions the actual reality associated with migration and how crossing of borders is different from the postmodern condition of migrancy and marginality. According to her it is more often the recipient community which considers themselves as marginalised owing to the influx of the population of migrants. Although her essay addresses the larger Assamese community and its sentiments of otherness vis-à-vis the contours of nation and nationalism, nevertheless her argument on the reality of border states as contrary to the celebrated postmodern conditions of liminality and transcendence of borders can be read in this particular context as well. While the students listen to the experiences of violence as a corollary to the creation of borders, they however express that since so much of blood has already been shed in the name of nation-building and protection of national identity, it is all the more necessary to keep intact the national boundaries. The middle part of the novel (chapter 16, 18) presents the displacement and uprooting of the neighbours of Lenny's household during the time of partition, to which the students raised the point that such stories of displacement are still witnessed in the contemporary times where the influx of immigrants compels the local people to abandon their places of origin in fear of getting surrounded and marginalised by the outsiders. Another discussion worth mentioning here is when a student responded to the plot of the novel where Ayah and her group of friends discuss the political scenario of their times and the manner in which their harmless discussions gave way to heated debate centring communal hatred and violence. The student brought up the issue of the increase in the number of immigrants which led to the ethnic riots in 2012 but he argued how the entire incident was given a communal colour and the focus shifted to the news of violence against the Muslim community only. The Muslim fundamentalists retaliated by threatening the people from Northeast living in other parts of the country like Bangalore, Delhi, etcetera and as a result they were forced to flee from there for fear of persecution. According to him, the onus shifted from the crisis faced as a result of the immigrants and took a whole new different turn and began to be understood as Muslim versus the Hindus in the rest of

India⁴. Whereas writers like Bhabha, Rushdie, Ghosh through their various writings fantasizes the notion of hybrid diasporic writer who believes in a borderless world or a movement along borders in a seamless way, the students raises the importance of borders as contrary to the ideological debates by these writers as a result of their lived experiences.

Locating Conflict: Text and Context

Teaching a partition text helps in bringing the realities of its history closer home, contrary to the dominant ways of dealing with historical periods situated in a different time and a different space. It becomes an interesting educational experience where reading context confronts and resists the domain as reflected in the context of the texts under study. *Ice-Candy-Man* as a novel is replete with images of large scale destruction owing to the historical event of partition. The novel offers a poignant description of the horrifying impact it had on the lives of the common people with terrifying acts of violence, displacements, and rampant loss of innocent lives and property all around. The novel is a portrayal of a particular time, the hour of Independence and place, Lahore, Punjab. Teaching the text by helping students interpret it through the lens of their own ongoing history and impact of partition takes the text out of the domain of literary ideas and the dead past into the domain of life and society, emotion and empathy, identity and dignity. In fact, my students learn to trace the ongoing conflicts in BTR to the time of partition and examine the manner in which stories of violence and displacements are still being carried out albeit in varied forms and manner. They learn to notice and understand how systemic violence in their own community works, how partition continues to shape that violence, and how they might address it in real life. Research works point to the traumatic experiences and gruesome realities of the people suffering in the ethnic riots of the BTR region. For instance, S. Tiwari and G. Ghosh offers a detailed analysis of the plight of the people who got displaced during the crisis of conflict and the manner in which they survive in harsh conditions in the relief camps for quite a long time. Their article problematizes the issues of

⁴Monjib Mochahari (2013) provides a statistical analysis of the bias in media representation surrounding the ethnic conflicts. He argues that the riots were given a communal colour excluding “pertinent issues like *unchecked infiltration from the neighbouring countries, demographic change, encroachment of tribal lands*”(44). The aspect of communalising the riots is also addressed in ACHR Report.

conflict and points to the various aspects regarding illegal immigrants and local people who are displaced from their homes owing to events of conflict and violence. Again, Pathak (2017), provides a statistical study of the livelihood crisis faced by the people suffering in the aftermath of riots. As mentioned:

Hundreds of houses belonging to people of both the communities were burnt rendering thousands of people homeless. The conflict that started on 19th July 2012 was a clash between the indigenous Bodo community and the immigrant Muslims. More than 100 lives were lost and almost 400000 people were rendered homeless (139). The article also mentions how the livelihood crisis of families affected in the BTR riots led to the increased sense of violence especially on women and children and they became easy victims of trafficking, sexual abuse and molestation even in the relief camps. Sidhwa's rendering of Ranna's account of the horror of partition as a child survivor, his experiences in the pathetic condition of the refugee camps filled with numerous hapless people like him parallels the condition of the women and children affected by the conflicts in BTR, forced to live in relief camps where sometimes their own families became perpetrators of violence and at times were responsible for their trafficking. Whereas Sidhwa's novel addresses the position of women caught in the turmoil of etching borders and boundaries for the formation of new nations, the legacy of drawing borders still bears resonance at the expense of women in this part of India. In the context of conflict in the BTR region the organisations like NERSWN (North East Research & Social Work Networking) and ABWWF (All Bodo Women Welfare Federation) works for the development and wellbeing of the people victimised in the ethnic riots, especially women and children, and these organisations also have to deal with the traumatized state of individuals affected by the trauma of violence in the riots. The need for more such NGO's in this region point to the gendered nature of violence and that the idea of fragmentation giving rise to conflicts still claims the life and security of women and children in a tremendous way.

Again, the divisive conflicts in BTR are being written at the expense of women and children as women and children mostly bear the bitter consequences of such events. In the conflict affected part of the

region, the girl child is often given off for early marriage to protect them from sexual exploitation and violence.⁵

Students respond by sharing similar realities corresponding to the present circumstances of the female children in the region by relating to the incident of Muccho committing violence against Papoo because of her being a girl child and later marrying her off to a much older person in the pre-Independence period. Hence, the situations of conflict as addressed in the novel is diverse in range but the deliberations still garner interesting responses from the students situated in the background of ethno-nationalistic demands for a separate state culminating into series of violent ethnic riots now and then.

Conclusion

The article presented the manner in which discussions in a literature classroom paved the path to unravel the lived experiences of the students and the place they belong to. The classroom emerged as a site which helped to introduce meaningful educational experience by shifting attention to readers (in this case the students) and exploring their local history and the significance of the text in relation to the readers. The reading context brought to light that although partition texts forms part of the University syllabus and the fact that the location of the University is a place which is marked with conflicts as a result of the burden of partition in the form of porous borders and illegal migration, there is not sufficient scholarship addressing this issue.

The literature classroom opened up possibilities of realising how the context of the readers is often neglected in the teaching-learning process and that it is the textual context mostly situated in a different time and place which gets more priority over the readers' context. Thus, the classroom discussions not only pointed to the scope of extending the scholarship on partition by shifting attention to the less highlighted borderlands such as Kokrajhar, but it also interestingly contributed to the pedagogy of understanding the local context as it may carry the potential to recuperate the memories associated with the hidden aspect of socio-cultural, political history of the place and its people.

My classroom became witness to the confluence of the textual context and the reading context and such a confluence led to the

⁵ Pathak (2017) mentions the problems faced by the survivors in the aftermath of violence and focuses on the worst affected condition of women and children living in relief camps (145).

understanding that scholarship on partition has always been inclined towards 'heartland' India in depicting the realities of partition. That the scholarship on partition has excluded the repercussions of partition on this region just like the nationalist historian was accused of providing an uncertain place to the history of partition in nationalist historiographies. The interaction with the students surrounding the question of borders also revealed the fact that concepts such as borders and migrant have the ability to produce different connotations depending on the geographical location, quite contrary to institutionalized knowledge on such terms. The article discussed the issue of migrancy and borderlessness in relation to the postcolonial discourses mainly concentrated on the three writers viz. Bhabha, Rushdie and Ghosh and their reception in the said location, keeping in mind their works in the syllabus and hence the students' familiarity with the theoretical frameworks generated by them. The article mainly tried to highlight the dialogue between the context as part of the text and the context of the students which produced a symbiosis of resistance towards the texts at times and realisation that there is a need to revisit discourses on partition, migrants and borders. Thus, the article argued that the classroom can become a site of contention, where the students' own time and place carries within it the possibility to challenge the discourses disseminated by universally acclaimed texts and open up scope for retrieving and recuperating otherwise repressed truths.

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