

**Seminar - Consultation on
'The Partition of India Revisited:
Thinking Through & Beyond Violence,
Trauma and Memory'**

Priyanca M Velath

The word Partition at once brings to mind old wounds, the birth pangs of new nations, the violence and trauma of biggest cross border displacement in history and an ensuing history of troubled relationships. In an effort to think beyond such nuanced notions a historic Seminar-Consultation on 'Partition of India Revisited: Thinking Through and Beyond Violence, Memory and Trauma' was held in New Delhi from 24-26 August 2005. The 'Revisiting Partition Programme', conceptualised by the Centre for Refugee Studies(CRS), Jadavpur University, Kolkata intends to undertake a series of nationally coordinated programmes to create a forum of different stakeholders in the subcontinent and build a network of civil society activists both within and across borders. The initiative is expected to become an invaluable instrument to foster peace, social participation and economic development. The programme is intended to initiate a series of such similar activities to be undertaken in diverse fields including art and culture over the next two years in the run up to the 60th anniversary of the Partition of British India.

The Partition of British India in 1947 signified not just the end of colonialism and the beginning of territorial dismemberment. It was 'one of the great human convulsions of history' (Butalia, 1998). Legacies of Partition continue to affect and impact lives in the subcontinent and therefore this 'rethinking' initiative is not proposed as a mere academic exercise but intended to begin a process that would involve various social and political actors. The partner organisations that collaborated in hosting the Seminar-Consultation on this subject were the International Institute for Mediation and Historical Conciliation (IIMHC) Boston, International Centre for Peace Studies (ICPS) New Delhi, and Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace, The Foundation for Universal Responsibility - (WISCOMP), New Delhi. While the CRS, since its inception in 1997, has been a pioneer in undertaking research and academic programmes to influence public policy on issues like forced migration, rehabilitation and repatriation, IIMHC's aim is to "foster history without hate and thereby to eliminate a primary motive for future violence". ICPS established in the year 1993, is an autonomous, non-profit research centre devoted to the studies of Peace, Conflict Resolution and National Security. Since its inception in 1997, WISCOMP has carved a niche for itself as an initiative that works at the confluence of gender, security and conflict transformation.

The three-day occasion brought together leading academicians, writers, scholars, politicians, bureaucrats, defence personnel, journalists, and activists from all corners of the country along with those from abroad. The Inaugural Session of this Seminar-Consultation was held at The Ashok, New Delhi on 24 August 2005. It was chaired by Prof. A. N. Basu, Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University. Hon'ble, Justice B. P. Singh of the Supreme Court of India was the Chief Guest and His Excellency Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal and Chancellor of Jadavpur University was the Guest of Honour. The Keynote Address was delivered by Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Leader of the Lok Sabha and Hon'ble Defence Minister, Government of India. Prof. Omprakash Mishra, Founder-Coordinator of the Centre for Refugee Studies, Kolkata and Director, Revisiting Partition Programme, Prof. Hillel Levine, President, IIMHC, Boston, Dr Meenakshi Gopinath, Hony Director, WISCOMP and Prof. Riyaz Punjabi, President, International Centre for Peace Studies, New Delhi also addressed the gathering.

The next day was the Seminar which attempted to re-explore the history of Partition in the light of new social and political theories, culminating in new modes of discourse on the history, politics, and political economy of the Partition and its impact through sessions like 'Partition: History, Identity and Memories' and 'Perceptions and Attitudes: Looking Ahead from the Past'. Speakers included Dr Radha Kumar and Dr. Ashok K. Behuria from New Delhi, Dr. Sudeshna Banerjee and Dr Sanjukta Bhattacharya from Kolkata, Dr. Andreas D'Souza from Hyderabad and Dr. Papiya Ghosh from Patna. There were also sessions on the portrayal of Partition in films and literature that were chaired by Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath and Urvashi Butalia respectively. Presenters on the panels were Dr. Ira Bhaskar, Debjani Sengupta, Sukrita Paul Kumar from New Delhi, Dr. Moinak Biswas, Dr. Sanjay Mukherjee, Dr. Parama Sen and Dr. Rajarshi Dasgupta from Kolkata, Dr. Rita Kothari from Ahmedabad, Mandeep Bajwa from Chandigarh among others.

The Revisiting Partition Programme intends to build up archives of hitherto uncatalogued documents and unrecorded memories related to the Partition and its impact. As a start to that aim the Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University, Prof. A. N. Basu, also released a select bibliography on Partition of India compiled by Priyanca Mathur Velath and Abhijit Bhattacharya.

The Delhi Initiative had some immediate aims like beginning a public dialogue on matters relating to public policy and reconciliation, addressing communal conflicts and the responsibility of the press in facilitating communal amity and reconciliation. Thus the final day comprised of Consultations with bureaucrats, diplomats and media persons and activists sharing their views on these issues. Ambassadors M K Rasgotra, Hamid Ansari, Arundhati Ghosh, I P Khosla, General Raghavan, Shri Dinesh Pathak, Saeed Naqvi, Siddharth Varadarjan and Teesta Setalvad among others enriched the deliberations with their views and suggestions.

Others who shared their perspective included Bimal Ghosh from Boston and Major General Bajwa. IIMHC was represented by Dr Dagmar Kusa and Dr David Baharvar. While Sumona Das Gupta represented WISCOMP in the final session of the deliberation, Jadavpur University was represented by Prof. Biswajit Chatterjee and Dr A J Majumdar. Finally, NGO partners and other representatives like Anjum Katyal of Seagull Foundation shared their experiences and spoke on their visions for the future.

It was decided that henceforth a National Committee would guide the activities and programmes to be undertaken in future and a sub committee was formed with representatives from Jadavpur University, WISCOMP and ICPS with Prof. Omprakash Mishra as the Convener.