

Humanitarian Politics of Testimony in *How Many Pakistans?* (*Kitne Pakistan?*)**Guru Prasad Bhattarai****Article Received:** 02/08/2025**Article Accepted:** 04/09/2025**Published Online:** 04/09/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.09.74**Abstract:**

This research paper analyzes the Partition short story, “How Many Pakistans?” through the perspective of humanitarian politics of testimony. The poignant narratives of the story places spotlight on the traumatic experiences and tribulation of different characters in the story with multiple circumstances with the experience to explore trauma and its aftermath foregrounding for its impacts. The partition forced displacement, contravention and psychological indelible blueprint of utmost suffering with impacting lasting legacy of tension and confrontation with alienation in the division of India in to two South-Asian giants India and Pakistan. In narrating the multiple voices, their sufferings and the ramification of partition, the writer Kamleshwar’s novel “Kitne Pakistans”? (Translated in English as a story “How Many Pakistan? by Aneesa Abbas Higgins, a British translator) proves magnum opus giving human dimension to partition violence. His work seems to be questioning all responsible administrative bodies and political initiative apparatus for super failure that resulted heartbreaking outcomes of partition of Indian sub-continent. The partition not only restricted in territorial division but also the division of different abstract bonds like we-feeling, love, affection among the people who shared same sky once. The writer is aware of projecting the sufferers not from particular sect and society but simply as credible human being like Justitia. By so doing, the writer attempts to heal the trauma by re-constructing the traumatized society in post partition time. His humanitarian politics of testimony makes the story an excellent piece of traumatic literature.

Keywords: Partition, Humanitarian Politics, Testimony, Trauma, South Asian Literature**Introduction:**

The partition story *How Many Pakistans?* (Translated in English from the novel *Kitne Pakistan*, by Ameena Kaji Ansari, is one of the master pieces by Kamleshwar Prasad Saxena, who was a prolific Hindu writer and script writer in different telecasted media of India. He has the contribution in Nayi Kahaniya Movement in the 1950s which focused on alienation in urban life, identity crisis and partition trauma. His novel, *Kitne Pakistan?* was awarded Sahitya Academic Award in 2003. The story *How Many Pakistans?* is translated version from Hindi *Kitne Pakisan* to English in which the writer radically subverts the

established trends of presenting the partition history in writing with the theme of hero villain model (Hindus hero and Muslims villain) by Post-independent Hindu Indian writers like Amrita Pritam and Raja Rao. As Beerendra Pandey in his book “*Historiography of Partition*” states “...the hero in one version is portrayed as the villain in another.” (7). Kamleswar, unlike others, offers a new insight and sensibilities to the Indian partition literature like *Lady Justice* without partiality in viewing the dramatic alienations of division of nation. In a real sense, the story exposes the traumatic event of partition of Indian sub-continent (1947), which caused the largest migration in 20th century and at the same time the situation of displacement, isolation and relocation causing the traumatic experiences to the people of India (the then whole) and after isolation Pakistan. Consequently, so many literary figures like Chaman Nahal, Intizar Hussain, Kamleshwar takes the narrative style to expose the pain, problem and suffering (mental and physical) of the people giving human dimension to overview the result of partition.

Kamleshwar, in addition presents the shame of the mass who indulged into forced migration. This ashamed status later shapes into the psychological pain to the migrants who have been eye witness in tragedy of the then time of partition. The narrator, Mangal represents the voice of all suffering people posits; “Each one of us was in agony; each one of us had made his own Pakistan. We had all been disfigured, mutilated, crippled. We were only half alive” (204). Here the term Pakistan represents only just separation rather the country for political interpretations. This is to point out separation was not of any one’s desire neither Hindu nor Muslims. As the narrator points “How painful was that parting!” (197). Likewise, in the story as the narrative goes on in the story *How Many Pakistans* the character named Mangal, the most traumatic character, describes his pitiful journey and tragedy on his forced shifting after partition of India he narrates as: “I had never imagined that I would be driven out of my own house like this. No one who has been humiliated and driven out of his own village can ever be at peace again” (197). He has been forced to leave Chinar, where he has passed almost his whole life. Similarly, another partition story *Owner of the Rubble* by Mohan Rakesh, brings out the character Gani Miyan, a Muslim man, who like Hindu boy (Mangal), relocates in pressure of his tragedy of partition violence. Gani Miyan like Mangal cannot associate self in calm rather he carries the burden of the separation with his family as Mangal sticks self with the memory of Bano. Both the texts (*Owner of the Rubble* and *How Many Paistans?*), highlight the theme of unaccepted separation of India. This simply points out that not only nation was divided but sovereignty, we-feelings, communal acts and so many other things like attachment, cultural norms related to community were divided and collapsed.

Furthermore, Kamleswar evokes the disgrace and unacceptable tone for the division of India and birth of Pakistan. He seems to disfavor the division which has traumatized lots of people who once were in undivided India. In the story, Mangal, Mangal’s father, Bano, Bano’s father, Qadir Miyan and other so many characters expresses their negativity of partition. All the characters who have once shared the same territory’s society, societal norms and sovereignty presented to be suffering. Likewise the weather setting, has been exhibited

for unwanted scenario with presentation of horrifying description of natural elements like the night as terrifying night, air as the blowing the murders, Ganga as flooded Ganga, wind as fierce and people as trembling tree. The reason behind doing that is to shape the uniformity in the identification of horrifying experiences of people. "Everyone was apprehensive"(196). This simply points out everything and everyone was victimized by the holocaust.

Despite being the partition story, the presentation of characters with pain and sufferings in both remarkable ethnic group either Hindus or Muslims of the then whole India, the story writer proves to be his omniscient nature to judge critically about the partition incident with balance eyes. In this response Jey Sushil in his article *Making Sense of Fragmented Bodies Across Generations; Tamas and Kitne Pakistan* states; "In this experimental novel, Kamleswar presents a sweeping view of the history of the world, especially that of Indian subcontinent, and addresses uncomfortable questions to all who live in [...]" (71). He views that Kamleswar has open a new insight in portraying the story with significant direction. In presenting the disfavored flashback of partition, Kamleswar shared the event with collective responses. As separation affects all the people, events have been shared because all the mentioned characters have gone through the catastrophic situation with creating hostility among the people forever and ever in real life.

The story presents a heartrending tragedy of Mangal, the central character of the story who was in love affair with a Muslim girl, named Salima. But the partition of 1947 caused them to be separated. The division of nation impacted the Hindu boy, Mangal to be in psychological trauma which recurrently keeps him in disorder by the horrendous shared event. As the narrative goes; "The truth is that Pakistan pierced my heart like a sword that day. I know that people had been forced to convert had changed their names, had been killed ..., shame, fear, anger, tears, blood, madness, love - all these were burned in to my soul that day". (197)

Although, Mangal is in pain, he doesn't posit the mistake to any character or the country like Pakistan and India to cause tragedy in his life and nations. His pain is fore grounded in the story by tragic event rather than the division of nation. He exposes the unacceptance of calling Salima as Banu, "But now I hesitate to call you Banu" (193). Here allegorically, Banu is the representation of undivided India. The wholeness of India was not of his hand, but the regrets for losing his Platonic (spiritual) love with Salima, who used to be in his heart like India as a whole before partition. Mangal, the central character is felt to be the mouthpiece of Kamleswar, who feels distracted with the fragmentation of India.

In taking the issue of Partition, Kamleshwor seems to have been against of the division of Indian sub-continent. If India hadn't been divided, perhaps Mangal and Salima (Bano) would not have been separated from each other forever, "you and I, Bano, had become victims of partition. We had been entrapped by it (202)." It is the partition which parted them forever. The forced migration after partition hampered Mangal, who goes through anxiety, depression, sadness and convulsive departure.

In the mentioned story, Kamleshwor shows the trauma in all the characters either Muslims or Hindus because of the unfavorable birth of Pakistan. Among those characters are like Mangal, his father, Salima, her father, drill master, Badri Miyan etc. All the characters had under gone anxiety, humiliation and sadness. As the narrative goes on; “O god! you don’t know how many Pakistan were created along with that one Pakistan. In how many hearts, in how many Places! The creation of that one Pakistan solved nothing. It merely confused everything. Now nothing is what it seems to be.” (193) It is the issue that the story tries to ironize how many other partitions can there be in future which the people of the once in same territory will have to pay out with tears and fears. The title “Pakistan” refers not only human induced satire for the partitions which was done in 1947, but also stands cracking caste, religion, territory, creed, human understanding, religion, country and on the top we-feeling of the people. Kamleshwar does not seem to hate the separated nomenclature of Pakistan, but he hates all bonds which were broken that was termed as separated nation Pakistan. Alongside, he is lamenting that there could be same traumatic events in upcoming days to any nation.

Indeed, the division of 1947 not only divided nationality but the culture, civilization, trust and we-feeling between people who had been living for thousands of years. Kamleshwor, unlike other partition novelists does not favor any side either Pakistan or India; neither does he make any kind of unjust for any group rather he seems to be concentrating in presenting the plot and character with omnipresent viewpoint of equality. In reality, literature of partition should bring the reality with neutrality.

Akhileswar doesn’t give any kind of negative templates to Muslim for betrayal of his affair. Mangal, the victim of the traumatic events of the partition asserts, “The truth is that Pakistan pierced my heart like a sword that day” (194). Here, Pakistan metaphorically represents for partition rather than the nation Pakistan itself. Mangal is in the state of ambivalence. He loses his rationality because partition and the violence thereafter makes him aimless and on the top heartless. His assertion, “Where should I go now? Where should I hide? There are Pakistans everywhere. Where can I find the kind of life I desire? How can I live an undivided life?” (206). His narration about his traumatic past is a step towards healing his long registered trauma. As Andreas Hamburger in his seminal work “*Social Trauma; A Bridging Concept*” posits, “[T]he fact that sharing traumatic memories in a holding, witnessing frame can heal individual suffering from posttraumatic disorders” (11). Here the expression of Mangal felt to be releasing of past which had impacted distress in his life.

Using first person narrative, this partition story has actually proved to be a trauma from which Indian sub-continent has not fully recovered yet. Real trauma is not projected in its history writing, but the fact is lamented by so many. As a critic Rituparna Roy adds in his book *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khusawant Singh to Amitav Ghosh* states on this regard; “There is not just a lack of great literature, there is more seriously, a lack of history” (18). Literature is more powerful in conveying trauma than any other forms of art. Indian partition novels have focused on independence and making the Muslims as

negative force. In this story, the writer has given the traumatic testimony of partition violence not identifying with any of the conflicting groups, rather treats them as human beings, not as Hindustani or Pakistani.

As Kamleshwor gives example of newness in projecting the actual event without prejudices, he is giving human dimension to tragic love story and its end. His story does not play identity politics, rather drags the attention of readers in doing justice to all characters, who are humans and are the victims of violence perpetrated by humans. A Hindu writer Vishnu Prabhakar praises the novel (Kitne Pakistan) thus:

This book has broken the traditional structure of novel, shown a new path to writer's expression after opening a new uncanny gate a new possibilities. [...] it is a new experiment. With offering a different wight. It has achieved a significant place in the history of Hindi fiction and it was awarded the much coveted sahitya Akademi Award. (Kitne Pakistan Review)

Humanitarian politics is an ideological based stand point that believes every human must have the right with equality. In taking consideration of this point, Akhileswor presents the notions of all characters through the name of Mangal. He displays name balance of knowledge of world history and its enactment that creation of equality, virtue, fraternity and mutual settlements with no terror from any side. At the same time, the story presents the collective identity of the people affected by the horrenwith the dous event in 1947. Every character in the text has been presented to be suffering. Kamleshwar presents the disturbance of nature as "like the night or terrifying night, air blowing murders, Ganga as flooded, fierce wind, trembling people tree. It is the reason behind he shapes the uniformity in identification "everyone was apprehensive" (196), to point out all individual suffered and disturbed nature.

The mentioned story thus, is a testimony of traumatic events of the partition of India through humanitarian line. The writer does not tag the victims as being either Hindustanis or Pakistanis but treat them as human beings. This humanitarian politics of testimony is capable of healing the wounds and rebuild the society ravaged by violence. In fact, the established trend of partition novels bear the issues of nationality and present the horrendous events like massacre and racial conflict with taking the lense of demarcation of one group with total negativities like Hindu and Muslims. The subject matter of the partition literary pieces of the then India valorized Hindus and negatify Muslims. This story, in this way, can be taken as one of the best piece of traumatic literature.

References:

- Hamburger, Andreas. "Social Trauma – An Interdisciplinary text book. 2018, pp.13-22
London, Routledge
- Kamleshwor, Vishwamitter Ali How Many Pakistans? University of Hawaii Press, 2007.
- Pandey, Beerendra. Historiography of Partition The Study-An Institute For Ias, 210, Virat
Bhawan, 2nd Floor, 2012
- Pande, Mrinal, 1947: Great Migration "Pangs of Partition, Vol. II Eds. Settar and Indian
Baptista Gupta, Manoshar, 2002, 117-123.
- Prabhakar, Vishnu. Praise for Kitne Pakistan. Quoted in Kamleshwar, Kitne Pakistan. New
Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2000.
- Goyal, Binod Nath. Dainik Jagran, Delhi, India
- Roy, Rituparna. South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khusawant Singh to Amitav
Ghosh: Amstardam University Press, 2010.
- Sushil, Jay. Making Sense of Fragmented Bodies across Generations: Tamas and Kitne
Pakistan Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, United States of America