

Ruptured, Reinvented and Re-ruptured Home in Bhisham Sahni's Short Story "Pali" (1989)

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Abstract

Amidst the heightened political tension between India and Pakistan, in this paper, I will focus on children's experiences in the history of the conflict between the two countries through the analysis of Bhisham Sahni's short story "Pali". As elsewhere in any other postcolonial nations, India was also under the threat of different forms of conflict during the postcolonial, post independent phase, partly due to the poor economic and social conditions that the colonial rule left us with and partly due to the power struggles within and among the different regions in the nation, and also due to the co-habitation of various religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. This complex situation of India at the wake of its independence in 1947 led to its bifurcation into two separate countries, India and Pakistan.

My essay explores how children's experience of conflict can be situated within the discourses of nation, borders, inclusion and exclusion during the Partition of 1947. What are the complexities in identity, citizenship, rights and marginalisation in children's predicaments during and after conflicts? How do the changing dynamics and configurations of 'home' during conflicts affect children? How, in the context of conflict, does 'home' act as a site of violence and also as a space of refuge? How does the existence of concepts like honour and pollution lead to the systemic violence of children's lives during the Partition? How does a literary text represent children's experiences of violence and help in unveiling another version of the same event that is otherwise invisible? These are some of the questions that are discussed in my essay through the analysis of Sahni's "Pali".

Keywords: Children, home, conflict, exclusion, inclusion, violence