



The Partition of India was a horrific event and the aftershocks continue to reverberate across the subcontinent.

## 6 MIXED BLOOD

My mother says, wherever you can trace your bloodline, that place is yours. Yours as much as anybody else's. By that measure, the province of Uttar Pradesh is flecked with my blood. Not just Uttar Pradesh, and not just India. Pakistan too.

My history is wrapped up with the history of the Indian subcontinent. Mom is Muslim, from the Indian side; Papa was Punjabi Hindu from the Pakistani side. The border between these two countries is an actual bloodline. The wound of millions being killed and displaced during the Partition is scratched raw every few years through fresh hostilities. Three wars have been fought, skirmishes and shelling continue, accusations of cross-border infiltration are hurled.

India and Pakistan do not give each other tourist visas. Many airlines don't run direct flights. I've even had brows raised at the post office when I tried to send books across the border. When citizens critique their governments, they are accused of being RAW or ISI agents, our respective spy agencies. In India, there is a new trend of rebuking all critics of government policy thus: *Go to Pakistan!*

A former member of Parliament caused a stir ahead of the 2014 general elections when he declared that those opposed to his party's prime ministerial candidate would have go to Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> Another former MP had said that people who want to 'lecture on secularism' can go to Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> The chief minister of Goa declared, 'Go to Pakistan if you want to celebrate it',<sup>3</sup> and one serving minister announced that people opposed to the abrogation of Article 370, which grants special status to the

state of Jammu and Kashmir, should go to Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> When a bureaucrat resigned his position in protest, an MP called him a traitor and said he should go to Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

Wars have heightened the perception that Pakistan equals the enemy. However, nobody says *Go to China!*, even though India has fought a war with China and border disputes continue. Nor is *Go to Pakistan!* similar to *Go back to where you came from!* Rarely is anyone asked to go to Afghanistan, or Iran, or Iraq, or Mongolia.

A curious nationalism is being enacted whereby many Indians define themselves *against* Pakistan. It is as if their inner location is on the wrong side of the border, their most intense emotions rooted in estrangement.

To understand this inverted location of belonging, one has to recall South Asia's recent history of intimate violence and our mixed genetic heritage. In 1947, British India was divided on east and west flank. Partition is often written with a capital 'P' to emphasise the disruption it caused. Over 17 million were yanked out of their soil abruptly.<sup>6</sup> On the east, about 700,000 left and 2.5 million Bengali Hindus came to India.<sup>7</sup> On the west, about 6 million Muslims left and 5 million Hindus and Sikhs came to India.<sup>8</sup> An estimated 2 million died in the accompanying violence. Princely states along the western border such as Alwar, Bharatpur,<sup>9</sup> and Jammu and Kashmir also saw extreme violence against Muslims with hundreds of thousands being killed or displaced.<sup>10</sup>

A sense of displacement accompanied not only those who left, but also those who stayed. Places where large groups of refugees settled, changed overnight. In Delhi, by 1951, every third person was someone from across the border.

Dislocation can be abrupt but the internal compass dissolves slowly. For months, even years, refugees remain invested in places left behind. The generation that moved in 1947 was sharply aware of the contours of its lost home. Intizar Hussain, often described as a novelist of Partition, writes not about a nation state but about households, fields, farm workers, the stillness of summer afternoons, uprooted men seeking

comfort in a refugee language. It took decades for the image to fade and for delicate shades of aesthetic and emotional attachment to dissolve into a general sense of rupture.

My father's family escaped the bloodshed. They lived in Lahore but some of the family had been on the Indian side, holidaying in the summer of 1947. They never went back. My paternal grandfather had to leave his home and business, and start afresh in Delhi and Punjab. I never had a chance to ask what home meant to him. My paternal grandmother had died before my parents even met, and my grandfather died before the wedding. My father too died before I could build a relationship with him. I never heard their stories. No artefacts were handed down to me. Pakistan did not translate into loss, not through my father. However, I did hear stories of loss on my mother's side.

Two each of Grandpa's and Grandma's siblings left for Pakistan. They could meet less than a handful of times in the last few decades. Two of them came to India, separately, very late in their lives. Both died during the visit and were buried here. Whatever place they may have thought of as 'home', it was inevitable that others would say, they came home in the end.

Attia Hosain, in her novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, describes a Muslim family divided over their choices during Partition. A character who intends to stay in India says, 'Can you imagine every time we want to see each other we'll have to cross national frontiers? Maybe even have to get visas.' His brother, who intends to leave for Pakistan, laughs, saying, 'there is no need to be as dramatic as all that. Visas indeed!'<sup>11</sup>

I'd laughed out loud when I came upon that passage. There are few bits of paper more difficult to obtain than a visa between India and Pakistan. At literature and cultural festivals, invited guests have not been granted visas. At various times, India-Pakistan cricket matches have been disrupted. Both nations have tried to restrict cultural exchange, like Pakistan banning Indian movies or Indian organisations threatening filmmakers who hire Pakistani talent.

The most tragic aspect of Partition was that most people were clueless as to what the splitting of a homeland entails. Journalist

Saeed Naqvi was privy to family discussions about how the demand for a new nation state had played out among the Muslim elite. 'Membership of the Muslim League was a bargaining tactic used by Taluqdar and big landlords. They did not want to give up their palaces and their lifestyle,' he writes in his memoir *Being the Other*. 'Pakistan was never the goal; it was a bargaining chip.'<sup>12</sup>

There are tragicomic stories about men being enthusiastic about the idea of Partition but not wanting to leave themselves. In *India Wins Freedom*, one of the most prominent national leaders, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, writes of the confusion of the times: 'these Muslim Leaguers had been foolishly persuaded that once Pakistan was formed, Muslims, whether they came from a majority or a minority province, would be regarded as a separate nation and would enjoy the right of determining their own future'.<sup>13</sup>

Many of those who voted for Partition had actually voted to retain the sociopolitical freedoms that they interpreted as a homeland, which, in their heads, was physically located wherever they lived! Maulana Azad rightly called the situation ridiculous, but it was also unbearably sad.

The leadership on either side did little to explain the consequences or dangers of a demographic split. On the contrary, they saw minorities as mutual hostages. Azad recalled, 'it was being openly said in Congress circles that Hindus in Pakistan need not have any fears as there would be four and a half crores of Muslims in India and if there was any oppression of Hindus in Pakistan, the Muslims in India would have to bear the consequences'.<sup>14</sup>

And they did. They still do.

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I have a persistent suppressed memory. A little girl in school uniform telling me that I was Pakistani, and me denying it.

Even as a child, I knew there was no argument that could reach her. What could I say except, no, I am Indian? How much I am troubled by it can be assessed through how often I try to

forget this moment. Then, I read similar accounts about other children and there it is again: the pretty face, the child's tight knowing smile, and her insistence, *I know you people are Pakistani*.

She had no idea about my father's Punjabi Hindu origin. Her sense of me being Pakistani came from my Muslim surname. I grew up thinking this sort of experience was mine because we lived in a remote township where people didn't know any better. Later, I discovered that it was common to many Indian Muslims, including those who went to college in cities known for their multiculturalism, like Lucknow. Journalist Seema Mustafa writes in her memoir *Azadi's Daughter* that the communal campaign in India has based itself on the violence and ignominy of Partition, and an insistence on linking Muslims who chose to remain in India with Pakistan. The demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 was another turning point. People no longer asked whether she was Pakistani. Instead, she recalls being flooded with calls threatening to kidnap her and demands that she go to Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

Saeed Naqvi has also written of a video tape made around the time of the demolition of the mosque. It showed *kar sevaks* (volunteers) threatening to bomb Pakistan and Bangladesh, and a politician saying, 'Muslims can go to Pakistan if they like.' Neither volunteers, who were supposedly there to build a temple, nor their leaders talked of Lord Ram or their personal faith. What was on display was 'a compulsive obsession with Pakistan'.<sup>16</sup>

'Go to Pakistan' has been said so often now, it has turned into a joke with people pointing out that they'd be willing to go if visas were granted. Less funny is the impact on civilians. Muslim children have been coming home crying, reporting that they're called Pakistanis by other kids.<sup>17</sup> More worryingly, unprovoked violence<sup>18</sup> has been unleashed upon Indian Muslim families, with demands that they go to Pakistan.<sup>19</sup>

Maulana Azad had pointed out as early as the 1960s that the creation of Pakistan had only exacerbated hostilities between Hindus and Muslims, for their mutual enmity was given a permanent constitutional form.<sup>20</sup>

Ironically, some of those who tell people off by asking them to go to Pakistan, as if it was on another planet rather than in the neighbourhood, are also given to asserting rights over its territory. Hindutva groups have expressed ambitions for 'Akhand Bharat', undivided India.<sup>21</sup> Looking at some of the unspecific maps floating about the internet, this would include not only Pakistan and Bangladesh but Nepal, Bhutan and parts of Afghanistan and China. Just as the proponents of Partition had no idea what it would actually translate into, proponents of Akhand Bharat have a very sketchy idea of what an undivision would entail, but politicians have spoken of it as a goal.<sup>22</sup>

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Sometimes I want to respond to *Go to Pakistan!* by crying out, *How dare you! My father's family had to leave Pakistan in 1947, thanks to two-nation enthusiasts like you! I belong here more than you do.*

I don't say it, though. I don't want to make any claims upon India through appeals to Hindu ancestry. The stronger claim is that of Muslims who chose not to leave when presented with a choice. Resisting majoritarianism, I genuinely believe, is the highest form of patriotism. Besides, it is hard for me to identify with my paternal ancestry.

The Lahore roots do not run deep. My paternal grandfather's birthplace was listed as Khanpur and there is more than one village or town called Khanpur on either side of the border. Who knows where that bloodline leads? I have not gone looking for it because I was so comfortably rooted in India on the strength of unstinting love on my maternal side. There was never any question of not belonging, either in the land or in the faith.

The only question that troubles me is this: was Partition concluded in 1947, or was it initiated?

The two-nation theory says that Muslims and Hindus are two peoples and do not belong in the same nation. As long as this theory is not put to rest, the ghost of Partition hovers.

Over seven decades, Indian Muslims countenanced shrinking political visibility, harassment and violence through riots or

anti-terror operations. A 2006 report prepared by a committee headed by retired judge Rajinder Sachar on the social, economic and educational status of Indian Muslims found that Muslims did face harassment, with men wearing beards or a *topi* being randomly picked up for interrogation from public spaces like parks, railway stations and markets.<sup>23</sup>

Equally damning was infrastructure and exclusion data. The literacy rate for Muslims was 59 per cent, significantly lower than the national average of 65 per cent. About 25 per cent of kids had never been to school, and the dropout rate was dramatically higher: only 17 per cent Muslims made it to high school, just over 3 per cent were graduates in 2004/05. The General (upper-caste Hindu) percentage was over 15 per cent.

Muslim unemployment rates were also higher than the General, but their share in casual work was higher. Where they did find regular work, they were getting lower salaries in both public sector and private sector jobs. At public sector firms, Muslims comprised about 7 per cent of employees, and their participation in security- and defence-related jobs was the lowest. Muslim workers in security agencies were limited to just over 3 per cent while Hindu upper castes accounted for over 52 per cent.

A large proportion of Indian Muslims work in their own enterprises; many are roving street vendors. What makes success harder is that their neighbourhoods tend to lack infrastructure such as tarred roads and bus stops, which are critical for self-employed people. Over 16 per cent of the villages without any medical facilities were found to be located in Muslim concentration areas. Muslims, scheduled castes and tribes lived in the largest number in villages categorised as 'least electrified'. Only one-quarter of rural households had access to tap water, but Muslims had the least access.

The mean per capita expenditure for India in 2004/05 was INR 712 (about USD 10), but there were great variations. For Hindu-General, this was a mean of INR 1023 (USD 14), for Muslims, INR 635 (USD 9). The figure was lower yet for scheduled castes and



tribes. The incidence of urban poverty was highest, over 38 per cent, for Muslims.

There have been riots every few years, and pogroms that could not have been undertaken without the support of at least some public officials. Afterwards, there has been scant justice for victims despite brave testimonies. Supreme Court lawyer Menka Guruswamy has argued that India's refusal to commemorate the violence of Partition has resulted in moral black holes that help to perpetuate it. She writes,

the impunity that characterised the long process of loot, rape and murder that is Partition has continued to replay itself, to lesser degrees both in form and substance. For instance, the 1984 killing of Sikhs in Delhi, and the 1993 and 2002 butchering of Muslims in Mumbai and Gujarat respectively, are illustrations of the replications of the degradations witnessed during Partition.<sup>24</sup>

Remembrance is essential before people can reflect. Nations that are serious about not repeating genocide make it a point to remember. As Guruswamy points out, many European countries punish Holocaust denial and it is impossible to travel through Germany without coming upon some commemoration of the murder of Jews. The more India and Pakistan try to move on without addressing the causes and horrors of Partition, the lesser equipped we are to prevent fresh horrors.

To look Partition full in the face, we must think about intimate betrayal: neighbour turning on neighbour, employees turning on employers, families killing daughters or asking them to commit suicide rather than risk abduction. But we cannot countenance such betrayals until we stop betraying. Far too many Indians continue to betray the trust of those who are most vulnerable to them, starting with children.

As in Nazi Europe, there remains in the subcontinent an obsession with 'pure' blood and genetic segregation, which is emphasised through physical segregation, such as not allowing tenants from certain religions and castes. Ideas of social pollution

are a thin disguise for the real purpose: control of blood and womb.

Modern science shows that the idea of purity/pollution is ridiculous. Our mix of language, food, attire, music, polity pales in significance when we consider genetic evidence that *Homo sapiens* mated with Neanderthals, possibly other *Homo* subspecies.

Within the Indian subcontinent, too, there is ample evidence of mixed blood but there is also a thorny debate about 'purity', since bloodlines are linked to claims over territory and natural wealth. Tony Joseph's *Early Indians: The Story of Our Ancestors and Where We Came From* waded into the debate with archaeological and genetic research to link Sanskrit-speaking Aryans with Steppe pastoralists in Europe and west Asia. There is evidence that Aryans and Dravidians – ancient north Indians and ancient south Indians – were distinct peoples who ended up mixed. DNA studies also suggest that most northern migrants were male. Or else, Aryan females were not permitted to mate with the 'other'. Thousands of years and mixed bloodlines later, our maternal DNA is overwhelmingly southern or non-Aryan. This would suggest that either the Aryans came as invaders, or that gender and racial inequality was already built into their social imagination.

Our civilisational memory runs very deep. Barriers to mixing have been in place for over two thousand years. Joseph writes of a dramatic reduction in genetic mixing around 100 CE, as if 'a new ideology had gained ground and power ... It was social engineering on a scale never attempted before or after, and it has succeeded wildly.'<sup>25</sup>

This was long before Christianity or Islam arrived, so the obvious inference is that caste was being reinforced and power being concentrated. The wild success Joseph refers to is revealed as Steppe ancestry or 'Aryan' genes being most prominent in Brahmins, who are at the top of the caste pyramid. Brahmins were associated with priestly functions, and with Sanskrit texts like the Dharmshastras and the Manava Dharma Shastra or Manusmriti, estimated to have been written before

the third century BCE, which prescribe punishments for inter-caste sex.

Shudra men, in the fourth caste, were to be punished with castration for sex with 'unguarded' women of higher castes; if a woman had a guardian – father or husband – the man's punishment was death. Brahmins were rarely given the death penalty; even kings were forbidden from killing them. Brahmin men who raped a 'guarded' woman of equal status were to be fined, but marriage or sex with an outcaste caused the Brahmin to lose his caste.

Segregation was enforced through marriage while girls were too young to conceive or choose mates. The ideal marriage prescribed in the Manusmriti is one where the bride is 8 years old if the groom is 24, or 12 years old if the groom is 30. This was the accepted norm, especially in Brahmin households until the end of the nineteenth century when, acting on the petitions of Indian social reformers, the British government intervened. The flash-point was 1889, when an 11-year-old called Phulmoni died after being raped by her husband. In 1891, the minimum age of consent, even within marriage, was raised from 10 years to 12.

Nearly a hundred and thirty years have passed since Phulmoni was raped to death, but marital rape is not illegal in India. Child marriage also continues. UNICEF data suggests that one-third of the world's child brides are in India.<sup>26</sup> Our own census admits that at least 7 per cent of all married girls are underage.<sup>27</sup> However, in 2018, one of our lawmakers described the minimum age limitation on marriage as a 'disease'.<sup>28</sup> He said it in the context of young people 'straying', that is, marrying into different communities.

The stakes are very high. Genetic segregation helps maintain a slave-like class that cannot claim equality by claiming to have the same blood and bone. The more mixed our blood, the more difficult it is to reject or enslave another set of people.

Mixed marriage is the antithesis of segregation and hierarchy. Those who are invested in preserving hierarchies ferociously resist mixing. Matrimonials are advertised along with caste and clan specifications, even in the internet age.

Compliance is ensured through intense scrutiny of relationships, informal caste councils, gender segregation in schools and, when all else fails, violence.

It is not uncommon in contemporary India to have people comment on mixed blood as inferior or somehow tainted. Where disapproval had once meant risking excommunication, now it means risking murder and imprisonment. Couples are hounded, dragged to court, blackmailed with the threat of riots breaking out and causing the deaths of other innocents. The bogey of 'Love Jihad' has been raised across the country, wherein boys are accused of seducing girls for the sole purpose of converting them to Islam. Parents have been known to torture daughters, and even to declare them mentally unfit in a court of law.<sup>29</sup>

I used to collect news reports of 'honour' killings or suicide pacts between lovers, which appeared in the newspapers with depressing regularity:

*July 2016. Haryana. Girl of 19 locked into a cow dung store, which is then set on fire.*

*September 2016. Teenage couple elopes. They go to Agra and take pictures of themselves against the backdrop of beautiful historic monuments. They visit the Taj Mahal, widely known as a monument to love. Afterwards, they throw themselves in front of a train.*

*April 2017. Elderly couple beaten to death by a mob because their grandson eloped with a girl. Boy Dalit. Girl Hindu, backward caste but higher up the scale than Dalit.*

*March 2017. A boy of 19 and a girl of 18. Different religions. They leave home, get down at a railway station. They hug. Boy shoots girl in the head, then he shoots himself.*

*February 2017. A couple is found hanging from ceiling fans in a room in Nagpur. Different religions. They were trying to persuade their families to accept the relationship. No suicide note. Cops register a case of 'accidental death'.*

*March 2018. Kerala man kills daughter on the eve of her wedding. Hindu, upper caste. Boyfriend was Dalit.*

*July 2019. Dalit man beaten and slashed with swords by upper-caste wife's family. She was pregnant. He went prepared, with a women's helpline team, and a female constable. It didn't help.*

I scanned the reports for more detail, something that would make these lovers flesh and blood, something more than the sum of age, caste, religion. In death, at least, they should be seen as something bigger than the ideas that killed them. But most media reports offered no more detail than community and official cause of death. They were buried on the inside pages, in small font.

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A decade ago, if you were willing to brave the consequences, you could elope. It was possible to start afresh elsewhere. With new tech surveillance, it is near impossible. Your location is given away by your phone or CCTV cameras. The government has pushed aggressively for biometric linked identity cards. Citizens are asked to link biometric data with bank accounts, phone networks and welfare benefits. Jobs, home rentals, driving licences, colleges, hospitals, birth and death certificates – all require a card that would betray you to those who want to kill you.

In July 2019, a video surfaced where the daughter of a politician, an elected member of the Uttar Pradesh state assembly, was asking her father to call off his men.<sup>30</sup> She asked the state to protect her and her husband, who is from another caste, but she chose to do so via social media instead of going to the police.

She could not vest her hopes in the state machinery from which her father derives his power. Instead, she turned to her compatriots, seeking safety in our collective witnessing. The eyes watching, the ears listening, the hearts that may be moved by her plight. Even if we could not protect her, we would at least remember her love and her courage. At least we would know that she had not been kidnapped or raped or killed by her own boyfriend, in case that was the story her family chose to spin.

This was a rare event, though. A desperate move by a desperate couple. Much more common is the ordinary, everyday harassment couples face in public and in private.

Instances of citizens being assaulted for being out with a member of another community are rarely documented. Unless, of course, they are documented by the perpetrators themselves. In 2015, in Mangalore, a coastal town known for its distinctive tiles and its fiery seafood, a man was stripped naked, tied to an electricity pole and assaulted in full public view by a Hindutva group called the Bajrang Dal. We were duly informed that the man was Muslim, and the woman, Hindu: the victim had taken a colleague out for a drive because he'd just bought a new car.

The Bajrang Dal was unapologetic. Its members have been accused of – nay, have boasted of – kidnapping girls who marry outside their castes and communities, breaking their spirit, then ‘purifying’ them and getting them re-married to some other man.<sup>31</sup> The group is not one of its kind; others like the Sri Ram Sene and the Hindu Yuva Vahini have also begun to attack couples. From public space, assaults have moved into private rooms. Vahini members reportedly barged into an apartment and assaulted a couple.<sup>32</sup> They had no fear of the law. In fact, it was the attackers who dragged the couple to the police station, rather than vice versa.

These developments appear to me as a grotesque inversion of Partition, when both Hindu and Muslim girls were kidnapped by the other community and turned into captive wives. Now girlfriends and wives are being kidnapped, assaulted, and turned into captive wives by their own families. After Partition, the state worked with activists to rescue kidnapped women. Now the state seems unwilling to act against ‘activists’ who kidnap women.

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There was a time when Indians who wished to marry across religious lines had to either formally convert, or declare

themselves atheist, or go to Switzerland to solemnise the union. Eventually the Special Marriage Act of 1954 regulated interfaith unions through registration, known in common parlance as a 'court marriage'. However, couples must declare their intention thirty days in advance via a notice at the district court. The marriage officer is required by law to enter such notices into a marriage notice book, which can be seen, free of charge, by anyone.

Thirty days is the long gap between hope and death. There has been no change in this provision despite frequent reports of families killing interfaith couples.

In early discussions leading up to the drafting of the Indian constitution, the question of consent at the time of marriage was raised. One of the leaders of India's independence movement, Princess Amrit Kaur, had argued that the right to consent ought to be enshrined in the constitution. She was out-argued.

The Constitution of India has been amended 103 times. To this day, it does not explicitly state that parents, sociocultural outfits or the police may not interfere in the sexual choices of adult offspring. It is left to children, if they have been assaulted or kidnapped, to approach the courts and accuse their own families or powerful militant groups with links to politicians. Some work up the courage, but in doing so, they court death.

India registered an 800 per cent increase in the number of 'honour' killings reported in recent years.<sup>33</sup> Police registered 288 cases between 2014 and 2016 alone, though activists suggest the numbers are higher. Most cases go unreported since it is usually families who report missing or dead children. With families doing the killing, who'd file a report? Officials also fail to document accurately, and some cases get passed off as accidental deaths.

It is hard to document how often cops collude with families to hunt down and forcibly separate couples. One of the ways they do this is by registering a case of rape against the man. Journalists analysed about 600 rape cases that were fully tried in just one city, Delhi, and learnt that 40 per cent turned out to be cases of consensual sex and elopement.<sup>34</sup>

Another way is to humiliate young people in public spaces. In 2005, in a town called Meerut, a bunch of police officers decided to devote themselves to public service in this manner. Local journalists were tipped off. Cameras were ready and rolling as the cops entered Meerut's Gandhi Park and began to round up people, chasing some, hitting others, forcing young men and women to raise their chins and face cameras. Television channels dutifully broadcast the footage.

Filmmaker Paromita Vohra tried to make sense of the assault through her film, *Morality TV aur Loving Jehad*. In one of her interviews, she said she was intrigued by the fact that 'stories about romancing young couples were reported by crime reporters, which was in itself curious – the location of love under crime'.

The Meerut assault had been codenamed Operation Majnu. Majnu – the name literally means 'crazy' – is the male protagonist of the legend of Laila-Majnu. Like Romeo, Majnu is a universally recognised tragic figure across the subcontinent. To call someone Romeo or Majnu was once a form of good-natured ribbing. Today, it is a threat.

The state of Uttar Pradesh assigned police personnel to 'Anti-Romeo' squads; other states promised to follow suit. Each squad was meant to include an officer of sub-inspector rank and four constables deployed in uniform as well as plainclothes. The director general of police of the time had reportedly tweeted: 'Safety of girls/ladies is the sole intent of the anti-Romeo squads. No moral policing.' But the state does not call them 'Women's Safety Squads'.

Writer and journalist Mrinal Pande describes such developments as a form of imperialism: 'Under the guise of upholding Indian traditions and protecting women, an anti-modern cultural imperialism is taking shape.'<sup>35</sup> Citizens are terrorised and the state refuses to reassure them.

I used to wonder why it mattered so much to politicians that people don't marry for love. Now I begin to see. Love is not a whipped-up sentiment, nor can it be whipped out of you. People cross borders, give up class and caste privilege for love. This is terrifying for politicians because it can make people re-examine identities.



Love is also the antidote to Partition. Therefore, a new language has been engineered wherein it is no compliment to be called Romeo. As for Juliet, she is not mentioned at all. Every so often we hear of a girl who risks her life for love. But young women are not referred to as Juliet or Laila by authority figures. By refusing to acknowledge them as lovers, the case can be made that women who fall in love are abducted or brainwashed, or forcibly converted.

It is a seamless continuation of the Partition rhetoric wherein each community had to prevent its girls being 'taken' while 'bringing' home girls of the other community. This trope plays out in popular culture too. Hindi films have often depicted interfaith couples on the run, willing to take on the world for love. But in most stories, the woman is Muslim. When cross-border love stories are written, the girl is Pakistani Muslim and the man - the 'hero' - is Hindu or Sikh.

Some films reverse the pattern. In one, *Kurban*, the Muslim man turns out to be part of a terrorist group. In another, *Anwar*, the Muslim boy is suspected of being a terrorist. *My Name is Khan* shows an autistic Muslim hero in the United States marrying a Hindu woman, a single mother. After 9/11, the child gets beaten to death by schoolyard bullies and the hero is banished from the woman's life until he can present his non-terrorist credentials to the American president.

There is one Partition drama, *Pinjar*, based on an iconic Punjabi novel. Its protagonist is a Hindu girl kidnapped by a Muslim man in revenge for the abduction of his aunt by her family. The book has the girl settling reluctantly into the marriage, having a baby and trying to raise an adopted baby of mixed or unknown blood. When she finally has an opportunity to return to her Hindu family, she chooses to stay back in Pakistan. The film obliterates the baby and the mixing of blood which had complicated the story of choice and what feels like home to the woman in the end.

One major Hindi film does show a mixed marriage in which the Muslim hero is neither terrorist nor gangster nor kidnapper.

It is a historical drama called *Jodha-Akbar*, based on Mughal emperor Akbar's relationship with his Hindu Rajput wife. It shows them coming to an understanding and their personal faiths not being disrupted by the alliance.

Theirs is not a unique marriage by any stretch. The founder of Azamgarh, Azam Khan, like most Muslim rulers in India, was only half Muslim. Mughal emperors, including Jehangir and Shah Jahan, were half or three-quarters of Hindu origin. The kings of the Deccan and of the south were also of mixed parentage. In fact, as Rima Hooja writes in *Rajasthan: A Concise History*, marriages between Muslim and Hindu Rajput rulers were not only common, the clans ensured at least five or six generations of intermarriage to cement the relationship.<sup>36</sup> Blood was not only mixed; the mixing was affirmed over and over.

Ordinary citizens also intermarried even up to the nineteenth century, when sustained campaigns were mounted against them. Around 1851–52, a clan of Bhatīs decided to forbid such marriages, and the Sodha Rajputs of Jaisalmer were asked to stop giving daughters in marriage to Muslims, with threats of social ostracism.

Reformist Hindu groups also began to protest against inter-faith unions, and once the rhetoric of Partition was in full swing, even kings could no longer take their own decisions. The ruler of Sirohi, Maharao Sir Sarup Ram Singh, had converted to Islam and married a Muslim woman but, in the 1940s, he was advised against declaring the fact openly, lest it trigger political unrest. He had no male heirs, and no descendants of mixed blood staked claim to his throne. Yet, when he died in 1946 and his will was found to contain instructions that he be buried with Muslim rites, there was a great flap. Some of his family and subjects, and Hindu organisations, lobbied hard to prevent the burial.<sup>37</sup> Had the ruler died in Sirohi instead of Delhi, it is possible even this – his last wish – would have been foiled.

The memory of the ruler's conversion has been buried as if it were a shameful secret. No histories honour his royal choice, nor

mention the name of his Muslim wife along with other Hindu wives.

Mixed blood, which offered the possibility of love as well as a compelling tapestry of power, is a story that's been proactively erased from public memory. When *Jodha Akbar* was released, in 2008, multiple state governments imposed a ban upon film screenings.<sup>38</sup>

Politicians, news sources, movies, even researchers are careful to say nothing of couples who retain disparate religious identities or are able to find peace and happiness in new socio-spiritual identities. To admit that this is possible would be to admit that love is a fire that burns away your shell but does not necessarily hurt your core. It would certainly undo the lie of the two-nation theory.

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Home, they say, is where the heart is. If home is a location of love, then in my country, home is a guilty secret. Or an apologetic, broken creature licking its wounds.

I cannot think of any city in India that is wholly safe for lovers. Having visited Bangladesh and Pakistan, I feel the same way about those countries. I cannot imagine walking with a man, arms linked, and not worrying about being questioned, humiliated, or worse.

The only place where I've seen people kiss each other in public is near the sea in Mumbai. Couples sit on the promenade or beach. They sit facing the grey-brown ocean, their backs turned to the city. When they think it is safe, they lock lips. The kisses rarely last more than a few seconds. I see girls kiss with one eye trained upon who is watching, measuring risk. The presence of other young people is, and is not, a measure of safety.

By and large, India's millennials tend to be wary of Romeo and bullying towards Juliet. A survey conducted by the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and the Berlin-based Konrad Adenauer Stiftung says that nearly a quarter, 24 per cent, of Indians between the ages of 15 and

34 are extremely patriarchal in their outlook. Nearly half, girls included, disapproved of women wearing jeans. Every third woman disapproves of women working – that is, working outside the home and earning an independent income – after marriage; 53 per cent disapprove of dating and 45 per cent disapprove of interfaith marriages.

Perhaps it is fitting, then, that India should lay claim to being the final resting place of Laila and Majnu. There is no evidence that Laila and Majnu, whose name was Qais before he lost his sanity, ever existed. The story originated in Arabia and travelled overland to India. Legend has it that it wasn't just the story; the lovers themselves came to India.

In Rajasthan, on the India–Pakistan border, there is a tomb that houses two buried individuals. Some say, these are the lovers of legend, Laila and Majnu. Others say, it is the grave of a local Sufi saint and beside him, his favourite disciple. But regardless of who lies buried, people of all faiths are rumoured to visit. Perhaps they come hoping for a happier fate in love. Or perhaps, as the old Hindi film song goes, they weep and pray: let nobody ever fall in love; the cost is too steep.