



# Partition, freedom and democracy

Posted at: 16/03/2019

## **Roots of the India-Pakistan conflict can be found in a shared attitude of derision towards the past**

- Had Krishna Sobti, the eminent Hindi novelist, not died this January, she would have renovated our appreciation of the truth about freedom and Partition occurring together.

### **Krishna Sobti's work**

- Six weeks after her death, a violent conflict broke out between India and Pakistan.
- The immediate, ostensible causes of the outbreak are terrorism and Kashmir.
- Real sources lie deeper, reading Sobti's works reminds you that the deeper roots of the India-Pakistan conflict can be found in a shared attitude of derision towards the past.
- Public mood shifts between indifference and disdain for the past.
- There is little genuine interest in the past or curiosity to figure it out.
- Politicians feel free and tempted to use the past to manipulate the collective mind.
- Across the three nations produced by Partition, there is little consensus over what it means to live with Partition.
- But there is a shared feeling that Partition is at the heart of many problems and behavioural reflexes.
- Each country looks at Partition from the perspective that the state apparatus has assiduously developed over time.
- The term commonly used these days is 'narrative' is a post-modern invention signalling the decline of interest in objectivity.
- No one seems curious to find out nor is anyone actively conscious that the acceptance of incompatibility means granting permanence to intra-regional conflicts.
- One clear reason why no one is worried is because a feeling of permanent conflict seems to offer unlimited political capital.

- When SAARC was established in 1985, it created the hope that mutual understanding would be pursued as a regional political goal.
- An ominous uncertainty hangs over the subcontinent, best expressed by the availability of nuclear weapons to end potential conflicts.

### **Partition's emotional content**

- Sobti had hoped that people could now recognise the complications arising out of history.
- Sobti had assumed that the Constitution would unite Indian society around its core values.
- That did happen to an extent, but words and statements alone don't safeguard values.
- Freedom and a sense of fraternity are among the values sculpted into the structure of the Constitution.
- Truth is not mentioned as such, but one assumes that it has an assured place in the edifice of law.

### **Truth and war**

- In this context, it may be useful to recall Mahatma Gandhi's dual commitments: truth and non-violence.
- The pairing of truth with non-violence suggests that truth and war are not compatible.
- The India-Pakistan hostility is richly intersected by bad memories.
- One can add many more issues to this list.
- To call them peace-time issues or to designate them as being secondary in comparison to security will be to surrender to history, that too a history soaked in emotions.
- It is true that politics is a game played in the shadow of history.
- However, if it is dominated by history, then democracy can hardly serve the cause of progress, howsoever defined will always remain stuck in history.