

Abstract

The Partition of 1947 resulted in wide scale migration of Urdu-speaking Muslims from India to East Pakistan. Although initially welcomed as muhajirs, the hospitality for Urdu-speaking migrants was short lived in the eastern wing of Pakistan because of their perceived closeness to the West Pakistani government. The war of 1971 found a section of the migrants pledging support to the West Pakistani army, which resulted in post-war hostility against the entire community. Their predicament was such that they were denied citizenship by both Bangladesh and Pakistan. The narrative of displacement and dispossession of the Urdu-speaking minority does not fit into the dominant discourse about the war, and the predicament of this internally displaced population has been largely neglected in academia.

This paper studies the gap between statist memory and individual memory through a close reading of Aquila Ismail's 2011 novel *Of Martyrs and Marigolds*. Interrogating the dominant narrative of the 1971 war and liberation warriors, this paper demonstrates how Ismail's novel makes space for silenced memories of the subaltern. It analyses how trauma is negotiated through fiction to be transformed into a narrative memory that can be communicated with others. Raising questions about the target audience, it also attempts to understand the impetus behind writing such a narrative several decades after the events of the war. Drawing upon the long and troubled relationship between Bengali and Urdu in Bangladesh, it emphasises the intrinsic relationship between language and identity. It also argues that the hybrid genre of the novel, incorporating characteristics of memoir with fiction, is an apt medium for articulating traumatic memories. In addition, the paper interrogates some of the ambiguous silences and fissures in the novel itself, thereby opening discussions on the position taken by the author.

Keywords: *displacement, conflict, subaltern, minority, citizenship.*