



Reflections Of Pluralism And Polarization In Krishan Baldev Vaid's *The Broken Mirror*

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ABSTRACT

Pluralism and Polarization have emerged as the two most discussed terms in contemporary times. India, consisting of people belonging to various religions, races, castes, and cultures claims to be a plural society. However, the presence of enmity, hatred, and distrust among the communities has also been a reality, and was so, even before the 1947 partition of India. The religion-based political practices have consistently fed the strains of polarization among different community groups even as India continues to celebrate her pluralism. The paper focuses on the two aspects - pluralism and polarization as depicted in Krishan Baldev Vaid's novel *The Broken Mirror* (2014) and examines the reasons as well as consequences of the movement towards polarization which eventually resulted in the partition of India in 1947.

Keywords: British India, Communal Tension, Diversity, Partition, Pluralism, Polarization.

Introduction

Pluralism and Polarization have emerged as the two most discussed terms in contemporary times. In history too, these two strains have constantly shaped and altered the condition of things in the country. John Dewey explains the term Pluralism, in James Mark Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, as "the theory that reality consists in a plurality or multiplicity of distinct beings" (Dewey 1901, 306). This implies that a society, in which members of distinct ethnic, racial, or religious groups maintain and develop their traditional culture within the boundaries of a common civilization, practices pluralism. Diana I. Eck elaborates that, "Pluralism is an ethic for living together in a diverse society: not mere tolerance or relativism, but the real encounter of commitments" (Eck 2006). Thus, the emphasis is on establishing a world consisting of diverse interacting groups who reject the notion of a single basic component at its basics. Pluralism thus indicates a way to live and let live in the world despite having a million reasons to disagree or cause grave disruptions.

As pluralism favors diversity, polarization is the contrary idea that refers to the separation of intermingled various ethnic groups. Murat Somer and Jennifer McCoy rightly state that polarization is "a process whereby the normal multiplicity of differences in the society increasingly align along a single dimension, cross-cutting differences become reinforcing, and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of 'us' versus 'them'" (Somer and McCoy 2008, 2). In other words, polarization is certainly not the ideological or social distance, rather it clarifies the complexities of politics and social relations. According to Joan Esteban and Gerald Schneider, "Polarization results from the interaction of within-group identity and across-group alienation. While the group members show identification with each other in a polarized society, they feel socially or ideologically separated from the members of other groups" (Esteban and Schneider 2008, 132). Thus, in a polarized society, as people tend to perceive and interpret political and social issues through the lens of their group identity, it leads to a more divisive and confrontational atmosphere. It certainly leads to social unrest and the possibility of violence inflicted against the other.

Pluralism, it is vastly claimed, is one of the main characteristics of the Indian society since it consists of several ethnic, regional groups, having diverse languages, castes, religions, and cultures that have co-existed for generations. In a general sense, there has been no irreconcilable hatred between the distinct groups. Yet, as Partition demonstrated so painfully, the polarizing strains are just as embedded within the texture of Indian

society. Krishan Baldev Vaid's novel *The Broken Mirror* (2014) (trans. from *Guzara Hua Zamana*, 1981) provides a glimpse into why people, who had so much in common and had lived together for generations, still turned against each other to the extent that partition became a reality. The peaceful and tranquil life was brutally torn apart with large scale killings, rapes, arson, looting, kidnapping, etc., within hours and days. The article aims to explore the pre-Partition Indian society through the relationships children portrayed in the novel maintain across Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities. Vaid also unfolds some actual historical issues that had become the genesis of the communal divide.

While the events during the partition of India remained largely absent from the official records, many literary writers captured the horror and trauma of the times in their writings. Writers such as Saadat Hasan Manto, Amrita Pritam, Khushwant Singh, Attia Hosain, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhisham Sahni, Chaman Nahal, Intizar Hussain, etc., through their works have ensured that the memories of the terrible incidents remain part of the collective consciousness. What makes their contribution even more remarkable is the balanced and secular view reflected in their writings. They have presented the violence of partition with regret, anguish, sincerity, and honesty without taking sides. Baldev Vaid writes in the same tradition as his novel *The Broken Mirror* focuses on the pre-Partition days.

Baldev Vaid's *The Broken Mirror*

Krishan Baldev Vaid, victim and witness of partition, was an India born Hindi fiction writer and playwright. His works, originally in Hindi and subsequently translated into English include *Uska Bachpan* (1957) as *Steps in Darkness* (1962), *Bimal Urf Jayen to Jayen Kahan* translated into English as *Bimal in Bog* (1974) and *Guzara Hua Zamana* (1981) as *The Broken Mirror* (2014). His other works include short stories translated into English, *Silence and Other Stories* (1972), *Dying Alone: A novella and Ten Short Stories* (1992), and *The Sculptor in Exile* (2014). The novel *The Broken Mirror* narrates the story of Beero and his group of friends before the partition of India when the communities lived together seemingly in peace. Vaid unravels how traces of mutual distrust could be perceived festering and hidden but definitely very much present.

The novel superbly brings alive the period of pre-Partition Indian history. Drawing extensively from his personal experience of having lived through the partition riots, Vaid depends mainly on his first-hand understanding of the reasons and consequences of partition. The narrative is set in a small-town of 1930's Punjab, a region of north-western British India, and focuses on the ambivalent inter-communal relationships in the society. Through his tale he points at how such relationships ended abruptly at the partition of the country.

The story is narrated from the point of view of a child character, Beero, a Hindu, and his friends belonging to different religions. Despite their religious differences, Vaid highlights the close relationship among them through their conversation and actions. This exemplifies the presence of sound relationships across communities in society. However, individual friendship gets spoiled due to the intrusion of religious and political clamour for a new nation, Pakistan. This demand causes a complete breakdown of communal harmony, brotherhood, and the longstanding inter-communal shared history. Vaid exquisitely narrativizes this transformation from pluralism to polarization in his novel.

Textual Analysis

The novel opens with Vaid's vivid description of the pre-Partition days in a small town, geographically situated in the northwest region of colonial India. The residents were Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs with Muslims being in the majority. The portrayal of several characters and particularly of Beero and his friends, captures the social texture of the time. Beero is close friends with Aslam, his Muslim neighbour. Beero idolizes Aslam as he confesses, "Aslam [is] my superior in age and size and, perhaps, intelligence . . . His every word deeply affected me - advice and counsel seemed to filter through all his jokes" (Vaid 2014, 26). There is no issue of Hindu or Muslim in their friendship. Moreover, it is not as if it is a special bond in any way. Rather their relationship exemplifies ordinary childhood friendships.

Aslam reciprocates Beero's affection. He considers himself neither a Shiite nor a Sunni but a devotee of Mumtaz Shanti. Vaid portrays Mumtaz Shanti (a prostitute) to highlight the plurality in society as he does not give any religious identity to her. Being half Muslim and half Hindu, she is an embodiment of Hindu-Muslim unity. A sign posted outside her chowbara in Lahore declares, "No religion preaches hatred among men!" (Vaid 2014, 116) Likewise, there are other female characters such as Phalo, "the weaveress", Chambeli, miser's wife, and Kumari, Dari's wife who all are half Hindu, half Muslim, and preachers of Hindu-Muslim unity through their profession of prostitution. According to them, "Hindus and Muslims alike shed their religious differences as they enter" (116). As they exist outside society, Vaid ironically implies that the social rules and taboos do not apply in their world or profession. Overall, the people of the town are accepting of one another's differences of identity and faith, which marks the plurality of the town. In an interview to Alok Bhalla, Vaid recalls, "Despite the tensions, people respond to one another as human beings first, not as representatives of any particular community" (Vaid 2006, 175). This is why there is harmony and acceptance of diversity.

Vaid, however, points out the ambivalent nature of pluralism prevalent in the society. On the one hand, there is an acceptance of all religions, while on the other, there are some who are quite rigid about their religious identities. Jita and Hardayal, the two Sikh boys in the friend circle of Beero are an example. Despite having a communal mindset, they do sincerely care for Beero. However, in a discussion about the prayers performed by

the imam of the mosque, or the Hindu priest of the temple, or the Giani in the gurudwara, Jita and Hardayal do not hesitate to claim that "the Sikh singers of the gurudwara [are] superior to everybody because of their classical ragas" (Vaid 2014, 32). Thus, as Vaid portrays, religious pride generates a sense of superiority and contributes towards the fragmentation and polarization of society. This incident exemplifies how even within pluralistic societies, there can be individuals who assert their own religion's superiority over others. It certainly hinders the fostering of mutual understanding and respect. There are instances in the novel where jokes and abusive words such as "Musla", "Kafir", "Musli" or "Giani's lice" are used depending upon the situation. For instance, Beero's mother in her day-to-day interactions uses the words 'Muslas', 'Musli' unthinkingly which indicates her inherent disdain of the Muslims. She says that Beero "was a mere baby when she nagged Father into moving, because we were surrounded by 'Muslas'. . . . She's convinced that some Muslim woman- 'Musli' as she puts it- must have suckled me [Beero] on the sly" (106). Despite this, she does not carry malice for the Muslims. Whenever Sheeta, the Kulfi Wallah shouts in a full voice in the lanes of the town, she (Beero's mother) praises his voice and says, 'The poor man's settled in this region far away from his children . . . It breaks my heart to hear his voice' (31). Similarly, Aslam too calls Beero a 'kafir' (106) when Beero shares his false obsession with his hometown while being in Lahore for his college study. Like Beero's mother, Jita and Hardayal too call Aslam, 'a narrow-minded Musla' (146). In a similar vein, there are some who call Jita and Hardayal 'Giani's lice' (107). Nevertheless, such petty instances of name calling do not lead to hatred or animosity between the communities. These are ignored or resolved on a priority basis as a matter of routine, thus maintaining the composite culture of the town. Vaid thus effectively conveys the ambivalent attitude of people of different religions towards one another. They nurse prejudices or have a sense of superiority, yet it does not ever translate into a condemnation of the other's entire community.

Vaid reflects upon how people live in peace and communal amity despite belonging to different religious faiths. One community's faith does not interfere with that of the other. Devoted to their own religion, they respect all religions, thus living a life of pluralism. Despite growing political tensions in the 1930's and 40's Punjab, people continue to be genuinely concerned about the good of others. Giani, the general merchandiser who is rough at dealing with his customers, in personal life is a devotee of God. His constant praying to God often creates a feeling of resentment among his customers who feel he neglects them. Vaid narrates, "His shopkeeping is for show - his real vocation is praying" (Vaid 2014, 99). So Giani remains committed to the welfare of the local people. Beero jokingly observes, 'People should bother him only when there's a drought, then for sure his howling will bring a downpour.' In fact, there are several other traders who contribute towards the welfare of people. Tooth Stick Shah, by profession originally a moneylender, has given up moneylending and indulges in charity, offering green twigs to people "like a king dispensing great wealth in charity. . . . He doesn't discriminate between Hindus and Muslims, children and grown-ups, rich and poor, . . ." (102). He is an example for other moneylenders of the town who remain busy in sucking the blood of the local people. Thus, as Vaid portrays, plurality was a way of life, the foundation of the pre-Partitioned society.

Just as with Hindus and Sikhs, Vaid presents Aslam, Mumtaz Shanti, and Lord Legless, who too do not give undue importance to religious identity. Lord Legless proclaims, "I'm neither Hindu nor Muslim-I'm just a human being" (Vaid 201, 109). He is so much involved with the common folk of the town that every individual believes he is his alone. For instance, Beero's mother says, "she thought he [is] not only a Hindu but a Brahmin as well" (108). His closeness to Weaveress Phalo across social and religious boundaries reflects his humanist approach. Beero comments, "From a distance they look like brother and sister" (112). Thus, the difference of religion does not affect the social interactions, love, and sympathy of one person for the other. Himmat Singh too, a kind-hearted and true preacher of Hindu-Muslim unity shows his empathy for Hara whose shop is boycotted by the local Muslims. He sympathizes with Hara and condemns the boycott several times in his speeches on Hindu-Muslim unity. A staunch nationalist, Himmat Singh is always ready to sacrifice his life for the welfare of society. Vaid narrates, "Scores of times, he's been to jail, hundreds of times he's been beaten up by the police" (110), thus making him famous among the town people who with pride calls him the 'Lion of Gujarat' (110). Vaid presents Himmat Singh as personifying the true spirit of plurality and nationalism.

Several other characters also, such as Hara Singh; the confectioner, and an altruistic individual, Fakira; a secular, reliable, and charming personality and a devotee of Rama and Sita, Surgeon Bakka and Hakim Zahoor Bakhsh; staunch Muslims and well-known for their unstinted generosity, are part of a multi-religious society. They all maintain cordial relations and their religious beliefs ensure their goodness as human beings. Every one of them is kind, sympathetic and respectful towards others. Such is the image of the pre-Partition society that Vaid portrays in the novel.

Not just individuals, even the organizations work towards establishing affinity and harmony among the people. 'Sardar School'- the local school as depicted in the novel is a clear example of social, communal, and religious harmony. Though primarily it is meant for children of the Sikh community, children from Hindu and Muslim community too study here. Similarly, the teachers working here too belong to all communities. The morning assembly starts with the Sikh prayer by Master Gianni, a Sikh, followed by the school drill performed by the bandmaster Mohan Lal, a Hindu. Thereafter there is a regular practice of reading out headlines of the day from newspapers by Master Ravana. The assembly would conclude with the recitation of a poem of Maulana Hali by Master Nazir Ahmad, a Muslim. The whole practice carried out every morning plays a vital role in cementing the Hindu-Muslim relationships. Significantly, there are no objections to such practices. As a result, the children imbibe in themselves values and teachings of all religions.

Another aspect that contributes towards co-existence of people is the regular usage of Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Persian, and Arabic words in the spoken language. For instance, Beero, does not tire of expressing his gratitude to Master Nazir Husain who taught him Urdu, Persian, and a little bit of Arabic during his school days. The close intimacy of teachers with one another despite their different religious identities is brought out at the death of Master Malava Singh. Though he was new in the school, his death becomes an occasion of grief for all. Everybody mourns at his sudden death. Even the children express their sorrow by wailing his name, 'Oh, Malava! Oh, Malava!' (Vaid 2014, 50) The school is closed for a day in his memory. This tribute to the departed soul reflects the social communication and interaction among the people of different communities at times of joy or sorrow. The depiction of this school is based on Vaid's personal experience. In an interview to Bhalla, Vaid reminiscences:

I grew up amongst Muslims and Sikhs. As a child I went to Sardar Hakam Singh High School. Roughly, half my teachers were Muslims. . . . My school had an eclectic group of teachers who didn't, who couldn't have, commanded more money elsewhere. But, I must add that our teachers were good. I think that in some unconscious way, I understand as a child that there was a relationship between the poverty of school and the religious backgrounds of those who went to it. (Vaid 2006, 173)

Thus, as Vaid portrays, the positive vibes of religious and communal harmony were strongly embedded in society, particularly among the poorer sections before the partition. Yet ironically a few divisive cracks could also be sensed.

While portraying instances of pluralism, Vaid critically highlights the contradiction in inter-community relations. Beneath the harmonious demeanor of society, the reign of prejudice is equally in place. Vaid focuses on the practice of untouchability – caste and religion-based ideas of purity and hierarchy. Along with people belonging to so called lower castes, the Muslims too were discriminated against. A derogatory treatment of the Muslim is as much the custom as that of the so-called lower caste. Vaid in an interview to Andrew Whitehead talks briefly about the business of 'chhua-chhoot' (untouchability) saying, "I know that there were women in that town who would take a bath if they accidentally brushed against a Muslim in the lane." (Vaid 1997) Thus, even though people in the novel lived in close proximity with one another, prejudiced behaviour and attitudes were as much a reality in those days.

The dietary and sexual taboos lay at the very heart of the composite culture of the pre-Partition Indian society. A staunch Hindu would never eat with a Muslim. In the novel, whenever Beero goes to Aslam's or Miser's house, he is under instructions from his mother not to eat anything there. Beero's father announces that, "nobody's going to buy anything [from Muslims] in any case until the question of Pakistan is settled." (Vaid 2014, 113) The taboos against the Muslims are strictly in place with vendors selling "Hindu water!" and "Muslim water!" separately. (234-235) Significantly this is not hidden from the Muslims. Hence often, Aslam's sister Hafeeza teases Beero by saying that he has become a Muslim by eating with them. Beero's mother believes that the cause of Beero's illness is his close intimacy with Muslims. She keeps worrying, "What'll I do if the Musla's breath gets into your mouth?" (88) Bir Bahadur Singh, a survivor of 1947 partition riots in his oral testimony reveals how Hindus treated Muslims in their daily routine activities.

. . . if a Musalmaan was coming along the road, and we shook hands with him, and we had, say, a box of food or something in our hand, that would then become soiled and we would not eat it; if we are holding a dog in one hand and food in the other, there's nothing wrong in that food. But if a Musalmaan would come and shake hands our dadis and mothers would say, son, don't eat this food, it has become polluted. . . . (Butalia 1998, 92)

Such prejudiced treatment passed traditionally on through generations was symptomatic of divisions lurking beneath the surface. However, Muslims did not have a problem with eating and mixing with the Hindus. Neither did they have any objection to buying food or consumables from the Hindu shops. Yet, it must be mentioned that despite the presence of unjust practices, there was a lot of intermingling and friendship among the communities.

With all the restrictions and scrutiny in place, people would still find opportunity to pursue love affairs across the communities. Vaid portrays the state of affairs during the time. Such instances, however, were not common occurrences. On the whole, the people followed communal laws and traditions. Male members of a community guarded the chastity of women of their community. Yet, there were some who broke these taboos intentionally. Such incidents happened commonly in those towns or villages where there was a mixed population of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Vaid observes, "Occasionally, and I know this from my own experiences, a Hindu or a Sikh would fall in love with a Muslim woman and marry her" (Vaid 2006, 174). Though such relations were always under some kind of communal tension, these did not necessarily lead to communal violence. From the very beginning of the novel, Vaid explores the sexual world of children who are unconsciously attracted to girls belonging to the other community. Vaid while sharing his pre-Partition youthful days with Bhalla recalls, "As young boys, we were attracted to Muslim girls, just as Muslim boys were attracted to Hindu girls" (174). Though it happened rarely, it did, and in some cases, they would go to the extreme of changing their religion to fulfil their love. In the novel, for instance, Beero is in love with his friend Aslam's sister Hafeeza who is an attractive and sweet girl. But Beero keeps this hidden due to the fear of the local people. Hara Singh falls in love with a Muslim woman Nooran and sheds his religious identity to marry her. However, his conversion to the Muslim religion is not wholehearted, rather is merely to keep himself safe from the Muslim hardliners who indirectly

intimidate him. Similarly, In-Other-Words and Phalo shed their religious identities to marry each other so that they can save themselves from the death threats. Nevertheless, such incidents do not disrupt the composite culture of the town.

The presence of pluralism in the pre-Partition era slowly and gradually transformed into polarization due to emergence of politics-induced communal clashes during the 1930's and 40's. Unfortunately, the effects of such polarization can be perceived in the present time as well whenever any religion, region, caste, or gender-based conflict occurs in society. Joan Esteban and Gerald Schneider in "Polarization and Conflict: Theoretical and Empirical Issues" aptly point out, "Recent developments around the world have shown that ideological, economic or religious polarization between contending groups is a major source of conflict and, hence one of the key impediments to social and political progress" (Esteban and Schneider 2008, 131). The turning point in the Hindu-Muslim relationship, as Vaid portrays in the novel, comes up as social, economic, and political issues start taking centre stage with the emergence of religion-based politics. The same school that was a symbol of communal harmony becomes the starting point of clashes; Master Ravana's snappy remarks on Pakistan, Muslim League, and Qaide Azam while reading the newspaper headlines becomes an immediate impulse. The silence of the assembly gets dissolved into whispering. This becomes the first event in the novel from which Beero, Aslam, Keshav, Jita, Hardayal, etc. begin to be aware of their religious identity. This results in their becoming conscious of the emerging political practice leading to mutual hatred and anger along religious lines. Murat Somer and Jennifer McCoy rightly consider politics "central to polarization. Pernicious consequences of polarization may emerge as an intended or unintended consequence of political interest-based and purposeful political mobilization." (Somer and McCoy 2008, 3) As political clamoring grows louder in the novel, even children become aware of the polarizing ideologies and the serious cracks in the very structure of society get deepened. Keshav, who has so far been a friend of Aslam, now starts looking at him (Aslam) with anger. One day when Aslam as usual starts mocking Hindu women, Keshav loses his temper and shouts, "Beero, you should explain to that sala [Aslam] that . . . , he'd better stop talking about everybody's mother like that. If he keeps it up, one day there'll be trouble between Hindus and Muslims" (Vaid 2014, 40). This remark may be seen as symptomatic of not only Keshav's anger against Aslam personally, but also against the entire Muslim community. From this juncture in the novel, relations between children begin to deteriorate, and the seeds of polarization are sown.

As Vaid portrays, people who are responsible for spreading hatred belong to all communities. These include Wrestler Vishwa, Cougher Shah, Hakim Zahoor Bakhsh, Melay Shah, Jita, Hardayal, etc. Belonging to different religions, their political and religious activities act as a catalyst that accelerates the growth of communal hostility and enmity among the local people of the town. People overcome with religious hatred join political parties and instigate communal ill-will to achieve their political goals. Their political activities further trigger the local populace's fear of the impending communal crisis due to the emergence of a new country, Pakistan. Jita and Hardayal being fanatical supporters of Singh Sabha, begin to instigate the local Sikhs and Hindus against Muslims by giving example of Aslam who had been always passing snide remarks against Hindu and Sikh women, saying "he never mentioned any Muslim woman in discussing hysteria" (Vaid 2014, 146). Similarly, Hakim who has come to control the town's Muslim League provokes fellow beings against Hindus and Sikhs by falsely citing the example of Beero's love affair with Hafeeza. He says, "This fake Hindu is molesting a Muslim beauty in public" (180). Thus, as Vaid depicts, communal passions are stirred by using similar methods by individuals belonging to all religions. Hence, though they claim to be believers and nationalists, they are unscrupulous individuals out for their own financial or political gains thus taking society towards polarization.

While presenting diverse characters in his story of Partition, Vaid also gives representation to those trying to do good for society. Vaid terms them "peacekeepers" who try hard to maintain peace and communal harmony amidst communal tension. Their opinion towards religion and humanity demonstrates their wisdom. The formation of the Peace Committee is one such initiative to retain harmony until the last days of Partition. Lord Legless states:

And the poor are Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, and Christians. . . . What I wish to impress upon you is this-the gravest challenge before us today is maintaining communal harmony. . . . I know the whole country's atmosphere is poisoned. But, even so, our Peace Committee has called this meeting in the hope that we can show the entire country that the people in this small town are human beings first and Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, Christians, or whatever later. (Vaid 2014, 307)

Such efforts towards maintaining peace indicate how at least some people had the insight and understanding of the ulterior motives of those who wanted to divide people on the basis of religion. These do-gooders could very well imagine the holocaust, ". . . if Pakistan comes into being you'll see . . . the havoc will be beyond imagination . . ." (Vaid 2014, 101) Thus, Vaid provides a comprehensive picture of numerous serious issues which contributed significantly towards polarization and communal division leading to the creation of Pakistan even as some individuals tried to foil the downfall.

Despite the endless efforts of the conscience-keepers to keep the town free from communal tension, there are a few who remain busy at provoking the local masses against one another in the name of religion and Pakistan. Spreading rumours of communal riots and killings sows the seeds of animosity resulting in the town "sure to be hit by riots" (Vaid 2014, 296). The ideological differences further escalate the existing communal tension

and mutual conflicts. The ordinary people who so far had not ever thought of murder and bloodshed become eager to indulge in violence. Consequently, communalism and polarity ruin the communal amity of the colonial society thus destroying the integral feature of Indian culture in the pre-Partition days. All efforts on the part of the people of the town to cling on to communal structure fail and the novel ends with a portrayal of the people caught in the web of communally charged logic. Vaid ends the novel with the people trying desperately to flee even as they are overtaken by death all around. Significantly, even at this juncture Vaid does not let the narrative of fixing blame take over. The aim merely is to demonstrate the consequences of polarized thinking. The hatred and mistrust, as Vaid portrays, has taken root on both sides and now there is no way they can escape the zealous frenzy. The harmonious relationship among communities that was once an inseparable part of the Indian tradition finally comes to an end with the partition of the country. The creation of a new nation proves to be a shattering blow that destroys the affinity amongst Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. As Vaid demonstrates, a mirror once broken is not only a bad omen, it also reflects a divided view, a sad image of what was precious once upon a time but now could be seen lying shattered forever.

Conclusion

To sum up, *The Broken Mirror* presents an authentic narrative of the ever-present conflict between pluralism and polarization in society. Vaid traces how pluralism that had been a significant aspect of the Indian society collapsed easily into polarization once it began to be fed with hatred and distrust. The novelist skillfully weaves the simultaneous presence of both these facets in the pre-Partition society, exploring their causes and consequences. As the novel reveals, polarization was due to several factors, including political rhetoric, socio-economic disparities, and cultural and ideological differences. Communal tensions and the cracks at the very heart of cultural fabric of the society resulted in an abrupt ending of the long and communally shared history and cultural heritage. There is no doubt that the relations between the different communities, especially Hindus and Muslims, were not always free of suspicion, distrust, and hatred. However, despite occasional moments of active hostility and communal frenzy, the common bonds of mutual goodwill and close friendship between the communities had remained intact. The communal hatred was not an inherent problem in the Indian society but rather, it emerged as a product of selfish individuals manipulating the sentiments of people, merely to serve their personal selfish interests. Hence, polarization and communal tensions are not a natural phenomenon. Rather, it is the result of deliberate efforts to exploit societal divisions. Vaid delicately balances pluralism and polarization in the pre-Partition India shedding light on the historical context and societal dynamics that contributed to the breakdown of communal harmony. Vaid demonstrates how fragile but precious the communal amity is and how easy, abrupt, and tragic its destruction can be. The novel thus should be read as a warning against allowing communal hatred to overpower society so that the country does not ever have to go through the trauma of partition ever again.

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