

# Exploring a Sense of Place and Nationalism in Sorayya Khan's Five Queen's Road

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**Abstract:** The paper explores minor communities living on the land of major ethnic groups, and analyses their predicament through the lens of sense of place and nationalism. A branch of human geography and environmental psychology has provided insight into the most fundamental aspect of attachment towards the place and - a bond between individual and nation or land. The novel *Five Queen's Road*, by Sorayya Khan, opens the ground to study the connection between nationalism and place attachment. The central character- Dina Lal, refused to leave Lahore (Pakistan) after partition on account of his attachment to the place and the newly created nation in general. Even though he knew the fact that the partition was done on the basis of religious identity, i.e., India for Hindus and Pakistan for Muslims, and people were forced to migrate overnight, he refused to leave. Primarily, this paper provides an intersection between the 1947 partition, theories on the sense of place and nationalism, theories of sense of place, and nationalism. Additionally, it raises the question on the claim made by Pakistan authority who articulated an idealized view of Pakistan as a welcome place for religious minorities. It explores how Dina Lal's family suffered because of his refusal to move from the place, which was becoming unsafe day by day. His attachment to place made him a victim of violence and later caused the disintegration of his family. The paper traces two essential aspects: the attachment with the place/nation and its consequences pertaining to the condition of minorities living in Pakistan after partition and their shattered hopes. It also deals with how a partition evokes the issue of belongingness, pain, violence, and traumatic memories.

**Keywords:** 1947 Partition, minorities, nationalism, sense of place, violence.

## 1. Introduction

The When one refers sense of place, when one resembles, imagine and identifies oneself with place or nation, there is an instant recognition of its physical and metaphysical characteristics. To the critic like Christopher Alexander who believes that "place-oriented thinking has little relevance" [1], Robin Walker suggests that "it is as much satisfactory interaction and identification with place as it is satisfactory interaction with people that modern man is seeking" [2]. Further, he believes that it is a normal expectation to have an image or to have attachment with existing place or nation and

his demand to satisfy that image. The present research paper explores the same notion of attachment with the place. Sorayya Khan, a Pakistani diaspora novelist and the author of *Noor*, *Five Queen's Road* and *City of Spies*, has addressed the repercussions of war and violence in her novels. In particular, she has worked upon how the past memories of war and violence changed the present and future of the characters of all three novels. Each novel is centered around an incident of war and builds on the involvement of characters, and the consequences of violence. *Five Queen's Road*, a novel having factual details in fictional way, is based on the period after the 1947 partition. It focuses on the condition of minorities living in Pakistan after partition and the difficulty they faced to survive on their 'own land' ('own' before partition). This "multi-layered" [3] novel reveals the personal experience of the protagonist Dina Lal, which is intertwined with the overall situation of minorities who refused to leave Lahore because of their emotional bond with the place. It has the perils and prices of the 1947 war as its central theme; the boundaries were constructed ignoring the emotions of human-led destruction. The paper attempts to study the post-partition condition of minorities, effects of cognitive geography (nationalism) on human emotions and attachment in the novel by comprehending the concept of 'place' and how it affects the lives of characters of the text.

## 2. Sense of Place

"There is no place without self and no self without place," [4] a famous quote by Edward S. Casey, a geographical philosopher, outlines the notion of the importance of place, and human beings are deeply embedded into. There is ample research that has been conducted about the phenomenon of humans developing emotional connection with the place. A sense of place is the emotional connection between people and areas. This phrase is commonly used, "when one imagines and identifies oneself with a place or a site, there is immediately an awareness of its physical and metaphysical proportions" [5]. It is a multidimensional term studied by cultural geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, and many other branches to know

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why certain places hold special meaning to particular people. Many scholars and geographers have defined it, as for J D Adams, it is “the lens through which people experience and make meaning of their experiences in and with the place” [6], and according to Lim and Barton, sense of place means, “living ecological relationship between a person and a place” [7]. A place establishes the sense of belongingness for which John Agnew has given three key aspects: location, locate, and sense of place. Location is the role a place plays in the world or its function, it is everyday language of place. Locale refers to the institutions that organize activity, politics and identity in a place. In other words, material setting for social relation and the human capacity to consume and produce meaning. And third aspect of the place is sense of place which is an emotional attachment that people have to a particular place [8]. Many things contribute to one’s sense of place, for which Tim Cresswell said, “place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world” [9]. Additionally, Yi-Fu Tuan, a Chinese-American geographer, and philosopher coined a new term for a sense of place- “topophilia,” which means “the affective bond between people and place or setting” [10]. People develop a sense of place based on social relationships and personal meaning. To some people, the place is not just a geographical area but their identity markers and out of multiple identities shaped due to various factors, ethical/cultural identity shapes a sense of place [11].

The branch of environmental psychologists termed it as ‘place attachment’. It can be defined as “a positive affective bond between an individual and a specific place, the main characteristic of which is the tendency of the individual to ‘maintain closeness’ to such a place [12]. In other words, the “tendency of people to ‘prefer to stay near to specific places.’ It is the propensity of human beings and other animals to seek out the place where they were born or find a place in which they feel comfortable and secure” [13]. As Williams describes, people develop “feelings of possession for the resource.” Place attachment is conceptualized primarily through two dimensions: place identity and place [14]. Place identity is the emotional connectedness to the place, whereas place dependence is the degree of substitutability to receive the same experience the place possesses. On the other hand, at national level it seems evident that place names provide communities a sense of social belongingness, territoriality and national ownership. Thus, these both components are connected to each other.

### 3. Nationalism

Because of the abundance of theoretical projects in the field of the emergence of nationalism, scholars have found fertile ground in the study of national identity. It should be noted that many of these theories and projects are built on the concept of ‘imagined communities’ given by Anderson. These theorists have conceived national identity as attachment towards the nation (place). To understand the elements or circumstances (factual or otherwise) under which such identities develop, it is important to look upon the concept of nationalism. A feeling of inclusion, membership, and commitment are essential

components in the development and maintenance of feelings towards place and nation: “the feelings of attachment that comprise... loyalty to a group, strengthens one’s identity and sense of belongingness” [15].

Nationalism is a theory that is not easily defined, but in a simple way, it can be symbolized with worship. It is like one’s devotion/submission to God with faith and respect. Nationalism is devotion to one’s own place of living, i.e., nation. Anthony Smith, a British historian, and sociologist defined nationalism as, “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation” [16]. As per Hans Kohn, an American philosopher and historian, “Nationalism is a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state” [17]. Ernest Gellner states that “nationalism is primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” [18]. For Benedict Anderson, nationalism is “spiritual unity” [19].

In simple words, nationalism is devotion to one’s own nation, patriotic feelings, principles, or efforts. It is a political or social ideology or movement related to sentiments for the place. The matter of nationalism is merely a metaphysical concept which is associated with the loyalty and attachment of citizens towards their nation. It is purely connected with emotions, emotions for territory, language, history, race, and history, which is commonly termed as ‘nation’. Carlton J. H. Hayes’ definition of nationalism states, “Loyalty and attachment to the interior of the group (namely the nation and homeland) are the basis of nationalism” [20]. It is indeed thought of as sentiments or strong feelings for one’s own country, which, in a modern way, is termed as ‘patriotism’. It comes under the state of mind in which an individual’s loyalties for a nation become superior to the individual’s life. Hobsbawm, in his book *Nations and Nationalism Since 1980*, commented that “the community of people identified themselves emotionally with ‘their nations’ and subsequently assumed a nationalism” [21]. In simple words, it is the sense of belongingness to the conceptual center-the nation. Nationalism is a broad subject which can be judged through a different point of view, for politics- serving the nation and developing nation, for the army- protecting the nation from the enemy, for the ordinary citizen- respecting national aspects, fighting for the national rights, etc. From this discussion, it turns out to be clear that nationalism develops on the same ground as a sense of place, and therefore it is an extension of attachment with the place. Thus, it seems natural to hypothesize that there is a significant relationship between nationalism and sense of place or place attachment.

### 4. Comprehending Five Queen’s Road through the Lens of Sense of Place

Eudora Welty describes the significance of place in literary texts in his essay *Place in Fiction* as “the starting point and source of inspiration for every author” [22], and further, an author closely links his experience (direct or indirect) with his work of art: “place is where he has his roots; the place is where he stands; in his experience out of which he writes, it provides

the base of reference; in his work the point of view” [23]. The novel *Five Queen’s Road*, based on Khan’s grandfather’s actual experience, shaped her vision and drew peculiarities of the environment by giving fictional touch. [24]. *Five Queen’s Road* is a novel about ‘memories of another day’- the condition of minorities on the land of Pakistan after partition [25]. After the declaration of independence, on 15th August 1947, India was divided into two countries, India and Pakistan. The division was done on the basis of the condition- India for Hindus and Pakistan for Muslims:

“Never before or since have had so many people exchanged their homes and countries so quickly? In the space of a few months, about twelve million people moved between new, truncated India and the two wings, East and West, of the newly created Pakistan. The largest proportion of these refugees belonged to the western border - more than ten million of them – crossed the western border, which divided the historical state of Punjab, Muslims traveling to the west to Pakistan, Hindus, and Sikhs east to India” [26]. While the partition divided millions on the grounds of religion it also gave the freedom of choice to those who didn’t want to leave their place. In such cases, political leaders from both nations agreed and took responsibility to look after minorities. The day Mohammad Ali Jinnah established his political power and delivered his Presidential Address to the constituent assembly at Pakistan, he stated:

You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste, or creed; that has nothing to do with the business of the State... We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state... [keep] that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state [27]. *Five Queen’s Road* depicts a different picture of the suffering of minorities which is a stark contrast to the above speech. It narrates how a ‘small’ community suffers in the land of the majority. This novel, represents the trials and tribulations of one family headed by Dina Lal, living as a minority in Pakistan. Before independence, it belonged to united India; Lahore was a part of Panjab, but after partition, the boundary was divided, and Lahore became a part of Pakistan. *Five Queen’s Road* belongs to the same land and focuses on Dina Lal, ‘a true-blue Lahori,’ who refused to leave for India after Partition.

Dina Lal refused to go away from this place even though he was aware of the violent incidents of “knifings, robberies and murders” the Hindu community was subjected to in Lahore [28]. While roaming the streets of Lahore, he witnessed “a neighbor being dragged into a busy thoroughfare and pummeled to near death with a child’s cricket bat” [29]. The place had become dangerous day after day, filled with anger and

urgency, and the so-called promises made by the leaders remained just words. Dina Lal had lost his children, and eventually, his wife, incidents after incidents made him feel that “she (Janoo) was right, the city was dangerous, would always be dangerous after the madness of partition made itself known” [30]. It expresses, what Hannah Ardent said in her essay *On violence*, “when power fails, Violence emerges” [31]. The matter of separation did not finish right after partition; the politicians created “the politics of hatred and fear psychosis and irrationality” among the people [32]. This outcome of hatred has affected the people who were Hindus living in Pakistani territory. Although the city witnessed violence on minorities, there were a few, like Dina Lal, who refused to leave the place.

As mentioned, memories play a vital role in developing attachment with the place. In the matter of Dina Lal, his memories associated with the place played an important role in his refusal to leave. He had spent his childhood and walked the street of Lahore, holding his father’s finger. The place where his family lived constructed memories, which further led to the attachment. For some time, he worked in Lahore with railways and nurtured a strong desire to own a house like the Englishmen at *Five Queen’s Road*. He was sure that he “wasn’t moving” just because of the newly created border, one imaginary line for him [33]. He found the entire incident of partition or “this business of imposing lines where there had been none” as completely “unjust,” and thought, “who were the British to draw imaginary-crooked, even-lines across his land and proclaimed a random date when it would break (like a biscuit, for God’s sake!) into two countries?” [34]. His identification with a place makes him believe that the place belongs to him and he to the place, “Lahore, inflames or not, was his,” “in stillness, rare in a city bursting with life and now death, the city was his” [35]. And he had made up his mind, against all’s will, that whether “Hindu or not, he wasn’t goddamnit, going anywhere” [36].

His sense of place was above all attachments. He knew that everyone would consider him mad because of his decision, his own family would go against it, yet he was adamant. Even though, while moving around the streets of Lahore, he saw people being hostile, he felt no fear because he discovered that “he enjoyed walking the streets of Lahore, something he had not done since he was a child, and he had learned his way around the labyrinth of alleyways inside Lahore’s old city” [37]. The place had given him a sense of security even though it had now become unsafe for him. Instead of being worried about such an incident, he “preferred a cup of sweet milky tea in his lap” from a nearby tea stall where that incident of violence on the child had happened [38].

A borderline and political agenda changed the entire way of life of millions of people. Those who decided to stay back had to change their way of life, like Dina Lal, “as part of new attention to safety,” “either he or Janoo” had to be “in the house at all times” [39]. Though Dina Lal had the notion that as he had not done anything wrong with anyone in the city, he and his family were safe on this land, but to his great surprise, misfortune had found him. On one fine day, “someone stole the heavy gate at the bottom of the driveway,” and after a few days,

his wife was assaulted. [40] While returning home from the temple, in their driveway, men sprang from behind and knocked her to the ground. Her purse was snatched, and the gold chain she was wearing was yanked from her neck. She screamed for help as one of the men with unbearably dirty fingernails pulled out her earrings, leaving her lobes bloody and sore. They cut off her bangles with wire cutters, and as an added insult, the men took her sandals. In a final act of depravity, one man held open her arms as the other rubbed a handful of dirt on her forehead, which she numbly recognized was meant to erase her bindi. She cried out and choked on the dirt. She was pushed into a driveway and kicked in her stomach. [41]. the whole incident shocked and disturbed her but Dina Lal was dauntless. The love for the place where Dina Lal had spent his entire life remained undeterred, and he refused to move to India [42].

Instead of leaving Lahore and moving to India, he set up two plans. First, he decided to become a Muslim. He started reading Quran, “Dina Lal reasoned to himself that religion had never been important to him, and if becoming a Muslim would provide him and his wife – the remnants of his family – with protection in these crazy times, it would be the responsible thing to do” [43]. He did not stop here; he even changed his name from Dina Lal to D. L. Ahmed. The second decision of Dina Lal was to divide the house into two, the front house and the back house. The front he planned to give on rent to any Muslim tenant to protect him and his wife. His decision shows the extent to which a person can go for the attachment to live on their ‘own land.’ He was so adamant that even though Janoo was not satisfied with his decision, Dina Lal hardly paid any attention to her.

Dina Lal called Amir Shah, a Muslim tenant who could be called a true citizen of newly formed Pakistan as he was a Muslim. Amir Shah was a barrister with the government of law ministry and worked in the same building in downtown Lahore, under whose protection Dina Lal thought he and his wife would be safe and so would be his house. The partition on the basis of community/ religion did not remain limited to the nation or land, as Dina Lal drew another boundary to demarcate the area for his tenant and his family. The partition of the house symbolically represents the same idea, even though it was just the ‘rope border’ which divided the house where Dina Lal (Hindu) will stay at the back of the house and Amir (Muslim) in the front.

Dina Lal thought changing the name and religion, giving the front house to a Muslim tenant would save him and his wife from the holocaust of partition, but another incident with his wife shattered him. One fine day, Rubina noticed an unknown car driven by an unknown thirty year or so man. Having unusual fear, she hid in the living room, but she was more frightened when she heard Janoo screaming and calling her husband. A group of men walked in a row, in the garden, one of them carried Janoo over his shoulder. Janoo was abducted, and “her round face swollen with bruises and cuts, her back arched unnaturally over the man’s shoulders, her arms bound together in thick rope bracelets and dangling behind her head. Janoo’s eyeballs rolled in her head from side to side as if, Rubina later imagined, in a frantic survey of what she was leaving behind.”

[44]. When Javid did nothing to save Janoo, Rubina tried to save her on her own, but Javid stopped her from taking any action. The initial conversation between Javid and Rubina gives an idea of the social-political mood of the society of Pakistan at that time. ‘Stop!’ Javed ordered roughly. ‘Think for a moment. Please! We don’t want them to return and find you.’ ‘but they aren’t after girls like me!’ Rubina insisted, not heeding her brother’s orders.

‘Like you?’ Javed inquired. ‘Muslims. They’ve come to take Hindu girls away, Idiot!’ [45]

When Dina Lal got the news that his wife had been abducted, he lost all his senses. He not only angrily ordered the police constable to find her, he even went on roaming from room to room, hoping to discover Janoo in the abundance of rooms. He had already lost his children and now his wife, incident after incident made him feel “she (Janoo) was right, the city was dangerous, would always be dangerous after the madness of partition made itself known.” [46] But his love for the place which he had known as home did not allow him to move even now, after all this. The attachment with the place was beyond reason, and “even though the bloody bastards had taken his wife, they would not change his mind. He was not leaving Lahore, his home, his love, for anything. He would stay right where he was, in his own home, and let history find him.” [47]. The incident created hostility in the relationship between Dina Lal and Amir. As Dina Lal had brought this tenant for their safety and he believed that Amir failed to perform his duty well. It was his responsibility to take care of his wife in his absence. Much later in the evening, Dina Lal was waiting for Amir to return from the police station. He enquired angrily about his absence when his wife was abducted,

‘... Where were you? This afternoon? When they came for Janoo?’ ‘I was at the office,’ Amir Shah answered, surprised.

‘You were at the office,’ Dina Lal echoed. “Do you think,” Dina Lal began slowly, “I invited you to share this house out of – what? – the goodness of my goddamned heart?” [48]. The reason for inviting Amir Shah into his house was apparently clear in Dina Lal’s mind but not to Amir Shah. And now Dina Lal thought and blamed Amir Shah that “he had failed in his obligation to protect him and his wife” [49]. Janoo’s kidnapping incident shows the breakdown of trust: Dina Lal failed to protect his wife, and Amir failed in protecting the members of the minority community. Similarly, all those “promises of according equal treatment to all its nationals irrespective of their caste and creed” made by M. A. Jinnah during partition proved as a cold comfort [50].

As time passed, Dina Lal accepted the reality of his wife’s kidnapping and started living a life of emptiness. But his anger with Amir Shah and against the Muslim community, in general, increased day by day. He could not free himself from the thought of Amir’s failure to protect them and the failure of the plan he had set to live in the city and the place he loved the most. This thought is used many times in the novel, “the passing weeks did nothing to diminish Dina Lal’s rage at Amir Shah. If anything, Dina Lal grew angrier and angrier that the Muslim who was meant to protect him had done nothing of the sort” [51]. A similar predicament was faced by those who emigrated

to India faced challenges accepting the new land, they were considered an outsider, and the question of belongingness was haunting them. The new borderline caused mass displacement and homelessness of people on both the sides, “the traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.” [52]. Amir Shah originally belonged to Amritsar, but during this partition, he had to leave his house, though not so big, behind and settled down here, in Lahore. Here, he was a mere tenant. In the beginning, he found it very difficult to have a place to live in Pakistan and ironically, he was kept as a tenant to give safety to the landlord.

### 5. Conclusion

The novel symbolically represents many burning issues of pre-partition, during partition, and after partition era. By owning a home of an Englishman, Dina Lal represents the post-colonial consciousness of laying claim on one’s land in his own country, to which he is attached and to determine the departure of English people (Britishers) at first, “soon you will be far, far away, Johnny, in your own country – nothing but an island- and I will live in your house any damn way I please” [53]. However, the Britishers’ departure came up with the holocaust of partition in which millions of people had to leave their house overnight. Here, the issue of belongingness or sense of place and place attachment emerges clearly because of which many people with a heavy heart had to leave their native place or homeland. On the other hand, people like Dina Lal, who had a strong feeling for place attachment, resolved to fight for his place and not leave at any cost.

Partition forced people to chance their place of living and cross the borders, due to that the migrated people were not completely accepted by the people already living there. For example, Amir Shah had to leave his house and settle down in Lahore. On the other hand, Dina Lal lived in Lahore, owned his own house, yet he was forced to leave the place as he was not of a specific community. Khan depicts the lives of two families change after the partition and through which she depicts how communal riots uprooted millions of lives. The well-furnished/ managed house with a pleasant garden and a happy living family both decayed due to one decision of partition based on community. People had only two choices, leave the place and settle with their own community regardless of their attachment to the place and people, or they had to suffer or, as in most cases, lose everything, wealth, loved ones, and lives. The way Dina Lal chose the place over family and ended up losing everything was not just an incident of a single family but many people. At last, after losing everything, he died, and the novel ends with an epilogue where Javid and Irene prevail upon Amir Shah to leave this house of Five Queen’s Road, though not Lahore, and the old house is demolished.

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