

Partition: Perennial Theme in Sub-Continental Literature

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Abstract



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The aim of my paper is to make the present and future generations motivated in literary works based on this heart rendering theme so that more and more research works may be undergone and the truth regarding this historical event can be revealed. My ultimate aim is to bring out the reality that common people are not interested to involve in riot or enmity with the people belonging to other communities but very often facts are misinterpreted by people with vested interest, often politicians with communal bend of mind. I believe if future generation comes to know all these, they will, instead of being prejudiced, be guided by secular ideas to frame the history of partition of our sub-continent.

Partition happens to be a very infamous and anguishing phenomenon in our sub continent. Its ghost seems to have been haunting us since 1947. Its memory haunted us time and again and it has become a tool to our politicians. Partition, in fact, is not a unique episode for Indian sub continent only. Even before India, other countries like Ireland and USA were partitioned. Some thirty years back USSR was also split into many small states but people there did not have to suffer the bitter trauma in respect of loss of lives, property, honour, safety and security. Creative writers of many Indian languages and English as well were inspired or felt an urge to share their ideas on these blood-curdling riots. This issue though painful and lethal has become a favourite theme to the authors who aspired to portray the pangs, troubles and tribulations of this devastating event. Partition had its most adverse effects like hooliganism, treachery, barbarism, rape, murder, abduction and thirst for blood especially in the bordering states like Assam, Bengal and Punjab and it is no denying a fact that both the communities—the Hindu and the Muslim—suffered badly. The authors who had direct experience to watch these horrible sites were more adept to draw these issues. Important books published in Indian languages include Bengali novels like 'Keya Patar Nouko', 'Purba Paschim' 'Meghe Dhaka Tara', (an epoch-making film by Ritwik Ghatak), 'Komal Gandhar Etc.', Hindi novel 'Tamas by hima Sahni, Urdu novels 'Basti by Intizar Hussain, Sadat Hasan Manto's 'Toba Tek Singh' etc. The Indo-Anglian writers also wrote profusely on this theme and this tradition still continues. In the vast canvas of Indo-Anglian literature, to name only a few, the names of a few novels may be cited—'Train to Pakistan', 'A Bend in the Ganges', 'Ice Candy Man', 'Other Side of Silence', 'The Shadow Lines', 'Midnight's Children' etc.

This research paper seeks to explore the trauma experienced by millions of refugees and sufferers as depicted in select Indo-Anglian novels including 'Train to Pakistan', 'A Bend in the Ganges', 'Other Side of Silence', 'Ice Candy Man' Etc. Besides this it delineates in brief, how a number of Bengali novels and short stories by the authors from both the banks of the Padma retell the excruciating pain and hardship suffered by common, innocuous people, especially the downtrodden and so called lower class people belonging to both the communities immediately after partition and even long after it.

Keywords: Partition, Literature, Trauma, Communal carnage, Man-Made Border, Blood Curdling Riots, Homeless, Horror, Bestiality, Refugee, Rehabilitation.

Introduction

Nehru's famous speech, 'Tryst with the Destiny' delivered on August 14, 1947 was not an expression of unlimited blessing; it was not the dawn which the Indians were waiting for so long. It was followed by the division of united India on the basis of religion. It was almost impossible to keep united the two leading sections, viz., the Congress and the Muslim League. Even Gandhiji expressed his helplessness: "He soon arrived at the painful conclusion that the conflicting aspirations of the League and the Congress could not be reconciled except at the cost of partitioning the country".¹ It seems to be a nightmare to the victims and a section of politicians still use the memory as a tool for their political gain. The people of the border area, especially of Punjab and Bengal, witnessed bitter trauma in respect of loss of lives, property, honour, safety and security. Needless to say, creative writers from both sides of man-made border endeavoured to portray the

adverse effects like blood-curdling riots, loot, rape, hooliganism, treachery, barbarism, murder, abduction and what not. M.K. Naik rightly pointed out the scenario that immediately follows the partition: "The lack of adequate preparation and safeguards when the country was hastily partitioned into India and Pakistan led to a communal carnage of unprecedented proportions resulting in 600,000 deaths and 8.5 million refugees".² A huge number of creative and edited works were published on this theme in different vernaculars like Bengali, Hindi, Urdu etc. apart from English. The injury of leaving homeland has left an indelible mark in Bengali literature – stories, novels, poetry and other fields of art and culture. When asked by Harsha Dutta why the topic of partition has recurred again and again in his creation, Sunil Gangopadhyay replied, "My father told in choked voice in the morning of 15th August, 1947, India has become independent, and we have lost our country! That pain of loss is still felt so many years later under the heart."³

Partition Novels in Bengali Literature

Some of the notable works on partition in Bengali literature are Goura Kishore Ghosh's 'Prem Nei', Hasan Azizul Haque's, 'Agun Pakhi', Mahmudul Haque's 'Kalo Baraf', Manoj Basu's 'Yasin Mian', S.N. Bajlul Haque's 'Bhag Na Diye Bhagano', Anjali Devi's 'Nabin Ashar Kharga', Apurba Kumar Maitra's 'Swadhinatar Byatha', Narendra Dev's 'Chalachitra', Sumathanath Ghosh's 'Udbastu', Harinarayan Chottopadhyay's 'Punascha', 'Itihas' and 'Lathial', Ritwik Ghotok's 'Sfatik Patra' and 'Sadak', Fanindranath Dasgupta's 'Gopal Uder Lane', Manik Bondhopadhyay's 'Khatian', Samarash Basu's 'Nimayer Deshtyag', Satinath Bhadur's 'Gananayak', Naredranath Mitra's 'Head Master' and 'Palanka', Sikandar Abu Jafar's 'Ghar', M.D. Wazed Ali's 'Nehayet Golpo Noi', NUR Ali's 'Mohazer', Begum Hasmat Rashid's 'Fariad', Alauddin Al Azad's 'Chhuri', Narayan Gangopadhyay's 'Swet Kamal' and 'Adhikar' etc.

The titles of some stories themselves directly imply the theme itself such as 'Desh Bhagat Por' by Imdadul Haque Milan, Jafar Talukdar's 'Pitri Bhumi', Jiban Sarkar's 'Kosha', Debesh Roy's 'Udbastu', Mihir Sengupta's 'Pitamohi'r Swadesh yatra' Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay's 'Kolikatar Danga ebong Ami', Somen Chand's 'Danga', Banaful's 'Dangar Samoy', Ishaq Chakhari's 'Riot', Shima Das's 'Dyesh Theke Desh', Jyotirmoyee Devi's 'Epar Ganga opar Ganga' etc. They deserve mention.

Later, this theme got expressed through novels like 'Purba Paschim', 'Keya Patar Nouko', 'Meghe Dhaka Tara', 'Komal Gandhar' (last two were filmed by Ritwik Ghatak). Hindi novel 'Tamas' by Bhisam Sahni, Urdu novel 'Aag Ki Daria' by Qurratulain Haidar, or 'Toba Tek Singh' by Saddat Hassan Manto deserve mention. A number of books on this theme were published from Bangladesh and Pakistan too. K.R. Srinivas Iyenger observes: "Novels on the partition horrors and bestiality are legion, but it is not often they transcend sensationalism and achieve them discipline of art".⁴

Manik Bandyopadhyay's 'The Final Solution' depicts the condition of homeless people, spending their days and nights along with cattle in the goat-shed. Deviating from the androcentric male discourse of partition story, it surveys the horror from women's point of view. According to Joan Wallach Scott: "It made women the focal point, subject and narrative agent of women's investigation. The narrator is moved by sexual abuse, profanity, disrespect, obscenity, violation of dignity etc."⁵ Suranjan Das observes: "Riots are a transformative as well as a historical event. It shapes and changes perceptions and desires. People have changed their attitudes towards each other and their thinking about themselves have changed".⁶ Mallika, the protagonist, has compromised her self-esteem and integrity by choosing prostitution to feed her child and to save the family from being washed away. Her courage to strangle Pramatha to death in order to foil attempt to exploit women like Mallika endears her to be a lovable person.

Prafulla Roy's 'Keya Patar Nouko' starts with the description of serene, peaceful, happy life of rural Bengal (presently Bangladesh) surrounded by rivers and covered with shady trees but ends with partition, exodus and brother-killing riots.

Perhaps the most successful Bengali novel in the backdrop of partition is Sunil Gangopadhyay's 'Purba Paschim'. It is not stale, insipid description of social and political life of two Bengals; but in its canvas is captured the picture of Indo-Pak war, elevation from Nehru's India to Indira's India, economic crisis, aspiration of the youths to build up deprivation-free society, militant movement, freedom struggle of

Bangladesh, the shattering of dream of the youths after freedom besides the day to day events of birth, death, love- making, marriage etc. in the middle class Bengali society. This novel depicts the mental distance between the 'the Bangal' and 'the Ghoti'— "After the division of the country, the Hindus of East Bengal, after recovering from primary bitterness, could understand that they had little differences with the neighboring Musalman's ,rather more similarities existed between them". Even after spending many years in this country, Suhadini wants to go back to her own home in East Bengal. She wonders to know that house is gone: "we shall not be able to return to our own house". On the day on which (21 Feb 1952) firing was charged on students and common people, the intellectual like Mamun came to realize: "There is no class or religion among the oppressors and tyrants, they are all one in every country."

This novel, not confining itself to the periphery of Bengal, reflected minutely the condition of the people right from Europe and America to the orient i.e. of Asian countries.

Partition Novels in Indo-Anglian Literature

Questions are often posed whether literature based on narrow theme, often biased ,may be great literature. Debendra Satyarthi questioned the greatness of such literature: "No one based on hate and prejudice can really be great. It was a drama of degradation and shame, a drama of human decay showing how the minds of two communities were poisoned by the dogma of two-nation theory".¹

Some of the prominent works of Indo-Anglian literature are Khuswant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan', Balachandra Raju's, 'The Dark Dancer', Gurucharan Das's 'A Bend in the Ganges', Anita Desai's ' Clear Light of the Day', Attia Hossain's 'Sunlight on a Broken Column', Amitav Ghosh's 'The Shadow Lines' etc. Apart from creative writings some authors tried to edit books to delineate the situation. Some books that deserve mention are Gyanendra Pandey's 'Remembering Partition', S.Settar and Indira Batista Gupta's 'Pangs of Partition', Rabikanto and Tarun Saint's 'Translating Partition ' ,Bama Bhusin and Ritu Menon's 'Border and Boundaries', Suvir Kaul's 'The Partition of Memory', Urbasi Butalia's 'The other side of silence'etc. These narratives consider the human aspects of this event e. g. Butalia analysed many letters culled from Refugee Rehabilitation Dept. to bring out the tale of suffering of women whose voice was suppressed so far. Bapsi Sidhwa, a woman novelist from Pakistan depicts partition from women's point of view in the novel 'Ice Candy Man'. Let us examine the theme of partition in selected Indian English novels. Perhaps the most living and life-like saga on the theme of partition is 'Train to Pakistan' (1956). According to KRS Iyenger, 'Train to Pakistan' projects with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border region during terror-haunted days of August 1947".¹¹

Riots that followed partition were the result of suspicion: "But I am sure he is Muslim Leaguer. They are much the same. We would have had to arrest him". The worst sufferers were the common men like tonga driver who apprehended, "When the mob attack, they do not wait to find who you are, Hindu or Muslim. They kill". Even if Hukum Chand is a heartless Police officer, he is perplexed to get the report of number of dead bodies brought from across the border, "Harey Ram, Harey Ram. Fifteen hundred innocent people. What else is Kalyug....And our people are doing the same". The Magistrate seeks an excuse to get the Mussalmans out of Mano Majra. He thinks had the offences like dacoity, murder been committed by the Mussalmans instead of Sikhs it would have been convenient, "Would have persuaded Mano Majra Sikhs to let their Muslims go". Cock and bull story was rife at the false propaganda of Iqbal being a Muslim, not Iqbal Singh: "Several villagers started telling the head constable excitedly of having seen Iqbal going to the fields and loiter about the railway track near the bridge". Both the communities—the Sikhs and Muslims were suspicious about the safety and honour of their women—"They (Muslim) had heard of gentle-women having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place". At the same time the Sikhs were sullen and angry: "Never trust a Mussalman", they said—Sikh refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than falling into the hands of Muslims". But exception is there. To the response of one Sikh who brought allegation against Muslims, one aged Sikh gentleman reacted, "What have they done to you? Have they ousted you from lands or occupied your houses? Have they seduced your women folk?" Again, the lambardar assured them "This is your village as much as ours". The Government officials, instead of

offering safety to the Muslims, advised them to go to the refugee camp, “The convoy is not going to Pakistan by road. We are taking them to Chandannagar refugee camp and from there by train to Lahore”. Although fanatics incite people “For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussalmans”, their words do not always move the peace loving villagers as it is evinced in the words of Meet Singh, “What have the Muslims done to us for us to kill them”. The novel ends with an optimistic note—a man sacrifices his life in order to pave way for the train packed with Muslims who would have been otherwise killed by fanatics whose leader cried in vain: “come off, you ass! You will be killed. Come off at once”. Chaman Nahal’s, ‘Azadi’ and ‘Balachandra Raju’s ‘The Dark Dancer’ depict the carnage and holocaust of partition in the then contemporary society. M.K. Naik compared the effect of these two novels: “In contrast with the substantial earthliness of ‘Azadi’, in ‘The Dark Dancer’ the author’s donnish style, chock full of literary echoes and allusions and straining after subtleties of thought frequently left half-said and unsaid, throws a curious haze over the entire narrative in which even the violence of partition appears to be curiously unreal”.¹² Manohar Malgonkar’s ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ (1964) is one such in which characters, mainly refugees, leave their dear homes for good leaving everything behind. The title and the epitaph has some mythological allusion: “At a bend in the Ganges, they paused to take a look at the land they were leaving”.¹³ Guru Charan Das’s ‘A Fine Family’ interprets partition as God’s will. The principal character thinks the killings and hatred are owing to the imperfection of the phenomenological world. The calamity is the result of God’s moral justice which mortals are unable to trace. Another character, Baiju’s sensibilities seemed to be visionless at the sight of violence and bloodshed during partition. Pitted against by fortune he had to migrate with nothing but his clothes. The heart-rending experience during partition is a testimony to his spirit. ‘Ice Candy Man’ (1981) by Bapsi Sidhwa presents how one incident related to partition transforms the peace loving, jolly, friendly, poetic person into a selfish, ruthless and savage one. The unfortunate incident that was the cause of this sea change was arrival of a train at Lahore from Gurudaspur, carrying dead bodies of Muslims, more horrible bags full of chipped female breasts. This barbaric incident dismantled his mental equilibrium and made him vindictive to kill Hindus and Sikhs. Later he does not hesitate to drag a Hindu Ayah from a house to abduct forcefully. Ice Candy Man married her and kept her in the locality of prostitutes called Hira Mandi. The girl Lenny wounds her tongue in remorse since her truth saying was the cause of the abduction and torture of Shanta, the Ayah. Passion and fury being over, the Ice Candy Man realizes his mistake, tries to repair the relationship but in vain. The Ayah, Shanta, in compliance with her wish, is sent to Amritsar where she is followed by remorseful Ice Candy Man, completely woe-begone lover pining for his beloved whose soul he killed and his betrayal has shattered their dream and romance as well. Lenny is deeply hurt to find Shanta turned Mumtaz in Hira Mandi. Her frustration gets expressed thus: “Where have the radiance and animation gone! Can the soul be extracted from its living body? Her vacant eyes are bigger than ever—wide opened with what they have seen and felt”

The story, thus, presents how racial identity and religious bent of mind can strip all humane qualities of a sensible person like Ice Candy Man. It delineates how social norms are disintegrated in the backdrop of communal riots prompted by partition. A comment from New York Liberty Journal deserves mention: “The originality and power of Sidhwa’s splendid novel on the partition of India and the subsequent communal violence derived from her choice of protagonist, Lenny an eight year old parsee girl from Lahore, a spectator living in the midst of, but apart from, the rising tension among the Hindus, Muslim and Sikhs.....”¹⁴ Anita Desai’s ‘Clear Light of Day’ depicts the intimacy between Raja, a Hindu boy and a Muslim family headed by Hyder Ali on the days when negotiation between the political leaders of India and British Government was underway. The Muslim leaders demanded separate nation for the Muslims and partition was inevitable. Raja was sympathetic to the Muslims mainly owing to his secular outlook which was termed as pro-Muslim and he was almost ostracized by his Hindu friends. After creation of Pakistan a lot of bloodshed occurred on both sides of the border. However, partition did not leave only bleak, pessimistic tone here. Defying the resentment of his brother, Bin Raja visited Hyder Ali at Hyderabad and eventually the bitter effect ended with Raja’s marriage to Benazir, Hyder Ali’s only child.

Aim of the study

History and literature are quite inseparable. The aim of this paper is to build up a bridge between history and literature. Partition is a purely historical theme and this history is interpreted by various groups of historians in diverse perspectives according to their religious, political or even neutral view point. Historians have the limitations of presenting the facts on the basis of their data and evidences, where as literatures, poets or dramatists have the liberty to delineate all these themes in terms of their creative imagination in short all the creative works are mingling of fact and fancy . I hope the study of this paper will invite avid readers to explore newer horizons on partition theme and history will be reflected through literature in new angles, of course keeping in mind all these will disseminate higher ideals based on secular democratic generous thinking that gives rise to the feeling of international fraternity.

Conclusion

However, the entire literature on partition does not reflect negativity only. In stories or novels we find people belonging to other religion are equally respectful to the sentiments and religious faith of other community. 'Ekti Tulusi Gachher Kahini' ('The story of a Basil Plant in Bengali') by Syed Waliullah is one such example. In the story some Muslim youths of Bangladesh in the aftermath of partition occupied a house abandoned by a Hindu family. Among the fanatics one conscientious Muslim youth Matin feels pain to think of the lady of the house, who used to pour water to the basil plant. The story has a twist at the ending: "After the arrival of the police that day nobody poured water at the root of the plant. Nobody remembers the tearful eyes of the lady of the house." The sentiment of Hindu housewives is equally felt by one belonging to other religion. In those turbulent days in East Pakistan Muslim people offer shelter to the Hindus often at the risk of their own lives and similarly in India the Hindus offer shelter to their Muslim brothers. So many books, articles drew these collages and partition has become one of the major themes to the authors of South East Asia, who write in English. Day by day new unknown facts are being exposed and researchers have been exploring the various facets of this bitter but true incident of history. Therefore, literary and historical writings on this episode will remain pertinent in all ages and in respect of all nations.

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