Review

Partition through literature

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Accepted 4 October, 2013

The hard battle which was fought against the alien rule was marred by the division of the united country [India]. Millions are said to have moved across the borders and lakhs have been died. This was an “irreparable loss” for the subcontinent. We can’t undo the partition which is now a reality. We must learn lessons from history. The aim of the paper is to focus on the writers’ perspectives, as reflected in the stories and novels. It is interesting to note that majority of these writers transcend the petty ethnic prejudices and are generous in portraying characters of the other ethnic groups.

Key words: Partition, Communalism, abduction, Toba Tek Singh, Train to Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

The population of India is composed of a variety of people possessing various religions, practising diverse rites, speaking different languages and having manifold cultures from times immemorial, they lived in relative harmony resulted in disseminating a spirit of humanism and tolerance among its inhabitants which gave them the identity of “inimitable eminence”. Irrespective of their disparity they in the long drawn struggle, carried on by forging a united front, thus liberated their country from the chained yoke of the mighty British regime on 15th August 1947. However the wonderful moment of independence married by the tragedy of Partition “an original trauma”, which constitutes the most tragic chapter in the modern-day history of not only India but of the whole world. This historical affair was significant not only as a political occurrence which gave birth to the two nations but it was the most perilous incident for millions who suffer. Salman Rushdie in Midnight’s Children portrays the Partition episode as “…in all the cities, all the towns, all the villages the little dia-lamps burns on the window-sills porches verandas, while train burns in the Punjab, with the green flames of blistering paints and the glaring saffron or fired fuel, like the biggest dias in the world…. And the city of Lahore too is burning.” The monster in the streets has began to roar, while in Delhi a wiry man is saying … “at the stroke of midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India awakens to lay and freedom… And beneath the roar of the monster there are two more yells, cries, bellows, and the howls of children arriving in the world their unavailing protests mingling with the din of Independence which hangs saffron and green [flag] in the night sky…” In it Rushdie creates a montage there by linking the features of customary everyday life with the violent destruction associated with Partition At the root of Partition lay the concept of communalism between the two principle communities (Hindus and Muslims) of the subcontinent. It [communalism] is a political assertiveness of a community to maintain its identity in a plural society. Indian premier Jawaharlal Nehru remarks that “One communalism does not end the other, each feeds on the other and both fatten”. The creation of Pakistan synchronised with the partition of India; which marked the communal hurly-burly, resulted a large scale migration, torture and massacre. Its magnitude was so much that it impacted almost all walks of life. A tragedy began to unfold in the bordered state Punjab with an exodus of Hindus and Sikhs eastwards into India and the Muslims west into Pakistan. The consecrated land of the modern religion Sikhism’s split like the house of cards, and the "radical leaders called for Khalistan, which never materialised”. Urvashi Butalia estimated that in 1947 “roughly ten to twelve million people said to have
moved within the space of a few months, between the new truncated India and newly created Pakistan. Between 500,000 to One million people are believed to have died." Mushirul Hassan (2000) estimated that the "range from 29,000 to 50,000 Muslim women and 15,000 to 35,000 Hindu and Sikh women were abducted, raped, forced to convert and marriage." Not only these, but "untold number of women particularly in Sikh families were killed by their kinsmen in order to protect them from being converted and perhaps an equal being killed themselves". Another writer G. Pandey (2001) notes that a few families, on both sides of the border, were willing to sacrifice young women to abduction in order to buy security for the family. Thus the more victimised people in the partition were the weaker sex 'women'. The other side of the tale which partition fashioned was the creation of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir which once was known as paradise on earth but know called the most dangerous place to live on. The centuries of coexistence among Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims became victims of mutual suspicion. The resulting mass relocations of these groups transformed the village populations overnight and the human traits turned inhuman. The peaceful co-existence became victims of mutual suspicion as sadism swept all-round; each and every one became enemies.

The relationship between the Hindus and Muslims started deteriorating rapidly after the Khilafat and non-cooperation movement. If one would study carefully the historiography of the Partition it would be difficult to blame on any one of the actors—be it Quid-i- Azam Ali Mohammad Jinnah, Jawaharlal Nehru or Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi Or in concrete terms Muslim League or Congress. Then one wonders whom to blame for the disastrous Partition of India? (Shahid 1986). We blame either Muslim league or Congress and exonerate the role of British rulers who were the chief culprits of the divide. The great modern scholars or to say leftist historians Bipan Chandra (1989), consider the creation of Partition because of the "surging waves of the Muslim Communualism" and 'mainly because of the long term failure of the congress to draw the Muslims masses into the national movement'. Actually it was the British and their adopted age old policy and practice of "divide and rule" which they implement in dissecting the common flesh and blood of India. Moulana Azad aptly held that the partition was neither in the interests of India [Hindus] nor in the interests of Muslims themselves. Aysha Jalal (1996) argued that "the psychological legacy of partition has left a much deeper impact on people's minds than the social, economic and political dynamics that led to the division. Whether the two dimensions should be separated quite as surgically as India was dismembered by the partitioner's axe is itself an issue of considerable disagreement among historians." The situation of holocaust was so high, that God himself would have wept and cried on the human made partition of sub-continent.

Historians nowadays are less apprehensive about the causes of the episode, rise and fall, personality of individuals, and are more introspective about the consequences of the episode. This lethal man-made unpleasant incident in the history left a permanent mark on the psyche of the conscious minds and particularly haunts those who have been the victims of this unpleasant incident. Many attempts have been taken in this direction by writers to highlight the agony, cruelty and genocide. The partition experience crept into prose, poetry drama, novels and short stories.

The foremost attempt in this direction have been taken by a cognisant Kashmiri Saadat Hasan Manto who lived in Bombay at the time of Partition and then in 1948 moved to newly created country 'Pakistan'. One of his best and perhaps the most famous partition story is "Toba Tek Singh" written in Urdu has been called the "enfant terrible of the Urdu literature" by Mushirul Hasan (2000). What had been witnessed and experienced by the affected writer during the trauma of partition was highlighted in his stories in precise and unflinching detail. Even after many decades his writings are considered best by the researchers working on partition. It is a conglomerate of the psychology and emotional interpretation of the pre and post partition affairs and the central character of his story was a Sikh prisoner named Bishan Singh who had gone mad fifteen years earlier. Anyone in the asylum [prison] calls him Toba Tek Singh, the name of his village. He often chants the nonsensical phrase like "Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the ialtain." The story is an ironic classic. A couple of years after Partition, both the governments [Pakistan and India] decided that the prisoners should be transferred to their respective lands. Muslim lunatics in India should be transferred to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums should be sent to India. Upon learning the decision, the inmates could not understand its meaning as they knew nothing of the new land. If they were in India, where on earth was the Pakistan? The protagonist inhabiting the 'no-man's land' is insanity rather than make an impossible choice between the two countries he could claim. They may have thought that "How a world which was so familiar had suddenly become a world of strangers." This is a pathetic story in which one gets the impression of the chaos and confusion that prevailed at the time of partition. The pain of abductions, rape and murders and the horrors are portrayed by this sensitive and creative writer. Thanda Gosht, Kali Shalwar, Khol Do, Open It to name only a few are the other well known stories of the author. In the Open It Sadat Manto depicting the madness caused by partition on women's, He brought to his readers how a woman was explored and used by man for their individual contentment and how the cruelty engulfed all parts of subcontinent. The successor of the Sadat Hasan Manto was the writer a magnus opus Train to Pakistan written by journalist cum historian Khushwant Singh (2006) after
the nine years of Partition. Singh himself belongs to the community who remained the chief victims of the Partition. That is why he in this novel, depicted all the ingredients subtly. Train to Pakistan is the story of an isolated village Mano Majho that is plunged into the abyss of religious hate. Singh’s attempt in the novel was to see the events from the point of view of the people of his village. “The novel shows the self-destruction of India not only as a social and political entity but as a human and moral community”. In the very opening lines of the novel, Singh laments that “the fact is both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped”. He neither blames one or other but the both parts. The women helplessness in the partition is beautifully summed up by another writer Bapsi Sidhwa (1997) who asks herself, —Why do they cry like that? Because they are delivering unwanted babies, I’m told or reliving hideous memories. Thousands of women were kidnapped.”

Train to Pakistan pictures as rightly put by K. K. Sharma and B. K. Johri 1984, “the brutal realistic story of political hatred and mass passion during the tragic days that proceeded followed the partition of India. Trains were halted and the unfortunate passengers were ruthlessly butchered. Men, women and children were indiscriminate victims. They were molested and killed by armed bands of men.” He criticised Hindus, Muslim and Sikhs alike for their acts and performances, for example, the Mullahs [Muslim preachers] were reported to have roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. Talking about Sikhs he narrated the story that one of a Sikh Sardar on a killing spree in a jeep alongside the column of mile- long Muslim refugees on foot “without warning they opened fire with their stang guns. God alone knows how many they killed…” The animal characters of the human beings, irrespective of their religion, caste were shown by the witness novelist. The novel also highlighted the positive atmosphere were a Sikh boy and a Muslim girl whose love affairs surpasses the dead cruelty and out- rage of war. But it is right to mention here that the much of the place has given by the writer to the romance and lust like:

“He brought the girl’s face nearer his own and
Began kissing her on the back of her neck and on her ears
He could not hear the goods trains any more.
It had left the countryside in utter solitude.
Hukum Chand could hear his breathing quicken.
He undid the strap of the girl’s bodice.”

I think it was because the great novelist has rightly read the pulse of the reader; to maintain the interest in his magnum opus. Khushwant Singh like Salman Rushdie believed that the birth of two children’s [Pak and India] doomed to destroy each other and sent a portentous signal about the future of the new nations. In the above mentioned partition stories both stresses that due to the partition of the country the friends become foes and long lasting traditions of brotherhood and peaceful coexistence quickly peter out.

Though as said earlier, partition is now a reality, we can't undo it. History teaches lessons and the need of hour is to learn it. The two so called “world wars” were fought among the European countries, not the Asian countries. Millions and trillions were exhausted; large numbers of human resources wasted but still they cooperate and live peacefully with each other; then why not the people of the south Asia? Let’s pledge for the same if not for ourselves but the new generations to come.

REFERENCE