



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

MEMORIES ARE THE FORERUNNERS OF HISTORY: A STUDY OF MALOY KRISHNA DHAR'S TRAIN TO INDIA (MEMORIES OF ANOTHER BENGAL)

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Abstract: Maloy Krishna Dhar was an author and a celebrated intelligence officer, born in Kamalpur, Bhairab-Mymensingh in East Bengal and migrated to West Bengal with his family during Partition. Gifted with the ability to observe and understand people and their motivations, penned down his personal memoirs to give us a clear and first-hand experience of his life. Train to India is one such book through which the author records the memories of the last sixty-five years – 1944 to 2009 that are a part of current history - a part of his life. He unravels the past in a most authentic manner and gives us the real account of the incidents witnessed by him at a very tender age, that led to the partition of Bengal and the formation of East Pakistan. Altogether, this paper tends to show how historical incidents and political ups and downs go hand in hand during the political upheavals of a state, all the while affecting the lives of the minorities and the marginalized.

Index Terms - Partition, The Great Exodus, Memorization, Historicization, Communal violence, Refugee, Identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

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The author memorizes the bygone days being one of the witness to the catastrophic event of the partition of Bengal from the standpoint of the higher section, i.e., 'the zamindars' and how the peaceful ambiance of the part of East Bengal turned into a slaughterhouse under the dire circumstances. Some of his family members were among the revolutionaries against the British, before the Independence and so the author got an access to the various events that took place in random succession towards the 'bifurcation of Bengal'. Later, the family started falling apart and also the Muslims, forcefully took hold of the land and property that were owned by their landlord. The article focuses upon why and how does the partition followed in the first place and what it counts to be a refugee victim? It also helps us to understand and analyze the various sensitive issues that were faced by thousands and millions of people who took the inevitable journey to the other side of the border to seek a better life. The journey taken up was not only a physical one but of a kind where the psyche of a person is highly affected. The fear of being uprooted from a place is as painful as to take shelter to a new place and to take a journey anew. Train to India talks about one such journey that the protagonist takes in a very tender age and being one of the victims, witnessed the chaos and atrocities that were forced upon the people of his region. It also gives us a grotesque image of being a refugee victim. In spite of romanticizing the events, the novel gives us minute details of the communal rites and violent atrocities that led to the division of East Bengal. The author, being part of it gives the work authenticity. As Umeeta Sadarangani explains the power of an autobiography, "... There is something powerful about learning from those who have experienced things first hand; they allow us to make sense of the numbers, to humanize vast tragedies, to replace stereotypes with faces. (pg., 65-66). She further opines upon conveying one's own partition experience that, "I want them to see how

everyday life changed drastically upon the creation of new national boundaries. All this happened to real people, though, not only to fictional characters,..." (pg., 67).

We are all aware of the Partition of India and Pakistan but many few talks about the 'vivisection of Bengal' into East and West Bengal. How East Bengal became a part of East Pakistan that later on, became an Independent Bangladesh. For Bengal, the influx of movement from one side of the border to the other continued for many years after partition, and continues in different forms. Some analysts have correctly indicated that, while "the Partition of Punjab was a one-time event with mayhem and forced migration restricted primarily to three years (1947-50), the Partition of Bengal has turned out to be a continuing process."² Therefore, displacement and migration from East to West, that is former East Pakistan and Bangladesh to West Bengal is still "an inescapable part of our reality."³ The author correctly describes the dilemma of the Partition as, "The Great Exodus took survivors across imaginary lines drawn on cartographer's maps, which promised them no home, land or manna from heaven. They waded through rivulets of blood and hillocks of skeleton but failed to negotiate the barrier of history. (TI:1).

Since antiquity, the peaceful rural community, where everyone, irrespective of whatsoever caste and religion lived in unity, was shattered by several events that were forceful and intimidating. The British were held responsible to divide the people on the grounds of religious, cultural and language difference in order to fulfil their selfish motives. Later, in the process of dividing the Nation into two, the prominent leaders or makers of the nation went blind towards the displacing population and the dire consequences that awaited them. In order to secure their own position in political field, they took decisions hastily, without measuring the intensity of turmoil that was later faced by the ignorant commoners. "There was no one to lead the confused Hindu and Muslim masses. (TI: 6). There was no patriotic fervor to be witnessed in this kind of partition, like the Partition of India and Pakistan, on the other hand, there were political parties and groups who took pleasure in self-aggrandizement and created a genocidal situation for the Hindus in east Bengal. "Look, the poison of religion has infected most of the people. They have brought religion to the center stage of national politics". (TI: 33).

In the name of Nationalism, people got carried away by hollow jingoism. Jinnah's Direct-Action Plan in support of Pakistan and the total indifference by the British who were eager to escape from India, led to Calcutta's bloodbath. Major political and societal changes started taking place in their village, and even communal tensions started breaking apart the Hindus and Muslims. The media and newspapers gave a disastrous face of violence towards Muslims in India and this, in turn, created more discomfort in the now, going to be Pakistan and resulted in human carnage. The Muslims started looking the Hindus with cynical eyes. This false Nationalism is well defined in the words of S. Irfan Habib in his 2017 book Indian Nationalism as; "In the doctrine of Pakistan, Islam is transformed into a political ideology and used to mobilize a majority sect of Muslims against everyone else". (From Indian Nationalism by S. Irfan Habib ch1, pg. 2).

The introduction of a different language and culture played a certain kind of dilemma. Earlier the people spoke Bengali, irrespective of belonging to a different caste and religion but later Urdu was made compulsory and the Muslim women were introduced to wear burqa and also the Muslims were strictly prohibited to take part in any of the festivals of the Hindus. Since antiquity, brutality and freedom is often writ upon the women's body and they have to carry on with it either silently or by being silenced. Women were sexually assaulted and killed. There were riots everywhere, their huts were burned and they were being ruthlessly murdered. The namahsudras (low class Hindus) supported the Muslim league, discarding their serfdom and stood against their landlords in the false hope of getting Independence, who were further exploited by the Muslim goons who took themselves to be the new lords of the piece of land of Pakistan that the landlords had inhabited since centuries. The Zamindars were demanded to surrender their properties to distribute it amongst the Muslim cultivators. The local leaders urged the Muslims to forcibly seize the Hindu properties. Politics has shattered the old bondages between the two communities. Land revenues were refused to be paid. Even the other caste or religion like, the Christians had no place in new Pakistan.

The train journeys became the last journey for the ones, trying to escape. Mutilated bodies were stuffed in the compartments, the police didn't interfere and some even shared the loot with the rioters. In the name of Hindustan-Pakistan both the sides killed each other. They had to die because they didn't belong to the other's religion. It was a genocidal situation for both the religion who crossed the border. The government didn't pay any attention towards the public and the Muslim league had a total control over the state affairs who concretized their culture and notions while suppressing the Hindus in every single way. They were left at the hands of fate that was not at all favourable. As Anasua Basu Raychaudhary opines to say, "The communal frenzy not only killed thousands of people, it also uprooted and displaced millions from their traditional homeland, their 'desh'" (pg.1). All of a sudden, they lost their territory, shifting into an 'unknown territory' that can never be called their own, along with a nostalgia that lingered forever. "But leaving the village did not mean mere physical dislocation. It was a kind of spiritual trauma. Only dislocated people know the pain". (TI: 53). Even at such a dire situation, when human misery was at its peak, the opportunist's made huge money and bought and sold lives.

Everything closed on a political and diplomatic note. It was simply clear by the increasing chaos that the leaders, such as, Nehru and Jinnah were power hungry and had no time to think for the welfare of the people. India and Pakistan were fighting over jute and coal. This was the reason the Indians were denied tickets to move to the safety of new India. Moreover, on special occasions tickets were issued to the Hindus under the direction of Ansar commanders and Muslim league stalwarts, to carry out a pogrom on wheels. These were the strategies to cleanse the pure land of the Muslims with the Hindu blood.

When they left home and reached the other side of the border, they were tagged as 'Refugees'. As I further explain in my article, the term "refugee" is a historical construction that privileged political and ideological considerations over economic and ecological ones. They were totally a different people now, their identities erased completely and were forced to push forward in the quagmires of reality with an uncertain belonging to an exile for a lifetime. All the people who crossed the border were all alike. "The distressed and panic stricken faces did not appear to be strangers. We too were in jeopardy and running to safety and I felt affinity with them".

(TI: 56). Their borders were the places of wilderness and violence where characters undergo unheroic and painful self-transformations. Said (2000) opened his essay "Reflections on Exile" with a warning against the aestheticization of exile: "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (173). He added that, given the scale of contemporary forced displacement, exile (by which he meant forced migration) is no longer humanistically or aesthetically comprehensible: "[T]o think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as "good for us." Is it not true that the views of exile in literature and, moreover, in religion obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography?" (174)

Many Hindus like the author's father who were reluctant to leave their village; their homeland, decided to be the loyal citizens of the new formed Pakistan. But this was a wrong assumption that came out to be an even more disastrous step. Neither Hindus nor Muslims had a protector. The zamindari system had collapsed and the new Pakistan administration had still not decided if they had any obligation to save the lives and properties of its Hindu citizens and other faiths. Even the condition of the Muslim inhabitants of the prior East Bengal was worse and they were despised openly by the Bihari Muslims who were fair skinned and had the knowledge of the language of the Mughal rulers. They called the Bengali Muslims as half-Hindus and demanded social superiority. And the landlord's family were the suspect section of the society. They were even forced to sign a pledge to support Pakistan in its war against Hindustan.

People who made to the other side of the border suffered more trauma; like the author who at a very young age suffered from the experience of drawing human blood in order to save his mother and he assumed for a very long time that only the knife could solve many problems in order to survive. He was haunted by the picture of human suffering he witnessed in his escapade. People encountered the violence around them and even fought back the rioters while travelling in the train. People were the scapegoat in the journey and their condition grew more traumatic who survived the journey and it became more pathetic for the ones who had to seek shelter and job to sustain their lives. One who had a relative were still lucky enough for they didn't had to live upon the crowded streets but had to somehow hang on to the relatives who never welcomed them. The lady would usually involve herself in the household chores in order to take off the favor bestowed by the relatives, the man would be outside hunting for a job and nobody would tend to the child who would grow like a wild weed. The schools won't allow admission to the ones without a transfer certificate and many (now termed as) refugees didn't had any such document with them. So, the future of the children was at stake and they were more helpless. People faced both physical and mental loss like the author, who in a young age lost his voice temporarily. Many refugees lived in the ghettos, bastis and slums and many even forcefully entered and started living into the deserted properties of the Muslims who moved to East and West Pakistan at the time of communal riots.

They were at the mercy of fate because government was not interested in their endeavors. "Thousands of refugees who waited for the government relief occupied the station's platforms... No centralized camps were set up for them." (TI: 293). The forest areas were destroyed, the tribes were uprooted from their ancestral lands and the animals were pushed deep into the forests. The condition of the areas to which the homeless people landed, bulk after bulk was a mess and chaotic such as, "The market area looked chaotic with the flood of people from India overwhelming the tiny capital town. Makeshift thatched structures had sprung up to cater to the needs of the refugees. The human butchers took advantage of the old market cliché: create scarcity, soar up demand, and hike up prices". (TI: 57). Language barrier between the Bengalis of East and West Bengal widened the sense of alienness among the refugees. People moved to new India with lots of dreams and plenty of aspirations, with the idea that the new India was a place of opportunity. But what happened was just the opposite, "Each one was on his own. Relatives seeking shelter were construed as unwanted beggars". (TI: 211). These were the conditions that befall the refugees.

II. CONCLUSION

The article not only gives a real picture of the ghastly acts and violence done towards the minority (in this case the Hindus) but also helps us better understand the real reason behind the partition of East Bengal. Thus, it is a narration of violence which creates history that records the doing and undoing of a nation. This special issue therefore not only focuses upon the power of memory in creating history but, it turns towards the modes of representation of the refugee condition and also studies the function(s) and impact of such representations on literary and artistic discourses. It also raises awareness about the conditions of life for those displaced. Further scrutinization can be done upon the topic from the standpoint of the minority section (in this case the lower section) of the society from whose lens the mayhem can be described.

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