



A Reflection on Partition Literature of Indian Subcontinent in English

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Abstract :

Though hundreds of books had been written on the history of partition but, it is difficult to have a complete and clear picture of the partition of India, its impacts, complexity and consequences. Indian subcontinent drank the sweet nectar of freedom from the foreign yoke of British colonial rule but had paid a heavy compensation in the form of partition and was divided into two parts—India and Pakistan. Dr. Asaduddin writes :

The partition of India, a momentous event in Indian history, continues to tantalize historians, haunt the Indian psyche and cast its shadow on our social and political life. It is closely linked with the chronicle of our freedom struggle that made the actual liberation of the country from foreign yoke an experience of violence, slaughter and exile for many. One of the most massive demographic dislocations in history, with its attendant human tragedy, it defies chroniclers to come to grip with it in all its dimensions. Tomes of analysis and exegesis by historians and bureaucrats have not led us anywhere closer to a definite understanding of the phenomenon, even though the recent works of Bipin Chandra. Ian Talbot, Ayesha Jalal and Musirul Hasan have brought fresh insights into the field. Historical accounts and official documents, despite their apparent 'transparency' and 'factuality' can tell us only about statistics at least one million deaths, ten millions refugees, and so on.

The trauma of partition and agony experienced by the people of Indian subcontinent found its voice in the literature of partition produced by various writers of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in different languages. An acclaimed poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz lamented about the brutalities and atrocities of partition, "This stain covered day break, this night bitten dawn. This dawn is not that dawn we craved for." Muslims living in India migrated to Pakistan and Hindus and Shikhs living in Pakistan migrated to India leaving behind everything; their ancestral homes, tradition and culture and became refugees with empty hands. Women became the largest sufferers, who were assaulted, tortured, sexually abused and abducted by the men of opposite communities on the name of religion. This tragedy of partition gave rise

to a new literary genre called “Partition Literature” almost in all languages of Indian subcontinent, particularly in Hindi, English, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Telegu, and other vernacular languages spoken in the subcontinent. This paper within its short canvas will endeavour to reflect briefly on partition literature in English.

Key Terms : Historian, demographic, desolation, chroniclers, Partition Literature, genocide

Introduction :

Indian subcontinent had long been under British rule. But long and continuous waves of Indian freedom movements led by indigenous enlightened people literally compelled the British Government to leave this subcontinent forever, handing the authority of administration over Indian. But what they did before expatriation was to build an unseen wall between the people of two major religions groups— Hindu and Muslim. And the obvious impact of this discrimination was partition. It is one of the most essential obligations of the historians to record all these truths, so that the succeeding generations may learn the true history of oppression and genocide and taking the lesson, they can learn to present a sound future-nation devoid of all kinds of oppression and discrimination. But historians almost fail to represent the detailed enormity of the tragedy of partition. The statistics failed to provide the exact accounts, how women must have felt while drowning themselves in the wells lest they be abducted and abused by men of other community. The statistical accounts given by historians fail to impart that it was feeling of insecurity and not religion or politics that forced most of the common people to choose India or Pakistan. The historical statistics or narrative do not narrate the identity crises that the innocent people faced during the period of partition between the families; husbands were separated from their wives, brothers from sisters and parents from their children. History did not clearly represent the sufferings of the women who remained the worst sufferers of the tragedy of partition. History includes or presents only facts and figures, but literature explores the feelings, emotions and sentiments of the people involved in the event directly or indirectly. History shows the superficial elements and does not go deeper into the minds and hearts of people as literature does in describing their experiences. In this way history is a simple record of partition written on pages but, literature is the reflection and representation of the sufferings, miseries, and difficulties faced by the people in the tragedy of partition. History usually records and presents the data about the leaders and other important men of the time and ordinary men and women are ignored. But literature explores the lives of even common, ordinary and marginalized people. History is

State-centric and nationalistic, literature is people centred. History mainly deals with the struggle of people for freedom, its progress and achievements, and narrates the partition only as a side of issue. But literature mainly explores the tragedy of partition, gives voice to the sufferings and miseries of abused women, victimized children and men. What history ignored is explored by literature. Thus we can safely say that literature plays an important role in penetrating into the human psyche, exploring its suffering, agony and sign of oppression along with the historical task of accumulating facts of the partition. The tragedy of partition has given rise to a new literary genre called "Partition Literature" almost in all languages of Indian subcontinent, particularly in Hindi, English, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Telegu, and other vernacular languages, spoken in the subcontinent. The common element in all these literatures is pathos and the common themes of their literary giants were violence, brutality, communal riots, bigotry, arson, exploitation, abduction, rape, murder etc. The writers of the partition literature presented the disastrous situation of partition in a different way as the historians depicted. Their literary works embodied the human sufferings, agony and trauma of partition. Writers such as Krishan chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Amrita Pritam, K. S. Duggal, Saadat Hasan Manto, Nanak Singh, Asmat Chughtai and others have revolved their writings on the subject of partition. In English Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children", Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan", K. A. Abbas's "Inquilab", Bapsi Sidhwa's "Ice Candy Man" and "Bribe", in Hindi Yashpal's "Jhoota Sach", Bhishma Sahani's "Tamas" in Urdu Saadat Hasan Manto's short-stories like "Toba Tek Singh", "Adkhri Salute", "Titwal Ka Kutta", "Khol Do", "Thanda Gosht", and other works by various writers in different languages presented the insight of hardships that common innocent people faced and endured in this nasty battle of power and politics. In this article I will endeavour to reflect briefly on some of partition literature in English.

Discussion :

The trauma left by partition of the Indian subcontinent remained a major concern of Indian literature after Independence. Most of the writers considered Independence as a false sense of security as it brought nothing which would be celebrated like Nazrul Islam of Bengal says that Swaraj did not bring anything for the hungry child or because it was divided India. Whole subcontinent was affected by the communal holocaust and is still fresh in the minds of people. Punjab and Bengal were directly affected by the partition hence the writers of these regions expressed the deepest anguish about partition. The first novel which described the

trauma of partition was Kushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan", in 1956, through which he made people of Indian subcontinent aware about the futility and hollowness of such genocide and brings out the futility of bloodshed and directly condemns the partition of India. He presented the events and incidents happened during partition realistically as it was a common practice during the time of partition to strip off the man's trousers to check whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim. In his novel "Train to Pakistan", a circumcised man

remarks :

Where on earth except in India would a man's life depended on whether or not his foreskin had been removed? I would be laughable if it were not tragic.

Thus Singh depicts a state of madness in people which made them act insanely during partition and it is obvious that if a man drinks the poison of communalism and hatred, he will naturally do such insane and lunatic acts. In this novel the plot of the story revolves around the village of Mono Majra located on the banks of river Sutlej near Indo-Pak border. All the communities of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh lived there with peace and harmony for centuries. The livelihood of the village depended on activities dependent on trains. From morning to evening there was din and bustle of train. One day a train arrived from Pakistan carrying dead bodies of Hindus. This created distrust and restlessness among people in the village.

People barricaded their doors and many stayed up all night talking in whispers. Everyone felt his neighbour's hand against him, and thought of finding friends and allies.

At that time Jugga, a local goon was in prison, who was in deep love with Nooran. They had a child and Nooran did not want to go to refugee camp in Pakistan as her son would not be accepted there due to his Sikh lineage. The people of the village were living peacefully until one day few youth gathered in the Gurdwara and delivered fiery speeches to take the revenge of killings, murder, loot and rape. There broke chaos in the village and the villagers made a plan to stretch out a rope across the bridge to stop the train carrying Muslim refugees. Then they fabricated a plan to kill Muslim passengers and set the train ablaze. Jugga was freed from jail by Hukum Singh. His beloved Nooran was also in the train hence he cut the rope despite being fired and saved her. Khuswant Singh kept the eternal love of man and woman alive in the novel despite all crucial circumstances and made love triumphant in the end and thereby brought out the message of humanity that literature only aims at where history only documents some scattered truth, not penetrating into the dark corner of human psyche.

Bapsi Sidhwa's "Ice Candy Man" also caught the current events of that time. The story of this novel was also based on the theme of brutalities of partition. "Ice Candy Man" revolves around a young Parsee girl, Lenny, who witnessed the brutalities and horrors of partition. A maid Shanta worked in this Parsee girl's house and was wooed by a string of lovers. Among them Masseur and Dilnawaz (Ice Candy Man) were in competition with each other in winning her favours. The maid was taking care of Lenny with innate love and affection. There was peace and harmony in the city of Lahore. People were living peaceful and affectionate lives until the news of partition breaks. All the peace and harmony was shattered. The Ice Candy Man killed the Masseur out of sheer hatred and jealousy. Then one day a train came from India with dead bodies and sacks full of breasts. In this incident, Dilnawaz's sister was also killed, which caused disgust and hatred in his mind towards all Hindus. He joined the rioters and took part in barbaric and violent events. He even abducted the maid whom he loved so much, but forced her to prostitution just because she was a Hindu. Later he married her but she was saved from prostitution by the help of Lenny's relatives and was shifted to refugee camps in Amritsar India. The most pathetic and disturbing aspect of partition is that people who lived together with peace and love as brothers for generation became enemies, thirsty of each other's blood, even molested women of each other's community. Lenny laments in "Ice Candy Man" :

The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot. I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming, hysterically sobbing... how long does Lahore burn? Weeks? Months?

Thus the whole world seems to be burning to a little child. The people were lynching each other, bigotry gains currency, people became insane. All these elements have been painfully depicted almost in all works of partition. Dilnawaz, the 'Ice Candy Man' became mad and furious when he came to know that his sister was murdered and started to take revenge on all Hindus. He roars, "I want to kill someone for each of the breasts cut off from the Muslim women". Women remained the worst sufferers of partition. They suffered all sorts of humiliation, violence, torture and barbarism. They were abducted, molested, raped and killed mutilated breasts of women came in trains. The easiest way of taking revenge to opposite community was to exploit their women, and they were victimized largely. They even choose the path of suicide or prostitution after sacrificing their chastity. In "Train to Pakistan", Kushwant Singh unveils the hollowness of social norms and absurd customs, when Sundari, a newly married bride was going to Gujranwala with her groom on the fourth day of

her marriage on the way to Pakistan their bus was attacked by Muslims. Her husband was stripped naked and she was sexually molested by the ferocious mob. So this is the reality partition literature aims at to depict vividly when historical events fail to do. Many writers were disgusted and disappointed with the violence and harrow of partition that they portrayed the realistic accounts of violence of partition very artistically without taking any side and blamed both the communities and nation equally. The most striking example of neutrality we find in Krishan Chander's "Peshwar Express" in which the author depicted a well-balanced statistics of the murdered men, women and children belonging to the both communities. Not only male writers but also female writers lamented on the tragedy of partition and showed grief and sorrow towards the victimized people and explored the plight of common people. Attia Hosan's "After the Storm" depicts the struggle of women and children in keeping themselves alive in the hell let loose by their men folk. A small, weak, thin with anxious eyes and a smile on her face, child, Bibi is led to speak about her past. Her childhood years had been robbed from her. She was unable to recall her childhood years and her mind fails to fill the gap between the refugee camp and her adoption. But what sensitive readers understand from the story is that Bibi is an orphan without a soul. In "Where is my Mother", Krishna Sobti reflects the terror and horrors imprinted on the mind of a little girl. She persistently pleaded and repeatedly requested to the Baluch-Yunua Khan, "I want my mother, where is my mother" (Dr. Raju J Patale. 36). Her inconsolable and anguished cry brings out the agony of the children who suffered during partition. Hence it is inevitable that in the catastrophe of partition not only adults suffered but also children were traumatized and exploited.

Conclusion :

There are enormous writings in Indian subcontinent dealt with the naked brutality of this notorious event called partition. It is not possible in this short canvas to cover all these writings. Raj Gul's novel, "The Rape", H. S. Gill's "Ashes and Petals", Alamgir Hashmi's novel "Clear Light of Day", Gurucharan Das's "A Fine Family", B. Rajan's "The Dark Dancer", Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children", K. A. Abas's Inquilab and many more works written by Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani writers represent the theme of the partition of Indian subcontinent into two nations on the basis of religion and the resultant brutality, oppression, rape, murder, abduction and above all the annihilation of humanity. Thus, the role of these writers is not merely to record this destructive event fragmentedly but to dive deep into the root causes of it's occurrence and to depict the tragedy it brings to

humanity. In this way literature plays an important role of preventing the future generations from taking part in the dusty dance of death which history does not.

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