HORRORS OF PARTITION: A STUDY OF VIOLENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN KHUSWANT SINGH’S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN AND BAPSI SIDHWA’S CRACKING INDIA

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ABSTRACT
Partition of India (1947) created at least 10 million refugees and resulted in at least one million deaths. The bounds of the property loss could not encompass the devastation. The number of persons killed, tortured, maimed, abducted and exposed to disease remains incalculable. The emotional pain of severance from home, family and friendships is by its nature immeasurable. Partition unleashed barbarism in its cruellest form which gave birth to unending violence and trauma that caused severe psychological trauma for the people of that era to accept. The violence attached to Partition was mostly faced by Women and Children of that era. The people believed that they best way to take revenge was to torture the women and children of the opposite religion. The very essence of humanity was lost during the entire episode of Partition, the effects of which are still prevalent but not addressed by many, even after 70 years of Independence. This paper tries to put forth the horror of violence and mental trauma that people at the time of partition underwent, calling for immediate and strong addressing on the same. The Paper would also give an account of women being the worst sufferers of Partition which led to lifelong shame and discontentment resulting in psychological trauma.

KEYWORDS: Violence, Psychological Trauma & Discontentment

INTRODUCTION

This is not the dawn we awaited for so long [1]

-Faiz Ahmed Faiz

The transfer of population surrounding the Partition of India on August 14-15, 1947 created at least 10 million refugees and resulted in at least one million deaths. This is, perhaps as much as we can quantify the tragedy. The bounds of the property loss, even if they were known, could not encompass the devastation. The number of person’s beaten, maimed, tortured, raped, abducted, exposed to disease and exhaustion or otherwise physically brutalized remains measureless. The emotional pain of severance from home, family and friendships is by its nature immeasurable. Seventy years have passed and the Partition remains unrequited in the historical experience of the subcontinent.

This is, in one sense as the truth remains that Partition unleashed barbarism so cruel, indeed so thorough in its cruelty with complementary acts of compassion so magnificent- in short a complex of impulses so perversious, so heroic, so visceral, so human – that they cannot be easily assimilated into normal life. Neither can they be forgotten. And ingloriously, the experience of the Partition has been perhaps most clearly assimilated in the
perpetuation of communal hostility within both India and Pakistan, for which it serves as the defining moment. The hope for a different assimilation has motivated the recent spate of publications on the literature of the Partition where three major anthologies in the past two years has come up. These collections attest not only to the resurgence of literary interest in Partition, and the emergence of Partition writings as a genre in modern South Asian Literature in translation, but to a different approach to the event itself; an unbridled reclamation, a direct gaze at ugliness and survival.

India and Pakistan were born in massacres carried out between populations which stamped their mark on the entire subsequent history of the region. The cost of creating India and Pakistan in 1947 led to a huge expense. The communal violence exercised by the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs led to the largest peacetime exchange of population.

The extent of the violence is truly unfathomable. By August 1947 the end of the British Raj in the Subcontinent was marked. With the departure of the British from the subcontinent it led to the creation of independent India and Pakistan. The division was based on two nation theory with the argument that the Hindus and the Muslims cannot live together as one nation since both have distinct social, cultural and religious identities. It resulted in violent migration of the people across the nation. Sikhs and Hindus moved into India whereas Muslims moved to Pakistan with the prospects of peaceful and calm living, with their own religious identities. This mass scale migration called for massive violence and trauma. It is very difficult to give an exact account as to how it impacted the people of that era but it has got similar aspects like the great war of Britain and China. Describing the monstrosity of the situation Urvashi Butalia says that the partition left one million dead, 75000 women abducted and raped, and turning twelve million displaced into refugees status. Unfortunately, the split between India and Pakistan heightened each other’s resentment instead of seeking peace in the region. This resulted in huge civil tension leading to split families, burnt homes and abandoned villages. Some women were so conscious of the sexual humiliation that it led to mass suicides. Partition trauma was further noticed by others when families were destructed through murder, suicide and rapes.

To understand and define the inner chaos and the societal complexes that weighed down the society after the tragedy of Partition, a lot many attempts were made to do so in the fictional world. The vast volume of Partition fiction in English, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and other languages of the Subcontinent faithfully records the gruesome disaster in the wake of Partition. The Indian and the Pakistani writers were more interested to talk about the life-long sufferings and bewilderment of these people.

Khuswant Singh’s Train to Pakistan (1956), Amitava Ghosh’s Shadow Line (1988), Bapsi Sidhwa’s Ice Candy Man (1998), Urvashi Butalia’s The other Side of silence: Voices from the Partition of India are some such examples that attempt to gives us an insight into the public frenzy, communal hatred, extreme disintegration and large scale sectarian violence. The novels have received worldwide recognition and admiration for documenting faithful representation of mutual hatred, mistrust and enormous upheavals culminating in the result of Partition.

Khuswant Singh was thirty and Bapsi Sidhwa was too young at the time of Partition to understand Partition violence. Khuswant Singh is a renowned Indian writer whereas Bapsi Sidhwa originates from Pakistan. Although they share the same theme of Partition and post Partition turbulence in their novels but they talk about the physical tortures and psychological trauma in a different aspect. Both of them paint a vivid picture of the separation between the Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in the summer of 1947.
Khuswant Singh’s “Train to Pakistan” and Bapsi Sidhwa’s “Ice Candy Man” describes the events in a way where the tragedy comes alive. The novels were published keeping in mind a gap of three decades. The novelists share a lot of details regarding Partition keeping in the originality. The novelists provide human dimensions instead of depicting it. A study further establishes the fact that the two novels unfold the fact that horror and trauma was further recognised when people of both the sides received trains full of mutilated corpses. The train serves to be the utmost source of trauma. The most affected regions stood to be Punjab as it was divided into two halves. It led to huge scale migration to seek a peaceful land for their own safety which gave rise to violence and crime scenes.

Lenny the major protagonist of Ice Candy Man commented “born with the awareness of war”. It was decided to divide Punjab between India and Pakistan when rioting starts. Friends became foes which led to riots to in major parts of the city. They killed and plundered widely. People were only talking about bloodshed and trauma attached to Partition. Master Tara Singh’s stirring address against the division of Punjab makes the mob turns “maniac”. The Police was targeted and as such they were unable to take any action against the heavy riot. The question that worried was “How long does Lahore burn? Weeks, Months” Ice candy Man reports to his friends that a train from Gurdaspur has arrived in Lahore full of dead Muslims. He shouts “Everyone is dead and butchered. The trains are full of mutilated corpses”

The pictures of this mass scale destruction and disaster was also traced in Train to Pakistan as well. In the opening lines of the novel, Khuswant Singh said that it was a horrific event that led to this mass scale destruction. The quiet and serene ambience of Mano Majra starts to disintegrate when a cluster of dacoits kill Ram Lal- the money lender. Circumstances are worsened when two trains arrive full of murdered Sikhs and Hindus.

All of these people were massacred to pieces. The harshness of the state of affairs is judged from the very fact that the fuel stock for funeral pyre to burn the corpses was used and bodies couldn’t tend incarceration. Dead bodies were buried in a pit dug near the station. Mother Nature also played chaos at this very hour of trial and trauma. During the monsoon the murky floodwaters of the Sutlej stream that borders the city began to rise uncurbed, the gory remains of the Muslims killed float by, joined by the carcasses of the still yoked cattle. Flocks of vulture start to devour the flesh which stands out to be a gruesome event for the people living nearby. Train to Pakistan talks about the mutilated breasts of the bodies arriving from the Pakistani side like Ice-Candy Man who uses the same reference. The Ice-Candy Man willingly expresses his determination and convinces his friends to go for revenge upon the Sikhs and the Hindus. To defile a woman’s body was considered to be the greatest disgrace for a family to bear. Women were also seen to deliver unwanted babies with utmost pain and cry. It became a norm of the victors to celebrate their victory on the bodies of women.

The two most dreadful scenes of the novels stands to be the abduction of Ayah by Ice Candy Man. He very intelligently strips the woman of her identity as a woman and as a Hindu. He prefers to keep her in a “kotha” even after marrying her. Ayah is not accepted by her family when they get to know of the incidents. She suffers psychological and emotional outbursts throughout her life. Hamida also gives us a similar reflection of rejection when she was finally discarded by her family. People of that era believed in the conscience that women should not be touched by other men. Lenny who is seen to be a young girl undergoes huge psychological transformations as she is anguished to hear the wailings of a recovered woman at the refugee camp near her house.
Train to Pakistan also accounts some of the similar incidents when Sundari was brutally raped by the mob of the other gang while she was going to Gujranwala with her husband on the fourth day of her marriage. It was portrayed in a way where her arms were still covered by red lacquer and her palms bright with Henna. She is gang-raped while her husband is dismembered before her eyes. Many women died in order to save themselves from the gruesome injuries. The sole role of a woman stood to be the preservation of their chastity and to protect their religious and family honour.

Partition of India records some of the most traumatic experiences of the people which enable us to understand the different kinds of upheaval they underwent at that point of time. Women never played any active role in all the mass scale destruction. Not only man but women became the object of violence as their bodies became the role purpose of religious and national honour. In the process rape became the most active way to make a woman go silent and add disgrace to her religious community. The different kinds of thunderbolts that women underwent at that point of time varied from different aspects as the only way to satisfy their hunger was to abuse and torture the women of the other religion. Women were seen to accept their position as inferior and started to serve their identity to the male of their own kin. It became a rule for the women to survive and serve to the needs of the men of the same kin. Women were tortured in the best possible way. In a culture where women were seen just to act as a torch bearer of respect and honour, they were treated with utmost disgrace. In a society where the only role of women is to serve to the society for their feminine attributes, it became very difficult for the women to survive under such circumstances. The different kinds of injustice that women underwent at that point of time cannot be justified by any means.

Women during the Partition riots were mostly seen as subjects. If we consider any text, we can see that women were the silent sufferers of such a disgrace. All the different kinds of community believed in nothing but forcing their cruel acts on all these women. We also see a wide range of migration happening at that point of time. It clears the air that in order to affect the people of the other religion, women came up as the option of accepting such tumultuous blows. We talk about all the writers of that era and we also notice the striking similarity in all their writings. Mostly all the writers of that era believe in the sole fact of talking more about the horrors that were welcomed by all the people of that time.

Literature acts as a mirror for the suffering and pain of the innocent which is more universal and better accepted than political discourses. The human sufferings served to be an endless phenomenon which requires recognition and affirmation by the society. Partition Literature works as a vehicle in bringing the horrors of those people. Women and children served to be the worst sufferers of such a political discourse. The events led to such inhuman experiences where people lost humanity and called for some of the most horrific events. After seventy years of Partition we are happy to get our respective nations but we should also recognize the sufferings and the psychological trauma of the people who sacrificed every bit to come to this position. The different kinds of events that took place during the time of Partition makes the reader understand the different kinds of psychological trauma that the people underwent at that time. The novels, that I study brings before the audience a mirror which better makes them understand the importance of residing in an independent country. Several writers have come up with an account of stating the difficulties that one faced during that time of the decade. Most of the writers fail to understand the psychological upheaval that took place to attain this political discourse right now. Khuswant Singh pens down the different kinds of experiences and tries to give a voice to such kind of actions but the writers also wants the reader to understand the different kinds of psychological upheaval that somewhere comes attached with such kind of actions.
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