

Trauma of Partition: A Study of Khushwant Singh's "Train To Pakistan" and Chaman Nahal's "Azadi"

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Abstract: *Indian writings in English, a product of the clash between Indian and the Western cultures, have evolved to a great extent in the post-colonial era. The partition of India, also known as the "Great Divide", has been depicted by many creative minds through novels, dramas and films. "Train To Pakistan" and "Azadi" are two such novels which depict the effect of the event on the individuals. The effect was manifold and the people had to face unprecedented problems like displacement, abduction of their womenfolk, atrocities and loss of near and dear ones. As an Indian trauma, the partition has been described as a massive human tragedy by both Khushwant Singh and Chaman Nahal. In fact, the incidents which took place as a result of the partition keep on affecting the relationship of India and Pakistan even today. Both the countries are mutually suspicious and the danger of nuclear war is not out of question.*

Key words: *Partition, Displacement, Abduction, Trauma, Refugees, Victims, Aftermath.*

Indian writings in English may be considered as the result or product of the historical encounter between the Indian and the Western cultures. The Indian society had been a closed society before the British Raj and with the coming of the British, the barrier of the closed society was broken and a new era started. In this new era, with the introduction of the British educational system, a new class of Indian bourgeoisie took birth and these people gave expression to their feelings and experiences in English language. As a result, a new literature was born which is known as Indo-Anglian literature, the contents of which are necessarily Indian but the medium of expression is English. Indo-Anglian literature upholds the Indian spirit at large which depicts Indian thought, Indian emotion but English only in words. The early Indian writers used chaste English which was unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian but in the Post-colonial era, the writers such as Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Chaman Nahal and others use Indian words frequently in their works and that makes this literature purely Indian.

The partition of India, which is also known as the "Great Divide", has been a highly controversial arrangement in the whole history of India and, in fact, it remains a cause of much tension on the Indian subcontinent even today. It is estimated that nearly half a million people perished in riots, massacre or just from the hardships of their flight to safety and nearly twelve million became homeless. Writes K.R.Srinivasa Iyenger, "The partition came like an unexpectedly virulent storm, and individuals were like leaves blown away, now this side now that, and when the uneasy calm followed the storm, the prospect was changed out of recognition. Only memories, and regrets, remained- moving about like ghosts in the night." (425) In fact, the partition was such a traumatic experience for the people of India especially for those of Punjab and Bengal that many creative minds on both sides created literary and cinematic depictions on the subject. Eye witnesses from both sides of the conflict wrote about their feelings and experiences during the genocide as they had been confronted to the blind and irrational violence and hatred. In some of these works, we witness the carnage during the refugee migration and in some others, we see the aftermath of partition in terms of difficulties faced by them on both sides. Some of the novels written about this event are "Train To Pakistan" (1956) by Khushwant Singh, "Toba Tek Singh" (1955) by Saadat Hassan Manto, "Tamas" (1974) by Bhishm Sahni, "A Bend In The Ganges" (1965) by Manohar Malgonkar and "Azadi" (1975) by Chaman Nahal. Besides these novels, some films have also been produced on this theme which offer a sense of nostalgia sustaining the event of partition in India.

The present paper tries to focus on the trauma of partition which the migrating people had to face as described by Khushwant Singh in "Train To Pakistan" and Chaman Nahal in his semi-autobiography "Azadi". As the titles of both the novels suggest, these are about the partition of India. Chaman Nahal's "Azadi" describes about the city of Sialkot which is in Pakistan and the journey of some Hindu/Sikh families to India and their struggle to settle in the new environment. On the other hand, "Train To Pakistan" describes a small imaginary village Mano Majra which is "lost in the remote reaches of the frontier" (TTP-2) on the Indian side. Both the novels have been divided into parts with titles which are highly suggestive. "Train To Pakistan" has been divided into four parts the titles of which are "Dacoity", "Kalyug", "Mano Majra", and "Karma". The part entitled "Dacoity" covers the peaceful time in the village with routine activities on the part of the villagers. "Kalyug" covers the time just after the announcement of the independence of India. "Mano Majra" focuses on the effects of partition on the village and "Karma" describes the reaction of the villagers in the situation. Similarly "Azadi" has been divided into three parts the titles of which are "The Lull", "The Storm", and "The Aftermath". The part entitled "The Lull" describes the time before 15th August 1947, "The Storm" describes the genocide and the journey of the refugees from Sialkot to Delhi and "The Aftermath" describes the hardships which the refugees have to undergo to settle in an alien land. The trauma of the partition was manifold and it affected the people in various ways some of which have been discussed in the paper as follows.

Displacement

Displacement was the first thing which came as a result of the partition of India and massive population exchanges occurred between the two newly formed states in the months immediately following the partition. In both the novels we witness displacement at a large scale. "By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people – Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs – were in flight" (TTP-2). In the novel "Azadi", the protagonist Lala Kanshi Ram, his family and his Hindu and Sikh neighbours have to flee from their beloved place Sialkot leaving all their belongings and a well flourished business to an unknown place. They move in large convoys fearing

attack from the other community and are humiliated physically and mentally until they reach their unknown destination. In the same way in "Train To Pakistan", the Muslims of Mano Majra who have been living in perfect harmony with the Sikhs and Hindus of the village, have to leave abruptly for the newly created country Pakistan. During this course of displacement, many of the refugees die due to fatigue, weather, illness or attack as the migrating people have to move on foot or in their bullock carts. The governments of both the countries were unable to provide people safety, security or means to move from one place to other and there was the atmosphere of complete anarchy.

Effect on Women

During such crises as the partition of India, women become a soft target to humiliate and the partition was no exception. The partition led to an ethnic conflict and immense social consequences and uncountable tragedies across the Indian-Pakistani border. Andrew Major writes, "During partition Punjabi society was affected at all levels by murder, displacement and assault. Rival communities targeted women to humiliate them and actions against women included rape, abduction and forcible conversions. Violence against women also occurred in Jammu and Kashmir and the Rajputana states." (57-58) The processions of naked women were carried out on both sides which is mentioned in both the novels under study. In "Azadi" the scene of procession has been described by Nahal vividly :

"The procession arrived. Arun counted them. They were forty women, marching two abreast. Their ages varied from sixteen to thirty, although, to add to the grotesqueness of the display, there were two women, marching right at the end of the column, who must have been over sixty. They were all stark naked. Their heads were completely shaven; so were their armpits. So were their pubic regions. Shorn of their body hair and clothes, they looked like baby girls.....The women walked awkwardly, looking only at the ground. They were all crying though their eyes shed no tears. Their faces were formed into grimaces and they were sobbing. Their arms were free, but so badly had they been used, so wholly their spirits crushed, their morale shattered, none of them made any attempt to cover themselves with their hands."(296)

The scene of the procession is quite heart rending and enough to show that humanity was nowhere and everyone had become shameless and heartless. In the same scene writes Nahal :

"The procession moved through the bazaar, and along with the procession moved a river of obscenities – foul abuses, crude personal gestures, spurts of sputum, old articles like small coins, faded flowers, cigarette butts and bidis that were thrown at the women. As soon as the women came near, the section of the crowd became hysterical. 'Rape them'. 'Put it inside of them'. 'The filthy Hindu bitches'. 'The kafir women'. Some said worse things. Then came the shower of spittle."(298)

All these things happen not only on the Western side of the Punjab but on the Eastern side also. When Lala Kanshi Ram reaches Amritsar, he hears that the same kind of procession of Muslim women is being carried out through the bazaar. In "Train To Pakistan" also, we come across such scenes. This is what happens with Sundari, the daughter of District Magistrate Hukum Chand's orderly. She is newly married and going with her husband Mansa Ram in a bus. On the way, the bus is attacked by a mob. Mansa Ram is killed before the very eyes of Sundari and Sundari is raped on the road by the mob. In "Azadi" Sunanda is forcibly taken away by an army captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan and is raped by him, though he is killed by Arun on the spot. During the attack on the camp, Arun's beloved Chandni is among the many women who are kidnapped by the attackers. Many of them return the next day but Chandni never returns. Writes Nahal, "The women that were discovered were led away silently by their families. None showed joy at the reunion; some seemed sorry the girls had come back at all, soiled and dishonoured". (319) Such was the plight of the women during the partition and it has been realistically described in both the novels.

Atrocities and Killings

Not only the women were targeted but the men, old and young, and even the innocent children were not spared during the process of displacement. Trains carrying the refugees were attacked and reached their destination with dead bodies only. In "Train To Pakistan", the 'ghost train' which reaches Mano Majra and because of which the tension spreads in the village, has been described through the words of the District Magistrate Hukum Chand, "There was a man holding his intestines, with an expression in his eyes which said: "Look what I have got!" There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just become voiceless. Some of them did not have a scratch on their bodies.....The most vivid picture was that of an old peasant with a long beard; he did not look dead at all. He sat jammed between rolls of bedding on the upper rack meant for luggage, looking pensively at the scene below him. A thin crimson line of coagulated blood ran from his ear onto his beard."(TTP-85)

The Sutlej becomes the witness to the killing of humans and animals. Many dead bodies of humans and animals are taken away by it as it rises and it is described vividly by Khushwant Singh:

"An old peasant with a grey beard lay flat on the water. His arms were stretched out as if he had been crucified. His mouth was wide open and showed his toothless gums, his eyes were covered with film, his hair floated about his head like a halo. He had a deep wound on his neck which slanted down from the side to chest. A child's head butted into the old man's armpit. There was a hole in its back. There were many others coming down the river like logs hewn on the mountains and cast into streams to be carried down to the plains. A few passed through the middle of the arches and sped onward faster. Others bumped into the piers and turned over to show their wounds till the current turned them over again. Some were without limbs, some had their bellies torn open, many women's breasts were slashed. They floated down the sunlit river, bobbing up and down. Overhead hung the kites and vultures."(TTP-144)

The above quoted scene is enough to show how brutal the people of both sides had become. Even the armed forces were not working neutrally and were helping the people in these heinous crimes. Chaman Nahal, in "Azadi", describes that when there was an attack on the refugee camp in Narowal, trained people were involved in it. Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan of the Pakistani army was leading this attack and he himself took Sunanda away forcibly to rape her. In this attack, many people, including Sunanda's husband Suraj Prakash are killed by the mob. In "Train To Pakistan" also, the Sikh youths plan to kill the people at large scale by tying a rope just at the right height so as to make the people sitting on the roof of the train fall into the river but Juggut Singh saves them by cutting the rope at the right time at the cost of his own life.

Love relationships

In both the novels we find love stories going on. In "Azadi", there is Arun, Lala Kanshi Ram's son, who loves a Muslim girl Nur and because of the partition he has to part from her. During his journey to India, Arun falls in love with Chandni, who has been living in his neighbourhood in

the same building where Arun lives with his family. He has promised her that he will marry her after reaching India. But during the attack on the camp, Chandni is kidnapped and she does not return though Arun keeps on waiting for her till the end of the journey. In the same way, in “Train To Pakistan” also the main focus is on the love story of Juggut Singh, an outlaw, and Nooran, a Muslim weaver’s daughter. While Juggut Singh is in the police custody, she has to leave the village abruptly with the Muslims of the village. Nooran requests Juggut Singh’s mother to accept her as she is pregnant and the child is Juggut Singh’s but the mother does not pay heed to her request and their love story comes to an end. Juggut Singh loves Nooran so much that when, after coming out of jail, he hears of the plan to tie a rope at the height so as to make the people sitting on the roof of the train fall into the Sutlej, he imagines that Nooran may be one of the victims. He decides to cut the rope and is shot dead in his attempt but only after ensuring that the rope is cut and the people on the roof of the train are safe.

The partition of India has been described as an Indian trauma and the novels under discussion confirm this description. In fact, it was a massive human tragedy in which everyone lost and none gained. It should have been avoided but could not be. The violent nature of the partition created an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion between India and Pakistan and because of the incidents which took place during the course of migration, the relationship between the nations has never been cordial. There have been three wars fought between the two countries and the danger of fourth one, which will be disastrous if fought, is not out of question.

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