

Theme of Partition: The Prospective of Khushwant Singh in 'Train to Pakistan' and Bapsi Sidhwa in 'Ice-Candy Man'

Suman Rani (M.A., M. Phil, NET)
Research Scholar

Abstract: The partition of the Indian subcontinent was an event of such a great magnitude that profoundly affected human emotions and values to such a great extent that all creative arts and artists have come under its influence. This historical event of great human significance inspired a host of sensitive and creative writers to express their human concern and inner agony through the literary medium of fiction in English. My research focuses on different versions of Partition portrayed in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*.

Index Terms: Brutality, Communal holocaust, Partition, Territory.

Introduction

Partition will forever remain inscribed in the psychic consciousness of our people. Collectively experienced and yet individual suffered retold in numerous voices, it is the cultural inheritance of all Indians entering the 21st century. The fear of being flooded out by memories of Partition bewildered ordinary people petrified by the shock.

A number of novels in the Indian sub-continent have been written on this theme. This unforgettable historical moment has been captured as horrifying by the novelists like Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy- Man*. The partition of India is a most horrible incident in the history of Indian Sub-continent. Because this event significantly changed the map of the Indian and its effects are still being experienced even after years of Independence and so the Partition. These horrible experiences became the subject matter of the novels by many novelists. Bapsi Sidhwa is a Parsee, Pakistani & Punjabi writer she has written *The Bride* (1987), *The crow Eaters* (1990), *Ice-candy-man* (1989), *An American Brat* (1994) and *water* (2001) Khushwant Singh is a Sikh Indian writer, has written novels like *Train to Pakistan* (1988), *I shall not hear*, *The Nightingale* (1988). The present study intends to undertake a comparison mainly between *Ice candy man* - and *Train to Pakistan* for the portrayal of the different aspects of partition by the two writers in these novels. The present study aims to fill gaps and to show that in case of Sidhwa the ideology of her country i.e. Pakistan does not affect her response to the partition. In her novel *Ice-candy-man* Bapsi Sidhwa shows the pre-Partition situation where people lived peacefully and harmoniously, socially, culturally & religiously. She describes through Lenny, the child narrator, the harmony between Ayah & her admirers & also amongst themselves, in *Ice-candy-man*. As portrayed in *Ice-candy-man*, the Muslims & the Sikhs live in peace & harmony & are not conscious of their religious identities,

Khuswant Singh was an Indian author, lawyer, diplomat, journalist and politician. His experience in the 1947 Partition of India inspired him to write *Train to Pakistan* in 1956 in which became his most well-known novel. Khuswant Singh was the first Indian novelist in English to write about the horror and holocaust of partition with great artistic concern in the *Train to Pakistan*. It is not partition which becomes symbolic of the attraction and attention in the novel but certainly, the bitterness and sympathy in the novelist's attitude, and the strange impression that he was simultaneously inside the action as a participant and outside it as a dispassionate observer. It is therefore, surprising that the *Train to Pakistan* is both a grim and pathetic tale of individuals and communities caught in the swirl of partition. *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh is a blend of history, politics and reality of the time of 1947. *Train to Pakistan* is a symbolic novel, through the symbol of train; the novelist depicts the harsh reality and mass migration of the time from India to Pakistan, and Pakistan to India. Mano Majra is a typical village at the border of Pakistan is a central of the novel. The specialty of the village is that the people of Sikh and Muslim are equal in number. The novel is based on the theme of partition like other novelists and their works. Iqbal Singh is a well-educated social worker from Britain. On the other hand Juggut Singh is a, muscular and uneducated person better known as badmash or dacoit. Both the persons are of different characteristics but both are arrested for the same reason of Ramlal's murder which they had not committed. Iqbal and Juggut Singh came to know upon their release that some religious agitators came to Mano Majra and instills the local Sikhs against Muslim and convinces them for mass murder. Both, Iqbal Singh and Juggut have the potential to save the lives of the people in the train, though they may be Muslims, peoples of Mano Majra or Nooran his beloved. Juggut Singh sacrifices his life and saves the life of many. The people of various religions like Hindu, Muslim and Sikh have been living side by side happily and unanimously since many generations. The Government officials and the Britishers have not taken any serious account of these villages and the great violence erupted in them. Mano Majra is a central village maintaining its order and also a center of conflict. The writer narrates the violence at both the sides of the border in a very effective, vivid and graphic manner. The novel, *Train to Pakistan* revolves around a single incident from the beginning to the end of the novel. The incident was the

murder of Ram Lal and dacoit at his home by the gang of Malli. This is foregrounding of the communal violence. The study of the novel focuses on such issues which are not the accidental instead these are the preludes of the communal violence to know which are innocent. The murderers of Ram Lal are Malli and his gang but arrested for the crime to those who are unknown and innocent to the murder, the persons like Iqbal Singh and Juggut Singh. Besides this, the happy and peaceful town Mano Majra disturbed a lot by the trains, its delayed and its arrival full with corpses. The same time rumors spread in the border villages about the communal riots.

Political freedom had been achieved apparently through 'non-violent' means but Hindu-Muslim riots had erupted in several parts of India and also in the newly created Pakistan. Hukum Chand's words of self-introspective rumination quietly proclaim the futility of this political freedom without proper orientation of the people:

What were the people in Delhi doing? Making fine speeches in the assembly! Loudspeakers magnifying their egos; lovely looking foreign women in the visitor's galleries in breathless admiration: 'He is great man, this Mr. Nehru of yours. I do think he is the greatest man in the world today, And how handsome! Wasn't that a wonderful thing to say? 'Long ago we made tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially.' Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, you made your tryst. So did many others."

Khushwant Singh pours out the agonizing tale of human tragedy and the impact of the partition on the peace loving Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of "Mano Majra". Khushwant Singh has designed the novel to explore the brutal and hypocritical image of man and simultaneously present his faith in the values of love, loyalty and humanity. Khushwant Singh had selected the title Mano Majra for the novel *Train to Pakistan* as Mano Majra, a small village, close to the Indo-Pakistan border serves as the setting for the novel. For centuries in this village Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs have loved each other as brothers and lived together in peace. But this tiny village becomes the microcosm of communal conflict and violence generated by the partition. This village had known no communal hatred and distinction before the flames of pre-partition communal frenzy reach there. 1947 was not like other times; it was different in character. The situation of the country deteriorated miserable in the wake of the partition. There were killing and rapes. Evils dominated the scene. The violence that started in Calcutta swept the country and tortured people.

The novelist puts the blame on both the Hindus and the Muslims. He feels the active participation of the Mullahs in instigating the people to mutiny and killing. Mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with the boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. The partition was the result of the communal suspicion sown by the leaders. The sub-inspector was enraged at the ignorance of the leaders in Delhi about the brutal acts in Punjab done in the wake of partition. He referred to the tragic scenes of the horrible killings in Pakistan and regretted the utter ignorance of the leaders preaching non-violence. He said to the deputy commissioner:

What do the Gandhi caps in Delhi know about the Punjab? What is happening on the other side in Pakistan does not matter to them. They have not lost their homes and belongings; they haven't had their mothers, wives, sister and daughters raped and murdered in the streets. Did your honour hear what the Muslim mobs did to Sheikhpura and Gujranwala? Pakistan Police and the Army took part in the killings. Not a soul was left alive

The depiction of these developments fairly reveals the inhuman drama enacted during those tragic days of the partition. It constantly reminds the readers of the bloody history that followed Independence. Even the hearts of the people, who were entrusted with the task of maintaining law and order, were burning with the fire of communal hatred. The magistrates and the police were indulging in ruthless cruelties in both Pakistan and India.

Bapsi Sidhwa was born in Karachi in 1939 and brought up and educated in Lahore. She is a Pakistani Parsee women novelist of the twentieth century. She deals with both the pre- and postcolonial period of the Indian subcontinent. She has written four novels in English that reflect her personal experience of the Indian subcontinent's Partition, abuse against women, immigration to the US, and the Parsi community. She has also been on the advisory committee to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Women's Development. In 1991 she was awarded the Sitara-i-Imtiaz, Pakistan's highest national honor in the arts.

Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man* or *Cracking India* deals with the partition of India and its aftermaths. This is the first novel by a female novelist from Pakistan which describes the fate of people in Lahore. The novel deals with "the bloody partition of India through the eyes of a girl Lenny growing up in a Parsee family, surviving through female bonding and rebellion.". First published in 1988 in London, this novel is set in pre-Partition India in Lahore. *Ice-Candy-Man* is a novel of upheaval which includes a cast of characters from all communities. There are Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and Parsis, so a multiple perspective of Partition emerges as viewed by all the affected communities. Bapsi Sidhwa uses a narrator, Lenny to tell the tale. The device of the child narrator enables Bapsi Sidhwa treat a historical moment as horrifying as Partition without morbidity, pedanticism or censure. The highlight of the novel is that the author throughout maintains a masterful balance between laughter and despair. The subtle irony and deft usage of language creates humour which does not shroud but raucously highlights the traumas of Partition. Sensitively the author shows the human toll of Partition, when a concerned Lenny asks: "Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is?"

The impact of Partition is psychologically understood and narrated through the feelings of a child, who is a member of a minuscule minority. The sense of loss is aptly demonstrated as Lenny and her brother Adi wandering through the garden observe.

“Adi and I wander from group to group peering into faces beneath white skull-caps and above ascetic beards. I feel uneasy. Like Hamida I do not fit. I know we will not find familiar faces here.” The scenes of violence and arson and above all the venomous hatred of friends who had months earlier rationalized about the impossibility of violence, have a frightening impact on the young Parsi girl Lenny. Violence breeds violence and Lenny is also a victim. Her rage is directed at her collection of dolls. In a frenzy she acts: “I pick out a big, bloated celluloid doll. I turn it upside down and pull its legs apart. The elastic that holds them together stretches easily. I let one leg go and it snaps back, attaching itself to the brittle torso.” The destructive urge overcomes Lenny and she is not satisfied till assisted by her brother Adi she wrenches out the legs of the doll and examines the spilled in-sides. This violent act by Lenny is an apt allegory on the mindless violence of Partition. With a morbid sense of humour, Bapsi Sidhwa reveals how the violence of Partition has serrated the roots of people of different communities, irrespective of ideology, friendship and rational ideas.

Bapsi Sidhwa also subtly delineates the psychological impact of the horrors of Partition on the lives of people. The communal frenzy has a distorting effect on people—and leads to feelings of suspicion, distrust and susceptibility to rumours. Even the children, Lenny, Adi and their cousin are intrigued and suspicious of any minor deviations from normal behaviour. Mrs. Sethi and Aunt Minnie travel all over Lahore in the car but do not take the children with them. Deprived of long drives, Lenny and her cousin are intrigued at the movements of their mothers. Ayah enhances the sense of mystery when she states that the dicky of the car is full of cans of petrol. The author shows that in a highly surcharged atmosphere, suspicion and distrust become inevitable. The Ayah is also suspicious about the movements of cans of petrol by the two Parsi ladies. If she suspects they are distributing petrol to the arsonists she does not state so. The three children are stupefied by this revelation and let their imagination run wild. Finally they come to the same conclusion. “We know who the arsonists are. Our mothers are setting fire to Lahore! My heart pounds at the damnation that awaits their souls. My knees quake at the horror of their imminent arrest.”

When the partition riot erupts, the Ice-candy-man seizes his chance to debase the Ayah and leads a Muslim mob to Lenny’s house. The Parsi family and its Muslim servants hide the Ayah, but Lenny unwittingly betrays her. Ayah is dragged away by the mob and raped. After her degradation, the Ice-candy-man sets her up in a house in the prostitute’s quarters in Lahore. Having proved his mastery over her, he now professes to be crazily in love with her and wants to marry her. She, having been betrayed by him and physically abused by the mob, refuses to accept him. The women from Lenny’s family eventually rescue her and she becomes a candidate for rehabilitation.

Sidhwa shows how women were the immediate recipients of this trauma, either enduring the loss and death of their husbands, or by enduring the loss of their own virtue at the hands of rape and sexual violation. The same way in which Sidhwa sees the nation violated by Partition, lines being marked and demarcated without any regard for individuals, she sees citizens of India, and in particular women, violated in much the same manner. The same disfigurement that thus happens on a national level happens on an individualized one, bringing out the trauma of Partition on a real and substantive level. It is in this where Sidhwa views Partition as something that is irrevocably traumatic for India and her people. Men used Partition as an excuse for violence against women. Such heinous display of savage brutality reveals a social dislocation, as women were “raped” twice. They were dislocated socially, experiencing rejection and dislocation because they lacked a community. At the same time, there was unimaginable loss as many of these women were discarded and silenced. The ugly underbelly of Partition that Sidhwa reveals is that the people in the position of power were men. Even the most powerless of men had more power than women during Partition. The result is that women experienced an almost doubly painful experience of loss and dislocation.

Sidhwa describes a train massacre through the eyes office-Candy-Man: - “A train from Gurdaspur has just come in ...Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslims. There are no young women dead. Only to gunny –bags full of women’s breast...” But Sharbat Khan is sure that “they are stirring up trouble for all” .Here he becomes a persona of the novelist and comments that it the intransigent sectarianism of the national leaders, which wrought havoc on the pattern of communal amity existing in rural India. The fear of partition and the violence it would unleash drives the common man to think about his safety. On her second visit to Pirpindo, on the occasion of Baisaki when the festival is already in full swing, it is in the midst of these gay activities that Lenny’s friend Ranna senses the steel of suspicion and fear. BapsiSidwa captures the prevailing feelings:- “And despite the gaiety and distractions, Ranna senses the chill spread by the presence of strangers. Their unexpected faces harsh and cold. A Sikh youth, whom Ranna has met few times, and who has always been kind, pretends not to notice Ranna. Other men, who would normally be aware of it, his smile becomes strained and his laughter strident “In this tense atmosphere, the Alkali leader, Mater Tara Singh visits Lahore. Addressing a vast congregation outside the Assembly Chambers he shouts, “We will see how the Muslims swine get Pakistan! We will fight to the last man! His address is greeted with the roar of “Pakistan Murdabad! Death to Pakistan Sat Sri Akal! Bolay So Nihal!”

Conclusion: Thus Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Icy Candy Man* poignantly describes the mindless partition violence and focuses on its socio-historical consequences to women. It enables the reader to understand the extent of the trauma of partition and review it in its historical context and thus suggestively delineates the fruitlessness of violence in individual and collective lives. The brutal realities of the partition in this novel don’t overshadow the resilience of spirit exhibited by several characters in the novel. The riots are shown as being orchestrated by males. ‘Ayah’ in the novel suffers the impact of partition the most. Her body is commodified by her husband, the Ice-Candy Man.

The novel *Train To Pakistan*, in fact, implies that the disintegration of Mano Majra and its harmony is not the collapse of a nation but it is the breakdown and falling apart of the mankind. The novel remains a remarkable study in objectivity because the novelist does not act in a partisan way. He blames neither the Hindus nor the Muslims for the tragic happening and is firm to believe that the partition is not partition of territory but it is partition of hearts and souls of the people.

Sidhwa's portrayal of the violence that accompanies the Partition is impartial and objective. She blames both the communities for it. On the other hand Singh in *Train to Pakistan* projects and highlights the details of the violence committed by the Muslims against the Sikhs. Singh on the surface blames both the Muslims and the Sikhs equally for killings and murders.

Conclusively, the novels on the partition present a realistic show of the tribulations the people underwent on account of the violence let loose by a spurt of sudden communal occurrences. The novelists feel that politics was responsible for human slaughter from all sides and any particular side could not be made responsible for ugly and repugnant series of events. Their approach in the novels has remained objective in the sense that all have tried to expose human nature and its capability of perpetrating cruelty and barbarism on its own creed. Certainly, the novels prove that the traumatic experiences of the partition have shaken their writers to roots and made them restive to give vent to their indignation at the terrible holocaust which claimed a huge loss of innocent human lives.

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