

Partition Violence: Past, Present and Future

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Abstract: Literature with its therapeutic powers has been able to produce catharsis for its readers. The fear, the trauma and the pain experienced during the partition violence by the multitudes is transmuted by literature into purging narratives. The portraiture of the historical facts woven into fiction produces a micro-history of an individual's or a group of individual's experiences into the representative of the macro-history of a nation. While Khushwant Singh through *Train to Pakistan* published in 1956, portrays the partition violence of 1946-47 after a decade of its inception in the lives of the South Asians, Mahesh Dattani encapsulates the violence of the Gujarat riots of 2002 with the backdrop of partition violence through *Final Solutions* published in 2005. In this manner these two texts encapsulate the past, present and future as the time referents of partition violence. Khushwant Singh's, *Train to Pakistan* recounts the rupture and the metamorphosis wrought in the lives of the people of Punjab by the partition violence. Mahesh Dattani's, *Final Solutions* presents the violent conflicts between the Muslims and the Hindus in independent India leading to the victimisation of both the communities. The overtones of the partition violence can be traced in the communal violence triggered in Gujarat.

Keywords: Partition, Violence, Independence, Collective Memory, Trauma.

The violence that devoured the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was due to the division of British India into two independent nation states of Pakistan and India. The widespread violence changed the meaning of independence for millions of people of South Asia. 14-15 August 1947, the day of independence was transformed from being a moment of celebration to a moment of crisis. The venom of violence manifested itself even prior to the partition with the observance of the Direct Action Day (16 August 1946) which culminated into communal riots destroying thousands of lives in the Great Calcutta killings. The violence then spread to the other provinces creating an incessant circular pattern of revenge. The All India Muslim League demanded to protect the rights and provide full representation to the Muslim community which though in minority in British India had the demographic numbers according to the international standards to claim an existence as a separate and independent nation. This polarised the people along religious lines and the air became rife with mistrust and suspicion. The communal comradery of the days of freedom struggle with the British being the common enemy was eclipsed by the divisive policy of partition.

The idea of 'Swaraj' and freedom from the British Raj had now burgeoned into the proposition of self-determination for the Muslims and non-Muslims. The binary divide of the people into Muslims and non-Muslims led to their further alienation. The Muslim-majority provinces, the Hindu-majority provinces and the princely states had to be realigned on the question of representation of the majority community. The All India Muslim League represented by Mohammad Ali Jinnah aimed at a confederacy of provinces with a weak centre and strong provinces undermining the dominance of a stronghold of a Hindu centre in undivided India. Nehru strongly condemned this plan but was not in favour of the creation of Pakistan as well. The AIML at the rejection of the creation of a federal framework of their choice under a united India then demanded the creation of a sovereign state of Pakistan and gave a call for Direct Action Day which proved to be the precursor of the violent communal clashes leading to brutal massacres and horrifying cruelties. The wheels of violence once propelled kept on gaining momentum and sucked in innumerable innocent lives into its vortex of annihilation. The announcement of the partition plan on 3 June, 1947 fuelled the violence further as it spread from urban centres to the remote rural habitations of the subcontinent.

The transfer of power from Britain to the two newly carved out nations of Pakistan and India had its roots in the cataclysmic event of World War II. The war had brought with it deeper implications for the British imperialism. Britain had to negotiate terms with all the stakeholders in the Indian subcontinent in order to gain their support for the war. The urgent wartime requirement of Britain was to possess a mighty army and for this end the Indian soldiers had to be conflated into one army. Britain was able to manoeuvre the Indian sentiments as around 2.5 million Indian army soldiers fought World War II under the flag of British Empire. After gaining victory in the war the Labour government in Britain with Clement Richard Attlee as its Prime Minister soon realized that the economic drain caused by the war on the British economy will hamper the smooth functioning of the mechanism of imperialism in far flung colonies like India. It was in this context that Britain decided to grant freedom to India with the sole consideration of safe withdrawal of British troops to Britain. Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India specifically mandated the condition that the British soldiers will not be embroiled in the situation of maintaining Law and Order in the independent countries of India and Pakistan. The British army were instructed to save only the lives of the British subjects.

Literature representing the Partition of the Indian subcontinent with concomitant violence relates the trauma of the sufferers. Khushwant Singh's, *Train to Pakistan* bears testimony to the pain, torture and anguish experienced by the people due to the partition. The description of the fate of the denizens of Mano Majra in the time frame of pre and post independence of India brings out the pain of displacement of people living along the newly carved borders, the horrifying physical violence and friendship among the communities turning into fury of vengeance. Both the communities indulge in communal stereotyping of the other. While Singh captures the partition violence as it surged in the past to engulf lives in its destructive vortex, Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*, traces the root cause of the festering wound of communal violence in independent India manifested through the Gujarat riots to partition violence. He fuses the past and the present to propose that collective memory of partition violence constructed by both the communities of Hindus and Muslims make them vengeful towards each other. The only way

forward to peace will be reconstruction of the collective memory. For this forgiveness and forgetting of the past grievances in the present moment to create futuristic possibilities of peaceful coexistence is imperative.

Khushwant Singh recreates the ghoulish partition violence of 1947 in his *Train to Pakistan* through the horrifying images of a dead man holding out his intestines, dead bodies of women and children with dilated eyes filled with horror, mouths open rending the environment with voiceless shrieks. Corpses with animated expressions. Fear, aversion and contemplation written clearly on the faces of the dead. The sickening and vile smell of decaying flesh intermixed with the smell of spilled blood and human excreta. These images and smells stamped with violence are concomitant of the ghost trains that ran during the time of partition between the two newly formed nations of Pakistan and India.

The novel begins with the recalling of the communal violence preceding partition which started in the summer of 1946 with the Calcutta riots and spread to Noakhali in East Bengal to Bihar and to the Punjab and the Frontier Province. Amidst the growing violence Khushwant Singh's *Mano Majra* is a hinterland lying in the newly created borderland of Pakistan and India where the partition violence had not reached as yet. The peaceful life at *Mano Majra* is stirred by the dacoity at the house of the local money lender Lala Ram Lal and his subsequent murder. Lala Ram Lal's family is the only Hindu family of the village with the remaining population having an equally mixed percentage of Sikhs and Muslims. The suspicion of his murder falls on Iqbal and Juggut Singh. Iqbal is the twenty seven year old man recently come to *Mano Majra* by the Delhi to Lahore passenger train. He actually belongs to the district of Jhelum which after the partition has fallen in Pakistan. He is a communist who has no apparent trappings of religion. His name Iqbal too did not give away his religion. He could be a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh. He professed not to be a follower of any religion. While he wore an iron bangle on his wrist suggesting him to be a Sikh, he is also circumcised giving the impression that he is a Muslim. This ambiguity of not being able to categorise him according to a predefined religious identity is manipulated by Hukum Chand who assigns him first Muslim and then a Sikh identity. Iqbal had spent a considerable time in foreign countries. After being impressed by the western civilised ways and their achievements he now wished to see some progress in his country. So, he had taken up social work and his party had sent him to *Mano Majra*, an important 'point for refugee movements', to try and avert any possibility of a communal riot taking place. But his shallow idealism and apathy of an armchair variety intellectual are exposed with his visible consternation and panic for his personal safety at the mere mention of the murder of the money lender in the village.

Juggut Singh on the other hand is the notorious *Badmash* of the village who according to the court orders is not to leave his village after the sunset. His father Alam Singh had been hanged on charges of dacoity and murder. Juggut Singh's aggressive behaviour, volatile temper and tendency of indulging in violent acts along with his father's conviction and punishment generally made the authorities suspect Jugga for any mischief or crime taking place around the vicinity of *Mano Majra*. On the night of Lala's murder Jugga was with his beloved Nooran, the daughter of Imam Baksh, the Muslim cleric of *Mano Majra*. When the policemen came to arrest Jugga and enquired about his whereabouts on the night of the murder, in his attempt to save Nooran's reputation he told them that he had gone to his fields. This is an evidence of Jugga's sacrificial nature. He embraces danger to protect Nooran.

The narrative then very aptly exposes how people like Hukum Chand, who is the magistrate and the deputy commissioner of the district exploit the susceptibilities and vulnerabilities of the people to suit their end. The arrival of the first ghost train at *Mano Majra* bearing the corpses of around 1500 men fleeing from Pakistan to India had made Hukum Chand decide that all the Muslims living at *Mano Majra* had to be evacuated. The unity between the Sikhs and the Muslims of *Mano Majra* had allowed the Muslims to feel at home and not consider going to Pakistan. Hukum Chand along with the sub-inspector devised a plan to undermine this unity, to make the Muslims feel vulnerable and comply to go to Pakistan. The wicked Malli and his gang who are all Sikh men, belonging to village *Kapura*, are the real culprits of the dacoity and murder of Lala. They had been arrested after Jugga shared information against them. But instead of taking them for a trial they were released in *Mano Majra*. The police then enquired about the notorious Sultana and his gang, knowing well that they had all gone to Pakistan. Finally the police also enquired about Mohammed Iqbal, a Muslim League member who was a young Mussulman babu recently come to *Mano Majra*. These three actions of the police did to *Mano Majra* what partition was not able to do so far – it split the village into two distinct halves. The integral wholeness of *Mano Majra* was rendered fragmentary by the divisive strategy of Hukum Chand. On his instruction when the police released Malli and his men then amid the horror invoked by the arrival of the ghost train the forgotten murder of Lala Ram Lal flashed back in the psyche of the *Mano Majrans*. Then the enquiry about Sultana and his men who were all Muslims implanted the idea in their minds that the murder of Lala might not be a case of simple dacoity but have the overtones of communal disharmony. Then the insinuation of Iqbal being a Muslim and a worker of Muslim League furthered the idea that communal discord had become a reality for their village as well.

Generations of brotherhood was subsumed into dissension. Every individual felt threatened and alienated. Factionalism pervaded *Mano Majra*. With the arrival of refugees and another ghost train from Pakistan the atrocities being perpetrated on the Sikhs and the Hindus by the Muslims became alarmingly vivid. This added impetus to the process of segregation and discrimination and the safety of the Muslims of *Mano Majra* became all the more precarious. The Muslims of *Mano Majra* finally decided to leave for Pakistan but the train which is to take them to Pakistan is planned to be attacked by the unidentified bloodthirsty avenging Sikhs. These Sikhs enlists the refugees who themselves have been victims of the violence, Malli and his men and a few *Mano Majrans* into their group. They wished to send a ghost train to Pakistan similar to the one that came to *Mano Majra*, carrying corpses and bearing the testimony of cruelty, savagery and viciousness. The Sikhs were resolute to outstrip the Muslims in their revenge, to prove that even they were pitiless, inhumane and fiendish, to violate all norms of humanity and diffuse an environment of violence. Their plan of revenge was, "For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussulmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot too. For each train load of dead they send over, send two across. For each road convoy that is attacked, attack two." (Singh 157)

Once again Hukum Chand uses diplomacy to get others to do his job. This time he wishes to thwart the attack on the train leaving for Pakistan as the young Muslim prostitute, Haseena Begum for whom he has mixed feelings of lasciviousness and love is also aboard the train. He orders the release of Juggut Singh and Iqbal Singh hoping that either Jugga's love for Nooran or Iqbal's communist fortitude against senseless violence would save the day for him. While Iqbal's sense of self-preservation makes him douse his senses dull with intoxication, Jugga rises to the occasion. He sacrifices his life and saves the train from being attacked. Through the act of sacrifice of Jugga, Khushwant Singh allows humanity to win against the forces of violence, allows the victory of love over hatred, allows the cinders of hope to glow in spite the all consuming fire of darkness.

Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* draws a parallel between the partition violence of 1947 and the violence perpetrated during Gujarat riots of 2002 through the twin character of Daksha – Hardika. The present day grandmother, Hardika is also the fifteen year old bride, Daksha of 1940s. The first entry on Daksha's diary is written on 31 March 1948 in which while describing the inanities of life she describes the independence of the country as a 'terrible thing' that had happened to the country. Her naive observation has reverberation of truth which deeply stings the reader. Her father was a freedom fighter who had fought for this day all his life. He was very happy that the Britishers were finally leaving their country but her father died in the communal violence that surged up and claimed countless innocent lives pre- and post- partition. Daksha and her mother were attacked in Hussainabad by the violent mob who were throwing stones at their house smashing one window after another. That same day Daksha's father was beaten to death by rioters on the streets of Hussainabad while Daksha and her mother waited for him to come and rescue them.

The violence of the past and of the present coalesce for Hardika and she utters very significant words, "Yes, things have not changed that much." (Dattani 6) The essence of the narrative timeline is poignantly reflected in these words which adumbrated the fact that India's partition violence is ever present in the minds of the Indians. The memories of it are the carriers of the trauma and grief which shaped the cultural memory and sensibilities of a generation of Indians. The memory of partition violence acts as a retrospective memory. The partition with its consequent violence became the site of creation of the traumatic cultural memory for both the communities. In this manner the violent past keeps haunting the present and unsettles the possibility of a peaceful future.

The Muslims who chose to stay in India after the partition now face a continuous diatribe full of threats of sending them to Pakistan and driving them out of India. The quintessence of all verbal attacks hurled on the Muslims is referred in the words of the chorus, "This is our land! How dare they?" (Dattani 6) This emphatic divide between the two communities of Hindus and Muslims highlighted by the 'Our', and 'they' sustains the hostility and bitterness among them. The cyclicity of the pattern of violence, fear and hatred meld the events of horror – partition violence of 1947 or Gujarat riots violence of 2002 become emblematic of the communal dissonance.

Final Solutions portray the cacophony of the communal discord through the coming together of Javed and Bobby, two Muslim boys and the Hindu family of Ramnik Gandhi, comprising of his wife Aruna, daughter Smita and mother Daksha – Hardika in the conflagrated environment of the communal riots between the Hindus and the Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. The immediate cause of the outbreak of the riot was the burning of the Sabarmati Express train near the Godhra railway station in the state of Gujarat in India on 27 February 2002. The Godhra train tragedy had an antecedent link with the Babri Masjid demolition incident of 6 December 1992 when a large number of Hindu pilgrims demolished the Babri mosque situated in the city of Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh of India. This had led to communal riots to spread in many parts of the country and thousands of people died due to it. The Hindu pilgrims had contended that in the 16th century on the orders of the Mughal emperor Babur, a pre-existing Temple honouring the birthplace of Lord Rama (god of Hindus) had been destroyed and a mosque had been built in its place. The Hindu pilgrims wished to reclaim their sanctified land and build a Ram Mandir in the place of the mosque. The Hindu pilgrims on board the Sabarmati Express train were returning from this very contentious site when it was set on fire. The fire claimed the lives of 59 Hindu pilgrims. The violence begot violence and the entire state of Gujarat was convulsing with violent riots in which thousands of innocents were killed, injured and left homeless. There was looting, plundering and arson. Thousands of people lost their livelihood and could not regain a normal life.

In the beginning of the central incident of the novel Javed and Bobby are being chased by an angry violent mob. They are given shelter by Ramnik Gandhi in his house. In the confines of Ramnik's house the trauma, the secrets, the guilt hidden in the deep recesses of the psyche of these characters are then shared openly. Javed and Bobby have been plagued all through their lives to bear their Muslim identity as the stigmatised identity. While Javed retaliates by throwing "pieces of meat and bones" (Dattani 46) into the backyard of the adult Hindu who had made him feel like an untouchable as a child, Bobby resorts to pretending as if he does not belong to the Muslim community and chooses a neutral name like Bobby over Baboon which will not give away his identity as a Muslim.

The interplay of politics and riots is also exposed through the admissions of Javed who states that he and the likes of him were transported in police vans to the spot where the Ratha Yatra had to be attacked. He was hired to block the Ratha Yatra, kill the Pujari, break the chariot and the idols of the Gods. The moment of violence seemed just right to Javed to avenge all the insults and humiliations that he had to bear but suddenly and intuitively Javed knew that it was not the right thing to do so, he ran away from the scene and did not embrace violence.

Hardika relives her past life of Daksha through her memories of cruel humiliation, miserable condition, the beating, the confinement and complete insensitivity of her Muslim friend Zarine. She rues the moment she befriended the Muslim girl with the 'false pride' who brought her to her ruin. The victimisation of Daksha was only one side of the coin with the other side being Ramnik's burden to carry. A wicked deed committed by his father and grandfather made Ramnik a captive of guilt with no escape. They had burnt the shop owned by Zarine's family under the pretext of communal riot and bought it at half the price. They had destroyed Zarine's family for their selfish gain. Finally Hardika realises that what she mistook as 'false pride' in Zarine was actually justified anger.

The need of the hour is to take cognisance of the ramifications of partition violence in the lives of the people of the Indian subcontinent. Partition violence has scorched our memories, traumatised our present and unhinged our future. The past, present and future of India and Pakistan as well as the Hindu and Muslim communities within the country are haunted by the trauma of partition violence. The contemporary communal riots are the corollary of the partition violence. The politicising of religion, communities and violence over these seven decades has created collective memory for the young Hindus and Muslims based on trauma, mistrust and doubt. The two communities now have the separating rigid boundaries of 'we' and 'they'. Amid the anger and hostility, vehemence and aggression, suffering and despair the healing touch of peace, tolerance and coexistence is required. We need to stamp out the divisiveness that propagates the creation of ghettos and isolated sub-cultures and promote interaction and integration among the communities for the permeation of communal harmony in the Indian society which will make it an authentic multicultural society. If we wish to liberate our future from the demon of past violence then it is imperative that every Indian should value the victory of humanity over violence as evidenced in Jugga's sacrifice in Train to Pakistan and also perceive the solution given by Bobby in *Final Solutions* through the words, "if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate." (Dattani 74)

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