

Inhuman Tragedy of Partition in Bhishm Sahni's *The Train Has Reached Amritsar*

Divya

Research Scholar, Department of English, Om Sterling Global University, Hisar

ABSTRACT

Partition related short stories magnify the riots, arson, killing, looting abduction and rape during the Partition. These stories reflect comprehensively in all its totality, reality, and variety of human suffering. The tragedy associated with the partition of India in 1947 has been the central theme of countless writers, belonging to both sides of the line. Sparing a few works that pen down the incidents of brotherhood, sacrifice, and humanity, almost all the literary works focus on the gruesome and inhumane violence and hatred that percolated into the hearts of commoners at the time. Bhishm Sahni was a noted writer who wrote the story originally in Hindi entitled as 'Amritsar Aa Gaya'. Partition of India as developed in the story of *The Train Has Reached Amritsar* was to resolve the confrontation between the Hindus and the Muslims. About six billion people including women, men and children lost their life in this crusade. About 1.5 billion people were dislodged and forced to rehabilitate in their safe zone according to their population ratio. This had been an awful experience for both the communities resulted in the Indo-Pak partition. This paper is an attempt to study Inhuman Tragedy of Partition in Bhishm Sahni's *The Train Has Reached Amritsar*.

Key Words: *Post colonialism, Freedom, Dislocation, Partition, Communalism, Violence, Identity Crisis.*

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Partition' brings up haunting images of blood smeared soil, trains filled with mutilated bodies, shelter camps with eyes searching for their families, people shrieking, trains loaded beyond imagination, fearful miens, loss of the sense of connection, displacement, distrust, identity crisis and the vicious communal violence, that has failed to be erased off the memories of not only those who witnessed it but also their progenies ever after. The horror is the same for the Indians as well as for the Pakistanis. Though it has been decades since the world witnessed this blood-stained legacy of colonialism yet its trauma could never be overcome. Many writers have explored this theme of partition in their literary works since then, but still, every new work adds another chilling dimension to the tragedy. Urvashi Butalia states,

"The political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions of history...twelve million people moved between the new, truncated India and the two wings, East and West, of the newly created Pakistan..." (Butalia 76)

Many notable writers from both the countries, India and Pakistan, like Khushwant Singh, Agha Shahid Ali, Amrita Pritam, Bapsi Sidhwa, Ismat Chughtai, Asgar Wazahat, Attia Hossain, Saadat Hasan Manto, Krishna Sobti, Yashpal, Bhishm Sahni and many others have tried to represent the complexity of this indelible torturous bloody exodus of suffering humanity through their works. The language was never a deterrent in expressing the tragic scenario of the partition.

The tragedy of partition destabilized the lives of millions of people. People were wandering from door to door to save their lives. When the existential crisis in front of human life arises, then the questions of human dignity are left behind. The commonality in the themes that dealt with this partition resulted in the formation of a new genre of literature, termed 'Partition literature', which encompasses almost all forms of literary writings, viz., novels, short stories, poetry, and non-fictional works. The lunacy of the frenzied souls over-possessed by religious bigotry is one common thread that binds all the literature about the partition. (Manto 4)

Bhishm Sahni has been awarded with Padma Bhushan in 1998 whose literary constructions reflect the blatant religious hysteria during the partition of India and Pakistan and its tragic after-effects. *The Train has Reached Amritsar* translated from the original text *Amritsar Aagaya* is a well-known story by Bhishma Sahni. It presents the

scenario of the Indo-Pak partition. After the announcement of Partition, the author has made a successful attempt in realizing the spirit of communalism in his story of *The Train has Reached Amritsar*.

The communalism that was burning in the hearts of the people at the time of Partition came in the form of riots. In the story, the author has made a close observation how a train coming out of a city in present-day Pakistan through different stations to reach Amritsar is faced with tensions and controversies during this train journey by small incidents. As the train moves forward, the tension increases. The ridicule and abuse of Hindu travellers by some Pathan travellers is prominently featured in this story. The tragedy of Partition affected millions of people not only on the emotional and ideological plane but also on psychological and spiritual level.

It illustrates the extremity of religious communalism that bred during the partition and mirrors the intensity of cruelty, barbarism, violence, and hatred that humans are capable of. The story, in quite a poignant way, states the loss of moral values and that the value of love, affection, kindness, service, etc. becomes artificial when humanity is faced with the question of existence and self-interest.

This story also explains the process of partition as a hurriedly drawn exercise in which the crux of mental agony and unwanted rumours spread among both the communities. Ultimately both the communities were at daggers drawn. However the reason of this confrontation was not known to the people of both the communities.

The characters mentioned in this story Pathan, Dubla Babu and other travellers of the train belong to middle class society and seem to be ignorant but exploited. None of them could understand the purpose of the creation of Pakistan. Most of them were found indulged in irrelevant discussion whether Jinnah sahib will leave Bombay and be settled in Pakistan but some of them disagreed to this superfluous discussion. This sort of political sharing is nothing but a voice of the disgruntled society where peace appears to be a distant dream and the high-ups of the society enjoy their mirthful lives

The story describes a train journey that begins from Jhelum station in Pakistan and while passing through several stations, reaches Amritsar and then continues to Delhi. The train journey describes the tension and turmoil amongst the fellow passengers who belong to different religions against the backdrop of the partition of India. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is quite happy that he is going to Delhi to witness the celebration of Independence Day.

In fact, when a fellow Sikh passenger asks him whether Jinnah is going to live in Lahore after the partition, he dismissively answers that there won't be any need to do that. Jinnah can continue to live in Bombay like before and visit Lahore whenever he needs to. This reflects upon the consciousness of a common man, who had no inkling of the gravity of this partition. The departing Imperial power caused damage and destruction not only to the material wealth of our country but with the masterstroke of the partition created havoc at the inner-psychic level of a humanity that has long been thriving on the talisman of co-existence.

The partition brought with it not only the division of geographical areas, but also roped in the seeds of communalism, casteism, nepotism, and corruption the fruits of which still poison the soil of our country. The partition presented an irony. The values and beliefs which fired the struggle for our freedom, at the time of partition, the same values and beliefs were demolished by mutual hatred. (Singh 28)

At the beginning of the story, the compartment has a very amiable environment. All the passengers are talking with each other, discussing partition without any animosity, even passing jokes on each other. It presents the harmony that prevailed among the people before the partition. As the journey progresses, they come across various stations, the invisible tension at each station starts reverberating in the compartment as well. The news of what is happening outside the train gradually brings a change inside as well.

The Pathan travellers in the compartment make fun of a Hindu traveller, Babu, teasing him to sit in the ladies' compartment as he is a vegetarian. Again, the same Pathan travellers do not allow a Hindu man to board the train with his family even when he had a ticket. One of the Pathans kicks his wife. This happens at the station of Wazirabaad. This behaviour irks consciousness of Babu. However, Babu keeps mum; it is only when the train has entered Amritsar, a Punjabi-Hindu majority area that Babu gains the confidence to give it back to the Pathans. He starts abusing them and gets so agitated that he finds an iron rod to hit them, luckily, they all get down before anything violent happens. But still, Babu could not control his angst and attacked another Pathan who was trying to get into the compartment. This creates an environment of tension and panic. These small incidents give a glimpse into the psyche of the people who suffered the partition and its after-effects.

A very interesting aspect that is exhibited throughout the train journey is the sense of security one feels in one's own territory. Home is where one feels the safest and the partition brought with it rootlessness, a sense of being a stranger in a geographical area that was once a part of one's own country, and now post-partition, one feels scared

in the same geographical space. This sense of dislocation is a recurrent aspect of postcolonial literature all over the world. This displacement affects both the material and emotional actualities of people. Bill Ashcroft and others write:

“A major feature of postcolonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being: the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place.....A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour.” (Ashcroft 59)

A confusing sense of alienation amidst one’s own people haunts throughout this story, where the same people have turned hostile and vengeful just because they follow a different religion. The Pathans in this story continue to foul mouth their fellow passenger Babu and one of them actually hits a lady on her bosom while she is trying to get into the compartment with her husband, but all this happens when the train is in the Muslim majority areas of newly created Pakistan. None has courage enough to counter the Pathans, except an old lady who mumbles for some time but she also goes quiet after some time.

As soon as the train enters Amritsar, that is the Indian Territory, the thin frail silhouette of Babu seems to gather courage from almost nowhere. It is here that he starts abusing Pathans about hitting a Hindu woman. But the Pathans get down at the station and after a while, the narrator sees that Babu has got an iron rod from somewhere and hid it beneath his seat. He scoffs at other passengers for letting the Pathans get away easily. There seemed to have been added a strange hideous facet to Babu’s visage. His menacing character comes to light when he hits a Muslim passenger who is trying to get into the compartment with his wife. Babu takes his revenge. Since he could not harm the Pathans, this unknown passenger became his target. This incident really exposes the cause of the massacre that accompanied the partition. The crowd killed another crowd. People took revenge by killing any person belonging to the religion of that person who killed their dear ones and the chain continued.

The heart-wrenching vision of an ocean of frenzied people stranded on both sides of the line of the partition proved to be a *spiritus mundi* for generations of writers, from wherein, they weaved tales so poignant and horrific, that the tragedy continues to haunt us even today. The shrieks of despair, angst, and torment, resonate in various literary works that are based on the theme of partition. This mass dislocation robbed people not only of their homes and loved ones but also of the composite history, culture, and the evolution of civilization. And no expanse of literature can be enough to mirror this inhuman tragedy, ever.

CONCLUSION

The whole story depicts the psychological bent of mind developed due to inhumane behaviour of the inhabitants of United India. When the train moves through the passage of Muslim dominated area in the newly created Pakistan, the Hindus are very shaky and the Muslims are behaving like warriors; on the contrary when the train passes through the Hindu dominated area fallen in India, the Hindus behave like warriors and the Muslims look like scapegoats. Above all this story presents a true picture of communal devastation during the period of partition. The characters are well drawn and they represent lively picture of Indian population in undivided India with the cult of Hindu-Muslim ethos. The religion is not brought to condemn the nation in this story but the social fabric is the culminating point in shaping this story.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Ashcroft, Bill. Re-placing Language: Textual Strategies in Postcolonial Writing. *The Empire Writes Back*. Routledge Publication London, 2002, pp. 59.
- [2]. Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1998, pp. 76.
- [3]. Singh, Khushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. Grove Weidenfeld Publication New York. 1956, p. 28.
- [4]. Manto, Saadat Hasan. *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition*. Penguin Random House. India, 1997, p. 4.
- [5]. Sahni, Bhishm. *Amritsar Has Come and Other Stories*. Orient Black Swan Publication Hyderabad.1990.