



COMMUNALISM AND THE TRADITION OF INDIAN NOVELS: A PHENOMENON

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ABSTRACT

The Partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions in history. However, the tragedy and the suffering of the people are elided and history books do not go into detail about the holocaust. Historians too are of the view that literature has stepped in to record the full horror of the Partition and that an evaluation of the times is incomplete without the literary archives. The creative novelists and filmmakers in different languages analyzed the feel of the period and presented in their works so that a humanity as well as harmony based environment can be created and a flavor of sympathy can be lighted in all the regions. This research work is having focus on the assorted and multidimensional analysis of communalism in the English literature from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were segmented because of communalism as the key root cause and magnetized the novelists so that the real scenario of assorted incidents can be shown. This research work takes a deep dive into the English literature from renowned novelists of these three countries which discuss and underline the same point '*communalism*'.

BapsiSindhwa, Khushwant Singh, ChamanNahal, Shauna Singh Baldwin and many other novelists put their literary and imaginative efforts in their novels so that the emotional values can be created in general public as well as government authorities.

BapsiSindhwa shows how Partition affected women, families and communities. Khushwant Singh shows how Partition encouraged communalism and affected community and society. ChamanNahal and Shauna Singh Baldwin effectively trace the painful exodus that followed the announcement of Partition, the separation of lifelong friends, the reluctance of people to leave their

homes, and the travails the displaced refugees faced while reluctantly making their way to India. They maintain that Partition on religious grounds should never have happened. It is ever present in our lives even today. The country still thinks in communal terms resulting in violence every now and then. Politicians exploit this factor and we have been witness to the anti-Sikh riots and the demolition of the Babri Masjid that caused a lot of communal turmoil.

INTRODUCTION

Communalism as a phenomenon needs to be interpreted again and again in the light of fast changing global affairs. Communalism has been a topic of detailed study for the past several years and many research works are done in this field. The most important threat that the globe is facing is the rising communalism. The western countries having religious singularity were free of this menace in the past. But the incidents happened in the previous one decade show that they are also facing the threat of rising communal problem. India having a population of above 100 crores with a variety of religions is a breeding ground for communalism. The religious pluralism and the contradictions between the faiths tend to create communal identities, which in turn develops to a stage of communalism, when passing through the democratic process. Religion, when deliberately used as a tool for attaining political gains often nourished the growth of communalism.

The rising trend of communalism and the violence followed, is the major threat posed towards the integrity of nation. So, efficient measures are to be adopted against communalism and its spread in order to check cracks on the social harmony and bondage. Taking into account the history of communal problem in the past, more non-violent methods are inevitable in combating the communal tension which takes place in the new millennium. In this section, an effort is made to trace the origin of the so called communal problems in India and its ramifications.

Classically understood, communalism is rivalry kept and practiced by one community or religion towards another or each other. Bothering only about the well-being of one's own religion and viewing the welfare of another community as a threat is a common characteristic of communalism. The primary feature of communalism is that one community is being viewed doubtfully in every social development. "Communalism can be considered an ideology which states that society is divided into religious communities whose interests differ and are at times even opposed to each other. The antagonism practiced by members of one community against the people

of other community and religion can be termed communalism. This antagonism goes to the extent of falsely accusing, harming and deliberately insulting a particular community and extends to looting, burning down the homes and shops of the helpless and the weak, dishonoring women and even killing persons.”

According to Bipan Chandra “communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion, they have as a result, common social, political and economic interests.”

Communal identities are given primacy over any other identity of an individual in a communal minded society. Linguistic, political, regional and other sorts of identities are comparatively irrelevant or of lesser importance in a communally polarized situation. The existence of some sort of antagonism among religions or communities can be termed as situation of communal disharmony. “The term communalism connotes the state of communal disharmony and the reverse situation is not an absence of communal violence but communal harmony. In the strict sense, communal harmony may be taken to mean as a state or condition of peace, normal or good relation and presence of fraternal relations between communities. Regarding Indian situations communal harmony means the persistence of fraternal relationship between Hindus and Muslims.”

To define simply “The opposition to each other of religious communities is commonly designated as communalism.”

The communalist tries to divide the society on the basis of religion and they are not doing so for the sole good of the religion, but to attain materialistic benefits in the name of religion. Social activities of the communalists appear on the basis of religion. They limit their transactions as far as possible only with the same community, try to educate the children in the schools run by the community or by members of the community and even try to settle down in areas where the so called community’s people reside in large. The communal minded persons shall not be necessarily religious in nature. The control of the communal organizations, the interested persons who propagate such a divisive ideology in society are usually the elite class in the respective community.

“Communalism is a modern phenomenon and its fundamental causes are secular like competition for share in political power or government jobs. Religion is not its fundamental cause but an instrumental cause because it has great mobilizing power.”

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of Pakistan and the advocate of the theory of a separate nation for Muslims (the two nation theory), was essentially a communalist but not essentially a man of religion. M.A. Jinnah did not represent the masses of Muslim population. "Jinnah a product of Lincoln's Inn in London represented the Muslim elite, not Muslim masses. The 'orthodox' Ulema on the other hand were closer to the masses and represented their aspirations. No wonder the Jinnah and the Deoband 'Ulemas never saw eye to eye on political matters. They were closer to Indian National Congress than to Muslim League, which was the party of the Muslim elite. They supported the composite nationalism than Muslim separation."

Similarly many religious persons who are having deep rooted knowledge in religion do not engage in propagating divisive communal thoughts. Those who possessed real knowledge in religion attached themselves to the morals and ethics of religion and kept aloof from acts of communal separatism.

"Outstanding theologian Maulana Asad was irreconcilably opposed to separatist politics. He was a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity and found legitimacy for this unity in Holy Quran. He came up with the concept of Wahdat-e-din, i.e. unity of religions. According to this, laws and rituals might differ but the essence of religion is one...."16The apostles of communalism hold religion as the most important distinction or distinguishing mark in the society rather than any other distinguishing matter like language, gender, politics, etc.... "Religious rigidities were over stressed by the respective elite of both the communities even cutting across the pressures of science and technology in the country. The elites on both sides have made use of religion for securing political and economic ends."

Religion is deliberately used as a tool for mobilizing communal passions and the spiritual element in religion is not given importance.

"Religion in the hands of the communalists is divested of all that makes it vital and eternal; it is reduced to a slogan, a symbol, an instrument to excite passions or to obscure reason- an opiate or a heady wine."

Jawaharlal Nehru while delivering a speech in Punjab provincial congress in 1928 clearly stated that the Hindu- Muslim antagonism was rooted in the economic exploitation stimulated by imperialism.

The role of religion is too less in a communal issue and the economic and political aspirations of both the communities play the major role.

“It is an outcome largely of anger and passion and when we regain our tempers, it will fade into nothingness. It is a myth with no connection with reality and it cannot endure. It is really the creation of our educated class in search of office and employment..... What does it matter to the Muslim peasant whether a Hindu or Muslim is a judge at Lahore? Economic issues run along different lines. There is a great deal in common between the Muslim, Sikh and Hindu (Landlords) and a great deal in common between the Muslim Sikh and Hindu peasantry; but very little in common between a Muslim peasant and a Muslim landlord.”

EXCERPTS FROM “BEND IN THE GANGES”

Partition of India is one of the most influential events for Indian. This traumatic event affected Indian Literature directly or indirectly. The Partition and the freedom of India bring misery to millions of people on both the sides of the border for no fault of their own. Most of Indian Fiction writers including Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand were also deeply anguished with this. The second generation writers like Khushwant Singh, Amitav Ghosh and Manohar Malgonkar presented this holocaustic event very painfully and truthfully that followed in the wake of the partition of the country. It was indeed one of the bloodiest upheavals of history that claimed innumerable innocent lives and loss of property. The civil war during the Partition took the shape of a religious war between Hindus and Muslims and the whole country in an unparalleled mass destruction.

Manohar Malgonkar, along with the likes of R.K. Narayan, was one of the front-runners of Indian Writing in English. But it is a matter of regret that his contribution to the genre we refer to today as Indian Writing in English remains largely unacknowledged. However we must remember that Manohar was a prolific writer whose prose and grip of the English language was as good as any of his contemporaries. His major novels and short stories taken together reveal him as a writer keenly interested in Indian social life. In *‘Bend in the Ganges’* Manohar is in full flow and one cannot but appreciate that not only was he a master story teller, but also had an exceptional command over the English language. No less than a writer of the caliber of R K Narayan referred to Malgonkar as his favorite Indian English novelist.

A Bend in the Ganges, like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, takes up the theme of partition and riots after it. Malgonkar presents here a powerful story against the background of the troublesome event which starts with partition. The novel starts with Civil Disobedience Movement of Mahatma Gandhi and ends with the Partition riots, violence and brutality.

The novel starts with the slogan of "*Boycott British goods*", in the whole country on the call of Mahatma Gandhi. Another powerful slogan, "*Bharat Mata Ki Jai*", gives expression to the fire of freedom that was burning in the heart of the Indian masses "just one of hundreds of thousands of similar fires all over the country". (Malgonkar)

The novel portrays the communal violence, brutality and riots which shook the very foundations of the nation on the eve of Independence and also focuses on its impact on the thought and behavior of people. The communal riots give rise to mutual distrust and hatred between Hindus and Muslims. The mood of the novel is introduced with a quotation from Gandhiji about his experiment with non-violence.

"This non-violence, there seems to be due mainly to our helplessness. It almost appears as if we are nursing in our bosoms the desire to take revenge the first time we get the opportunity. Can true, voluntary non-violence come out of this seeming forced non-violence of the weak? It is not a futile experiment I am conducting? What if, when the fury bursts, not a man, woman, or child is safe and every man's hand is raised against his neighbor?" (A Bend in the Ganges, Author's note)

A Bend in the Ganges also presents the ideological conflict between violence and non-violence. Malgonkar has chosen a wide canvas for his novel. The novel mainly focuses on the transformation of three young men—Gian Talwar, Debi Dayal and Shafi Usman—as a result of their involvement in the events of the years preceding and following the Partition of India. Gian, believes in non-violence whereas Shafi and Debi believe in violence. These freedom fighters forms the Hanuman Club, ostensibly for physical culture but it is really intended fortodians contribute to their slavery.

Malgonkar narrates the horrible developments resulting in the wake of Partition such as the communal violence, brutality and riots. Manohar Malgonkar is not blind to the limitations of non-violence as a doctrine and seeks to expose them. He appears to believe that if it fails, it is the failure of the people who cannot carry it forward. The novel portrays very strongly the communal poison between Hindus and Muslims separated into opposite camps, learning to hate each other with the

bitterness of ages. Even their own leaders have begun to take sides. The communal riots give rise to mutual distrust and hatred. While the Muslims stand for Jinnah and work for the Pakistan, the Hindus stand for the Congress.

“...A vast landscape packed with people was now being partitioned according to religious majorities; the Muslims in Pakistan, the Hindus in India... Every citizen was caught up in the holocaust. No one could remain aloof; no one could be trusted to be impartial.”

Malgonkar shows the pitiable situation of the displaced which are now refugees, fleeing from their own places leaving behind their lands, houses, cattle, household goods etc. He makes it quite clear that on the score of massacres no side was less guilty than another. It was a big irony that this violence is never used against the British to free India from the British rule but is used by the two major communities, Hindus and Muslims of India to resort to murder, plunder and rape due to sheer hatred and distrust for each other.

Partition has been one of the darkest phases India has witnessed. And the topic hasn't left any of the volatility down so many years. Train to Pakistan portrays the picture of ghostly horrors enacted on the border region during the horrible days of the partition. It still invokes the same awful memories amongst every Indian that was experienced by our grandparents and great-grandparents. Malgonkar's version of Partition in this novel is very balanced. There is no doubt that he was one of the last of a generation that has living memories of events that changed our nation's history and society in the most profound way.

CONCLUSION

The Partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions in history. However, the tragedy and the suffering of the people are elided and history books do not go into detail about the holocaust.

Historians too are of the view that literature has stepped in to record the full horror of the Partition and that an evaluation of the times is incomplete without the literary archives. Since creative writer best capture the mood of the period, I have chosen four Punjabi writers who write in English and have effectively conveyed various aspects of Partition. They are Bapsi Sidhwa, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal and Shauna Singh Baldwin. Bapsi Sidhwa shows how Partition

affected women, families and communities. Khushwant Singh shows how Partition encouraged communalism and affected community and society.

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