

The Traumatic Effect of the Partition of India: A Study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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Abstract

The partition of India during independence is a process of division based on the community. The northern part predominantly Muslim, established Pakistan under the leadership of Md. Ali Jinnah and on the other hand the Hindu dominant areas found the Republic of India. This partition brought lots of terror with the notion of independence, very soon the freedom from British colonial rule turned into the terror of bloodshed, riots, rape and killing of innocent people. On the one hand these two newly formed nations with their inexperienced administration and management ruined their economies. At the same time the emergence of communalism put the people at the threshold of insecurity, identity crisis, where countless innocent folks became the victim of riots. People who were living together irrespective of their religious and communal differences for generations no longer able to hold the peace and harmony among them. The 'ideologies' of communalism and riots made them doubt their neighbors with whom they have been living together. With the description of the experience of losing near one, encountering thousands of dead bodies in the train coming from Pakistan, bodies floating on the river; the work *Train to Pakistan* presents the scenario of India after independence. How all these events left the marks in the human psyche and how those memories of terror haunt them all these aspects were well portrayed through this novel. This paper made an attempt to evaluate the effect left by the partition in human mind, the traumatic effect of those terrors and insecurity visible among the people. Along with that it also focuses upon the gender position of the independent India with reference to Khushwant Singh's *The Train to Pakistan*. In the process of preparing the paper the analytical method is being adopted and various references have been made to some other works on 'partition literature'.

Key words: *Partition, Trauma, Identity, Gender & security.*

1. Introduction

The independence of India can be considered as the beginning of a period of dramatic transformation. This transformation includes the physical shape of the nation, the community, society and their rules and regulations too. While on the one hand the independent of India brought an end to colonial rule, on the other hand it brought the terror of insecurity, riots and various other violence events. The process of partition was not so clean and peaceful. It brought the terror of killing, bloodshed, countless travellers; mass killing became the best way to imply the community difference. Both these two nations and the countless people, suffering from the wound mentally and physically. This wound

was not ended with the primary victims of the partition. Even after years of partition the traumatic experience and their impact can be traced among the people from both countries.

The act of partition not only brought a division by drawing boundaries between the two countries. They injected the notion of opposition among the people. For them mass killing, refugees became an easy target to outbreak the anger and violence of the partition. The weaker section of the society specially 'women' became the easy target to attack upon the honor of a particular community. This paper tries to present a picture of society after independence.

2. Methodology:

In the process of preparing this paper the analytical and descriptive methods are being adopted. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is taken as the primary text for the study, while references have been taken from various articles, and journals.

3. Objectives:

The main objectives of this study are-

- I) The impact of partition and it's traumatic effect
- II) The position of females during the partition of 'India'.

4. Discussion:

4.1. Background:

'British India' was divided into two parts on August 14-15, 1947. It started with the Muslim League's 'Pakistan' resolution preceded in the year 1940, where they demand for the creation of separate 'states'. As a result of that during the time of independence the body of 'India' was torn apart. The partition is not only limited to the political aspects but also it affected the physical and mental health of the 'nation'. India with its state, different communities, religious beliefs form a body. But the act of partition made a wound to that body called 'India'. It snapped away the various parts from the body. People who used to live together for generations under the 'unity' and peace and harmony had to suffer from that 'wound' created by the partition. The terror of killing, riots, insecurity associated with the act with it. That insecurity and terror of losing someone not only affect the generation who were the prime victim but left a scare for the future generation in the form of memories. And the impact of such memories became haunting and which left a notion for holding a doubtful eye towards the opposite community.

As both the countries are trying to handle the partition and establish a secular state with peace and equality; the rise of riots interrupted that act. With the riots "...the old ghost of communal hatred, which shook the Indian subcontinent in 1947, reappears again and again each time causing new outburst of violence;...the life of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities has been haunted by recurrent strife..." as it was pointed out by Isabella Bruschi in her essay *Partition in Fiction: Gendered Perspectives*. And the outcome was a phase filled with uncertainty, insecurity, where countless people were killed, the mass migration and various other deadliest impacts of partition.

Partition Literature presents these political changes, socio-political scenarios of that period of time, provides the statistics and the emergence of various political institutions. Often human cost of partition limited by the historical narrative of the events, where the emphasis given upon the action of political leaders, various statistics of mass-migration, killing, rapes and many other violent activities. Another notable element of this literature is that it puts more emphasis upon the male narrative than the women's experience. Most of the literary composition focuses upon the violation of women, how they were being victimized or targeted to attack on the dignity of a community.

4.2. Partition and its Traumatic Effect:

Trauma in the general sense of the term means wound. In its Greek origin where it denotes a physical injury from an external cause. But in the present time it is used to describe psychological injury too. "Trauma is a disturbed mental and emotional condition, an injury caused to the psyche by some catastrophic events, which overwhelms a person and his response mechanism." Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* described the nature of trauma by stating, "excitation from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield".

In the context of the partition where it arose, communal hatred made a scar in the mind of people who shared the relationship of neighbor, brotherhood for generations. All these notions are well presented in the 'partition literature'. Various fictional works depict the terror of partition, conditions of the refugees, insecurity, victimization of females. One such significant work dealt with the scenario of after independence of India is Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. Published in the year 1956 this work presented the scenario of a village located on the border of India and Pakistan, Mano Majra. When the entire nation was affected by the partition and communal hatred, Mano Majra still lived in peace and harmony with their neighbors. But then Lala Ram Lal, a local and only Hindu money lender of is murdered. Then on a fine day a train arrives carrying the bodies of dead bodies of Sikh with that the village gradually turns into a battlefield. Neither magistrate nor the police were able to control the rising weave of violence and riots against the 'innocent' and their once 'neighbor'.

4.3. Violence and Dislocation:

Violence and Dislocation from one's own place came with once the partition was declared. People started migrating towards the East who used to live on the North- East border. The trains, trucks filled with refugees who were migrating towards Lahore. And the Hindus were returning to the 'Republic of India' from Pakistan. There were countless Sikh refugees who migrated from Pakistan to Mano Majra also. The refugees who arrived at Mano Majra had not experienced the violence on their way, and in Mano Majra also they didn't have to go through any kind of suffering or ill- treatment. 'These refugees have not lost much in Pakistan and apparently no one molested them on the way. The Muslim of Mano Majra has been bringing them food at the temple.' (Singh, 2013, p.61). After the arrival of refugees from Pakistan and the departure of countless Muslims to Pakistan via Mano Majra station, this village was still not affected by the hatred of communalism. The local Muslims were providing shelter to the migrated Sikhs. So far the magistrates along with the police are controlling the entire situation in a very safe manner. They also took care of the fact that no one can enter from the

outside with the 'ideology' of riots and violence, which can trigger hatred among the people of the village. That's why they also put 'Iqbal', a member of People's Party of India, so that he couldn't get the chance to mingle with the villagers and make them aware of the scenario outside Mano Majra. The magistrate was really hoping not to encounter the ghost train as he knew the power of destruction such a train possessed. It not only brought the dead bodies but also brought a death parlor to the notion of 'peace' and 'brotherhood'; and people started holding rivalry and attacking minds towards their age-old neighbors and soon a village became the victim of the curse of partition.

While thanking almighty for the peaceful situation in Mano Majra. At the same time the administration of Mano Majra realized the fact that it would take a few moments to burn the 'brotherhood' between these two communities 'If others turn up who have been through massacres and have lost relations' then the entire Mano Majra is going to be different from the present scenario. So Hukum Chand decided to 'bow before the storm till it passes'. And this leads to the dislocation of the Muslims of Mano Majra. As it was ordered by the militaries and policemen the Muslims of the village gathered their belongings and set for their journey towards uncertainty, without any protest. 'If we have to go, we better pack our beddings and belongings. It will take use more than one night to clear out of homes it has taken our fathers and grandfathers hundreds of years to male' (Singh, 2013,p. 79) as it was pointed out by Imam Baksh. This decision not only affected the Muslims, but the entire village mourned their parting from their neighbours, brothers. They couldn't imagine the uncertainty that lay with the decision of dislocating them from Mano Majra. Most of the villagers thought that once the peace returns and the riots are over they will be back, it's just a temporary separation. The next day they were taken in the military trucks without giving the time to say 'goodbye' to their age-old brothers and their journey began with the officer's shouting, 'Pakistan [forever]'.

Along with this act of wiping the Muslims from the Sikh and Hindu dominant areas for security purposes, it leads to insecurity. It loosened the security of the village more than the previous. As it was mentioned in the text that the first act of violence or decoity took place with the murder of Ram Lal, the only Hindu money lender of the village. They entered his house and beat him down to death. The family of Ram Lal including his old mother, wife and child remained the prime witness of the act of insecurity and violence. Taking advantage of the unstable state of government the 'Dakoo' emerged and they started the robbery; those young men who didn't want to be a part of the decoite group were considered as 'coward' and mocked for that and Malli is the leader of that dakoo group. After the departure of the Muslims from Mano Majra the Sikh administrative handover the responsibilities of looking after the belongings of them until and anyone who tried to interrupt on his way he would shoot to death. The responsibility handed over to a person who murdered Ram Lal, even though police caught Jugga for that.

4.4. The Ghost Train:

The arrival of the ghost train with thousands of dead bodies of the Sikh refugees in the month of September, 1947 can be interpreted as a symbol of violence. Till then Mano Majra was untouched by the notion of communal hatred or rivalry. But this ghost train brought darkness to the village. By the evening 'the village was stilled in a deathly silence' (Singh, 2013, p.54). The dreadful scene of the train

filled with dead bodies of young old men, women, children attached to their mother's body. As described the situation of Hukum Chand

The most vivid picture was that of an old peasant with a long whit 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... Hukum Chand had shaken him by the shoulder, saying Baba, Baba! Believing he was alive. He was alive. His cold hand stretched itself grotesquely and gripped the magistrate's right foot. Cold sweat came out all over Hukum Chand's body. (Singh, 55)

The ghost train was too much for people like Hukum Chand and his fatalism. Through the restlessness of the Hukum Chand Khushwant Singh draw a picture of the mental health of those who have seen this terror of death and massacre.

It was just the beginning of the curse in the fortune of Mano Majra, very soon the second train arrived at the station. This time the policemen didn't seek the help from the villagers by asking for wood and kerosene oil; rather they dug and buried the dead bodies. The use of both the term 'buried and burn' can be interpreted as the fact that the first train filled with the Hindus and Sikhs bodies were being burnt and the bodies from the second train were buried.

This arrival of the two trains loaded with dead bodies brought a change in the human mind. While the policemen were busy in the burial at the same time various groups arose, who gradually spread hate in the minds of the people. A group of young people came to Mano Majra which gave provocative speeches which were enough to trigger the notion of revenge in the minds of villagers.

"... For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Musulmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two... For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across... It will teach them that we also play this game of killing..." (Singh, 92).

As the government is not going to do anything it is 'we' who have to take revenge for the killing of our people. The Pakistanis never asked for permission when they mobbed, abducted the Hindu and Sikh people. So they [we] mustn't and cannot wait for the government. So they planned a mob at the train which is going to leave for Pakistan full with Musulmans.

4.5. The Position of Female:

Victimization of females became an easy way of attacking the dignity of a community. Both Hindu and non- Hindu adopt this method to attack their rival community. Because the chastity of females often determines the dignity of a community. Though in this text not much emphasis is given upon the experience of the females in terms of their first person presentation, in comparison to that of the males'. But as it was presented in this text the position of female is limited to the position of victimized only. Guided by the patriarchal notion Mano Majra, the responsibility and performance of women is only limited to household activities. And the image of women is often used to indicate the cowardness of a man. For example while Jugga refused to join Malli's dakoo group then he was being insulted with the imagery of female, 'Jugga, wear these bangles and put hena on your palms' (Singh, 2013, p.12) as remaining inside the house is sort of behavior showed by women only.

Presenting from the point of view of an observer, silenced the personal autonomy of expressing female's own condition. At the same time it also indicative of the fact that public life, political participation, self narrative are limited to men only. Abduction, rape, sexual assault became the usual notion related to women. The value of women reduced to the level of commodity where one can buy one by paying the price. From the conversation of Bhola, the cart driver and Jugga, where Jugga tease Bholeya by saying 'I hear a lot of women are being abducted and sold cheap. You could find a wife for yourself.' (Singh, 2013, p. 45). Bhola replied to that 'Why Sardara, if you can find a Musulmani without paying for her, am I impotent that I should have to buy an abducted woman?' (Singh, 2013, p. 46).

From the mentioned conversation we came to know they it was not only the women were being commodified but the relationship between people also started evaluating as business deal e.g. the relationship between Jugga and Nooran, which was materialized by the people. The story of Nooran was followed by her realization of having the child of Jugga just before their dislocation. She went to Jugga's mother for help; but she is powerless and only hope she can provide to Nooran to console her that as soon as Jugga came out of the Jail he will find her and bring back her to his home. Even though she realized the risk and terror of a pregnant woman but she could not help Nooran because she herself is not secure at her place and the only male support she has is inside the lockup at that time. Nooran also can't stand with her desire, left with no other option then leaving with the troop to Pakistan with the hope of getting rescued by her lover.

Another incident of Sundari, the daughter of Hukum Chand's orderly. When she was traveling with her husband Mansa Ram just after her marriage. On the road the bus was stopped and everyone was ordered off the bus, the Sikhs 'were just hacked to death', 'clean shaven were stripped... the whole thing was cut off' (Singh, 2013, p.108). Sundari saw her husband suffering from the pain. The mob killed her husband and 'made love to her'. Where 'love' doesn't indicate the desirable emotional state rather it was the terror for a female, where she has to lose her 'best jewel' even after being innocent. Another noticeable situation related to the women is that some were being abducted, some were being raped and killed; but there is another type exists in the society who choose the profession of 'dancer' & 'singer' for their survival. The story of Hashina who was forced to be a 'sex- worker' because she has to earn money for her survival who was barely sixteen. Even though her voice and appearance reminds Hukum Chand of his daughter, who died long back but if she was alive might have been of Hashina's age. He often feel self-contradictory in his behavior as he wanted to escape from the terror of partition even in its temporary form by indulging himself in such kind of activities. But at the same time he often felt guilty of the behavior; at his age conducting such activities is a sin. But the 'man' inside him often outshines the 'father's' emotions and within a few moments he wiped out the thought of guilt and started enjoying what he paid for.

5. Conclusion:

The partition of India is not end with the emergence of two nations or with the act of drawing the border between India and Pakistan. The after independent situation was the crucial for both the countries. It was not only that one or two generations suffered from the effect of the partition. But this effect is still visible in different forms. It compels a person to question his neighbors with whom he

shared friendship once. Dislocation, mass killing, riots creates a long lasting wound. This wound appears again and again in different situations. In the early 1980s there was a militant separatist movement among the Sikhs in Punjab that resulted to the Operation Blue Star that left hundreds of troops and civilians dead and injured. It was followed by the act of assassination of Indira Gandhi on 31st October, 1984 by her Sikh bodyguard. This wound was again appeared in 1990s, which leads to the destruction of the Babari Masjid in the city of Ayodhya in 6th December, 1992. In present time also this 'ghost of communal hatred' visible in our society. This paper made an effort to study the immediate effect of partition and how it left a trauma which is still prevalent in our society. The partition of India and its effect is a huge area of discussion. By taking the text *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh an attempt is being made to leave some contribution in this area.

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