

Short Communication

Politics of religion in partition novels: Rahi Masoom Reza's *Adha Gaon* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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People have moved many a times from one place to another. Ideally such movements should be voluntary but it is not always so. There are several instances, in the history of mankind, of mass migrations to escape perceived prosecutions on the name of racial/ ethnic cleansing, political strategies etc. A few of these experiences, especially of the modern times, are well-documented and attracted people with the human sensitivity belonging to the academia and non-academia too. The partition of India in 1947 is one such major event in the modern history of South Asia. This division, beyond questioning, was a political agenda but its aftermath and the mass immigration were never thought of. Undoubtedly, the partition was not inevitable; India's independence was inevitable. The preservation of its unity was a prize that was paid, in our plural society for absence of high statesmanship. There were many other reasons that deprived us of that prize - personal hubris, miscalculation, and narrowness of outlook (Noorani, 65).

Key words: Partition, Politics, Religion, Communalism, Adha Gaon, Train to Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Though this exercise was political, giving birth to separate nations out of one in due course, its implications were (and till today) far wider, probably encompassing whole gamut of the South Asian life. It sowed the seeds of mutual hatred and mistrust in the hearts and minds of people on both sides. That way it has been the dividing line in the geography, polity, history, economy, and real lives too. The few intellectuals who have sought to transcend the limiting constraints of their nation-states are constantly reminded of their national origins in the critiques and counter-critiques that have characterized

partition historiography. Even non-partisan scholarship rarely escapes being labeled 'made in India' or 'made in Pakistan'. To be relatively immune from the politics and emotionalism that have inflamed the debate on partition and its aftermath requires a none-too-easy negotiation of identities centered on the nation-state which the tortuous process of division left.

The present attempt is to (re)define or (re)explore the politics (or to say the religion based politics) which worked as foundation for this disaster. The study would look into the politics of religion by mapping the daily life

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experiences as narrated in Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon* ('Half Village') and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. Raza tries to capture the dynamics of rural life consisting of Hindu and Muslims in his canvass while Khushwant Singh makes note of individuals suffering from this mammoth monster. This study consists of the following major sections – Historical Perspectives on Partition, Politics of Religion: Reason and Result, a comprehensive comparative analysis and the concluding remarks (Adkins 1974; Manavar, 2002; Swain, 2001).

Historical perspectives on the partition

The Partition of British India in 1947, which created the two independent states of India and Pakistan, was followed by one of the cruelest and bloodiest migrations and ethnic cleansings in history. The religious fury and violence that it unleashed caused the deaths of some 2 million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. An estimated 12 to 15 million people were forcibly transferred between the two countries. At least 75,000 women were raped (Butalia, 2000).

At the level of popular memory however, partition often overshadows the importance of independence because of its much more direct impact on the lives of people. The trauma incurred in the process has been profound. Consequently relations between the two states, between them and some of their people, and between some of their groups have not normalized even after more than half a century; on the contrary, they have consistently worsened with each passing year.

Literature covered the public and private spaces and has narrated public frenzy and personal fears with superb skills. Consequently, a whole genre of 'partition Literature' came into being. Some of them had directly received the Partition wounds, some others got affected somewhat indirectly, and yet another created/crafted Partition fiction. While historians mainly 're-produce the mainstream versions' of the Partition; literary images capture less dominant spaces occurring simultaneously and playing stronger roles in retention/ demolition/ re-creation of landscapes at local levels. Many analytical studies of the Partition literature appeared in the last century throwing light on people, society, and polity.

Politics of religion: Reason and result

Before the discussion head towards the selected topic, the important issue to keep in mind is that in both novels the Politics of Religion works at two levels: Religion as a reason of partition and religious problems as result of partition. The novels chosen here show the harmonious and peaceful life of the people living in villages which represent symbolically different places all over the Indian continent before the partition and the after effects or

better to say the bloody and ghastly effects caused by the unnecessary and unintelligent act of partition. Few crazy politicians took the innocent people at their sides for this foolish act and that one wrong step created a whirlpool in the calm and cool water. Religion came into the center of these human relations and basic human emotions got lost. And all these things have their effects even today.

Comprehensive analysis of *Adha Gaon* and *Train to Pakistan*

While analyzing two things keeping in the centre the same topic, two types of studies can be done: comparison and contrast. The game of Politics is played by the so called intelligentsia in both novels. Both novels, though being village-centric and revolving around the same theme of partition, have different modes of treating similar incident. The first being pro-societal while the other is pro-individual. The vivacity also lies at the level of the central characters that are at the core of the stories as one highlights the plight of Muslims in a village where majority of the people are Muslims and Hindus, while the other shows the reaction of the Hindus and Sikhs. These novels give voice to those questions which were there in the minds of every common individual at that time. As chacha Imam Bakhsh in *Train to Pakistan* rightly asks: *What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst [Sikhs] as brothers* (Singh, 2000)

In fact, such novels raise the basic query as to who can be called the possible culprit for this disaster? Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped (Sengupta, 2006).

The reality to be taken note of is the dirty politics of the so-called religious leaders of that time irrespective of any which would be clear from these speeches: "*Never trust a Mussulman*". The last Guru had warned them that Muslims had no loyalties (Singh, 2000). Religion is in danger. Take the water of the Ganges in your hand and pledge to clean our motherland with the blood of the Muslims... Just see how these Malaichch Turks have insulted our mothers in Kolkata, Lahore and Navakhali. – Hindu swami (Reza, 2003). All of you may know that at present a war is being waged for the life and death of the Muslims. We are living in such a country where our status is not more than that of salt in dal. Once the British leave these Hindus will finish us. The Muslims are in need of a place where they can live with respect – People from Aligarh (Reza, 2003).

Through these dialogues, these so called highly respected people of religious order tried their level best to instigate poor villagers who could never understand either the reason or the result of these merciless killings.

As Hakim Sahib puts forth the query: *What I'm asking, beta, is have people suddenly gone mad or what? Without any reason they're fighting and dying...* (Reza, 2003).

In spite of all these religious and political instigations, the inborn goodness of these villagers was intact and both the writers truly and consciously puts forth this reality as these novels are full of such incidents where Hindus have saved Muslims from other Hindu rioters or vice-a-verse. The end of them is also symbolic as both ends with a note of communion of the heart of the parted communities. One shows the death of Phunnan Mian and Chikuriya with the comment that: *The blood of both mingled, but this mixture did not produce a third color, because the color of their blood was the same* (Reza, 2003).

Same is the case with the other text which ends with the death of Jugga in the course of saving the lives of many Muslims including the one Nooran whom he loved. These novels show how these few politicians and religious leaders took advantage of the religious instincts of these innocent and ignorant people and to an extent succeeded in it; but there are a few who were not caught in this net. But one thing is sure that the geographical partition was just the first step towards more complicated and devastated acts.

Conclusion

In an interview, Khushvant (1988), tries to express the agony which made him realize the need to write: 'The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country... I had believed that we Indians were peace loving and non-Violent, that we were more concerned with matters of the spirit, while the rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. After the experience of the autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe to these views. I became... an angry middle aged man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world... I decided to try my hand on writing' (Dhawan, 2001).

It is impossible to deny the function of Partition literature as a moral warning about what another Partition

can do to us. Yet, as another side of the coin, such warnings can have an invert effect: they can actually provoke more violence. As commented by Danish Husain for Adha Gaon: *"It is too honest a novel. Rahi wrote in responsible times, when the truth could be handled, but what he said then can harm us now"* (Chishti, 2007).

This, however, has its own absurdities: how can anyone dictate a writer not to make a literary inquiry into such a historical event. This is what gives credence to the viewpoint that the best way to deal with major event in Indian history, an event that Indian history writing does not tell us much about. Perhaps a process of forgiveness for the crimes committed during Partition initiated by intellectuals from both sides can miraculously lead to reconciliation and mutual acceptance.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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