



Partition Literature through the eyes of both Pakistan and India.

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Abstract

The paper deals with the effect of partition both in India and Pakistan in the words of Bapsi Sidhwa and Khushwant Singh in the books titled, “Ice-Candy Man” and “Train to Pakistan” respectively. One can understand the deep rooted effects of a horrific history that these two countries faced, which was a well planned and executed act of the Coloniser. The Postcolonial aspect has also been dealt with in this paper with “Partition” as the central idea.

The two books taken for the study deals with two different ways of explaining about Partition. It is very unique in itself, how Bapsi Sidhwa tells the whole story through the eyes of a 12 year old girl “Lenny” which makes the reader feel that the character speaks beyond her age, which shows one how it is more like a brainchild of author herself.

On the other hand, Khushwant Singh talks about how a whole fictional village “Mano Majra” in the Indian province was affected by the religious unrest that took place because of Partition. And how the people who once lived in harmony now struggled to survive in their mother land. Khushwant Singh also uses a bit of satirical humour in his novel, something which one does not expect in a much serious context like this. It is believed that Khushwant Singh talks about his personal experience of partition in his novel, connecting to people on a personal level.

“Ice-Candy Man” was published in the year 1988 and “Train to Pakistan” was published in the year 1956 about the incident which took place in the year 1947, the cries of the families that faced Partition still resonates. And how the seed of “Divide and Rule” is still growing between us, and how the aftermath of Partition is still a struggle for the people of both the countries.

The paper also talks about how the language of the colonizer was used to condemn their atrocities towards the country.

Key Words: Partition, Postcolonial Writings, Colonizer and Colonised, Language of the Colonizer.

Introduction

It was all well from the outside when the first Prime Minister of India announced the freedom of India from the British rule. And gave the speech to the Indian Constituent Assembly in the Parliament, the words of Nehru were as follows.

“At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom.”

At the stroke of midnight of August 14-15, 1947, the cheerful joy of the people were overlapped by the cries of millions who ran on the grounds filled with the corps of their loved ones. A land where

people were welcomed on flower beds, washed feet with rose water, today it was the bed of corps and feet drenched in blood. After almost hundred years of rule of British East India Company, adding ninety years of British Raj, India had achieved Independence. But of what use? This should have been a moment of joy, a moment of crowning triumph after all these years of struggle. Every sacrifice made for the freedom from British was marred by unimaginable, horrific, violence and bloodshed.

The two books titled “Ice-Candy Man” by Bapsi Sidhwa and “Train to Pakistan” by Khushwant Singh talks about the gruesome act of partition of both India and Pakistan. It is not to be marked as a bad day in the history; rather it is a horrific history that these two neighbours share.

One cannot forget the horrible days that these two countries have seen, and many writers like Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa, have experienced partition on a personal level. Khushwant Singh was thirty at the time of partition whereas Bapsi Sidhwa was only eight years old in 1947. Khushwant Singh is a renowned Indian writer and Bapsi Sidhwa hails from Pakistan.

Bapsi Sidhwa is an internationally acclaimed author. Raised in Lahore, Pakistan, she now lives in Houston, Texas. She has written five novels – Ice-Candy-Man, The Pakistani Bride, The Crow Eaters, An American Brat, and Water- which have been translated and published in several languages.

Praise for Bapsi Sidhwa in the words of some critics:

“Sidhwa captures the turmoil of the times, with a brilliant combination of individual growing-up pains and the collective work- particularly the dehumanizing effects of communalism she movingly reveals in *Ice-Candy-Man* - is painfully relevant to our present day India.” (*Economic Times*)

“Bapsi Sidhwa is technically Pakistani, but literature has no need of partitions, particularly as Sidhwa’s novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is one of the finest responses made to the horror of the division of the subcontinent.” (*The New Yorker*)

“Bapsi Sidhwa deals with the partition of India, a subject as harrowing as the Holocaust. Before our disbelieving eyes, she performs the remarkable feat of bringing together the ribald farce of Parsee family life and the stark drama and horrors of the riots and massacres of 1947. She has achieved the impossible through one masterly stroke creating a child’s world of home and games in the park amidst a motley company. At the center of this world is the child, Lenny is not allowed to become merely the embodiment of an abstract idea. Sidhwa’s triumph lies in creating characters so rich in hilarious and accurate detail, so alive and active, that long after one has closed the book, they continue to perform their extraordinary and wonderful feats before our eyes.” (*Dawn*)

“It is the summer of 1947. But Partition does not mean much to the Sikhs and Muslims of Mano Majra, a village on the border of India and Pakistan. Then, a local money-lender is murdered, and suspicion falls upon Juggut Singh, the village gangster who is in love with a Muslim girl. When a train arrives, carrying bodies of dead Sikhs, the village is transformed into a battlefield, and neither the magistrate nor the police are able to stem the rising tide of violence. Amidst conflicting loyalties, it is left to Juggut Singh to redeem himself and reclaim peace for his village.” (Penguin Books)

Was first Published in 1956, Train to Pakistan is a classic of modern Indian fiction.

Khushwant Singh is India’s best-known writer and columnist. He has been founder-editor of Yojana, and editor of the Illustrated Weekly of India, the National Herald and the Hindustan Times. He is also the author of several books which include the novels I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, Delhi, The Company of Women and Burial at Sea; the classic two-volume A History of the Sikhs; and a number of translations and non-fiction books on Sikh religion and culture, Delhi, nature, current affairs and Urdu poetry. His autobiography, Truth, Love and a Little Malice, was published in 2002.

Sidhwa in her book, "Ice-Candy Man" shows that people belonging to different communities and religions lived in peace and harmony before partition. She shows how Muslims and Hindus could fall in love with each other irrespective of their religious distinctions.

Through the eyes of a twelve year old girl Lenny, the child narrator, Sidhwa describes the harmonious coexistence of Ayah and her admirers, who belonged to distinct communities, interacted with each other with love, care and affection like any other human being.

"This is my heaven. My refuge from the perplexing unrealities of my home on Warris Road...." (Lenny)

**"If need be, we will protect our Muslims brother's with our lives"
(Jugjeet Singh)**

**"Every man in this village will guard his Sikh brother with no regards for his own life"
(Village Chuodary)**

Sidhwa predominantly talks about how the Radcliffe Commission members were dividing and distributing the cities between two countries like a pack of cards. Sidhwa is conscious of the gruesome negligence and unrealistic actions taken by British Raj, while undertaking and supervising Partition.

The tyrannical act of division of the cities through which India was wrongly given some cities, because of which the consequences were faced by both India and Pakistan along with its people

"The British gods under the ceiling fans of the Faletti's Hotel- behind Queen Victoria's garden skirt-the Radcliff Commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan. Amritsar (30 miles away) to India. Sialkot to Pakistan. Pathankot to India. I am a Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that." (Lenny)

One of the devastating incidents of Partition was the massacres that took place in the trains which travelled to-and-fro to Pakistan and India. Sidhwa portrays train massacres as one of the most horrific incidents of Partition. Ice-Candy Man, the Muslim protagonist is expecting his relatives from Gurdaspur, but to his horror he meets with vandalized bodies and finds only bags full of breasts cut off from Muslim women (149)

"A train from Gurdaspur has just come.....Everyone in it is dead.....butchered.....two gunny-bags full of women's breasts."

Khushwant Singh on the other hand also talks about the harmonious coexistence of people belonging to diverse communities in India before Partition in his book "Train to Pakistan"

He talks about a fictional village named "Mano Majra" in the Indian province, he talks about how the day begins with the Muslim prayer leader calling Allah-hu-Akbar, and inviting the believers for the prayer. Singh then explain how this Muslim prayer is followed by the Sikh Priest's prayers (6). The day at Mano Majra ends in a similar pattern with the Imam calling the believers to offer their prayers. Then Sikh priest leads the believers to the evening prayers at the Sikh temple.

Meet Singh, the head of Gurudwara, tells Iqbal

"Everyone is welcome to his religion. Here next door is mosque. When I pray to my Guru, Uncle Imam Baksh calls to Allah." (28)

Singh shows how some citizens irrespective of their religious beliefs, stuck to their patriotic selves, and remained loyal to their mother land. Upon knowing that the government was planning to transport all the Muslims to Pakistan from Mano Majra, one Muslim said:

"What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you (Sikhs) as brothers." (Imam Baksh)

Singh portrays the love and affection of two diverse communities but revolving the story around a couple, the boy named Juggut Singh; a Sikh falls in love with Nooran, a Muslim girl. How Juggut Singh is a kind hearted human that he does not worry about his life when it came to protecting his love interest Nooran.

This love story was not just about a couple who belonged to two diverse communities, rather showed how the actions of the people during partition was not always barbaric; it was based on humanitarian grounds as well. The chaos was among the few but affected the whole of the country. The religious unrest did not end the love that Juggut Singh had for Nooran, he in fact is seen sacrificing his life for fellow humans irrespective of his religious beliefs.

Like Sidhwa, Singh also talks about the Train Massacres, the Sikhs who were murdered in Pakistan were sent back in train to India, and their bodies were burned together in huge batches. The whole village witnessed this mass cremation.

"The northern horizon, which had turned a bluish grey, showed orange again. The orange turned into copper and then into a luminous russet. Red tongues of flame leaped into the black sky. A soft breeze began to blow toward the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene, then of wood. And then a faint acrid smell is searing flesh.

The village was stilled in a deathly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odour was. They all knew. They had known it all the time. The answer was implicit in the fact that the train had come from Pakistan." (54) (55)

The two books taken for the study can also be seen through the broader perspective of Postcolonial writings. How many authors have found themselves a plethora of central theme around partition, or for that matter during the Postcolonial era, wherein they ridiculed the acts of the Colonisers, and to do so some authors like Bapsi Sidhwa and Khushwant Singh used satirical humour in their novels to speak about the atrocities that they faced under the oppressors. An irony one can notice in these Postcolonial works is that, one uses the language of the oppressor to talk about the oppressor's cruel actions towards the oppressed.

Conclusion

Both Bapsi Sidhwa's "Ice-Candy Man" which was published in the year 1988 and Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan" published in the year 1956 speak a lot about the incident which took place in the year 1947- Partition. The cries of the families that faced Partition still resonate. And how the seed of "Divide and Rule" is still growing between us, and how the aftermath of Partition is still a struggle for the people of both the countries.

What one needs to understand is that these texts should be looked as a repercussion of a well planned and executed idea of the oppressors.

I wonder, as a Human, the terrible choices that we made during partition, does it show our savage self that we always had within us, the hatred towards the "Other" religion was deep rooted that we needed our oppressor to just pave way for us to kill each other based on what? RELIGION!

If Partition was a seed sown by the Colonizer, then its aftermath was the tree that grew so tall and its branches and roots have grown stronger, that it is still growing among us, and we are still feeding ourselves and our future generations with the fruits of hatred, which never really was our taste or choice.

One needs to question themselves, should we appreciate and cherish the fruits of our land- respect, love, care and harmony to fellow being or do we feed our coming generation with the foreign fruit. If the choice is to feed on to the foreign fruit of religious hatred then the owners of the seed are not far away, they will begin their market and rule over us once again.

Choice is yours, either fight for your country or fight for the oppressors of your country.

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