

A Comparative Study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*

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Abstract. Partition of Indian sub-continent is one of the most terrible events in the history of the sub-continent. The two countries got freedom in 1947 along with its vivisection on the communal basis which leaves us puzzled whether the year 1947 is worthy to be remembered for the independence or for the massacre and atrocities during involuntary migration of a huge mass of people for their existence. Various writers have attempted to deal with the theme of partition of Indian sub-continent in their works. However, a kind of variation in the depiction of the historical events, differences in the approaches to the truth and differences in the focus and attitude of the authors are quite natural. Even the treatment of the same event or incident may differ from author to author. The present paper aims at the comparative study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*. Both the writers have witnessed the event themselves and have tried to depict the terror of the conflict and the suffering of people during those days in their novels. *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a novel wherein Khushwant Singh tells the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan realistically. In fact the partition touched the whole country and Singh attempted to look at the tragic and terrible events from the point of view of the people of Mano Majra, a small village in Punjab, India. *Ice-Candy-Man* (1991) is also a novel depicting the conflicts in the sub-continent during the days of partition and their most damaging effects on the subcontinent. Here the story has been told from a Parsee's point of view. Khushwant Singh is an Indian writer, writing in English whereas Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani writer. However, both the novels share the same theme. Both the writers witness themselves the partition and have tried to depict the terror of the conflict and the suffering of people during those days in their novels. The present paper discusses the similarities and dissimilarities in the treatment of the same theme by two novelists of India and Pakistan.

Keywords : Freedom; vivisection; massacre; atrocities; involuntary migration.

Partition of Indian sub-continent is one of the most terrible events in the history of the world. The sub-continent got freedom in 1947 along with its vivisection on the communal basis which leaves us puzzled. The year 1947 should be remembered for the independence or for the massacre and atrocities during involuntary migration of huge masses of people for their existence. Urwashi Butalia moves her readers by describing partition in the following words:

The political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions of history...twelve million people between the new, truncated India and two

wings, East and West, of the newly created Pakistan... Estimates of the dead vary from 200,000 million but that somewhere around a million people died is now widely accepted... 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religion different from their own religion. (Butalia, 3)

The partition of India has been one of the most traumatic experiences of our recent history. It disturbed the Indian psyche as well as its social fabric. It brought to an abrupt end a long and communally shared history. Partition was and has remained a decisive event in India's social and political life, the reason being its volume and scope with regard to India. So, it was natural that it touched all and particularly the creative writers like Khushwant Singh.

Train to Pakistan enjoys the distinction of being the first novel which is by far the best and the most powerful novel on the theme of partition of India. Here, truth meets fiction with stunning impact as Khushwant Singh recounts the trauma and tragedy of partition through the stories of his characters, stories that he, his families and his friends themselves experienced or saw enacted before their eyes. He evokes the peaceful and frightening phase before and after the partition of India and Pakistan.

Bapsi Sidhwa is one such post-colonial Pakistani novelist who, in the independent Pakistan, that is a country free from British colonization, depicts in her novel *The Pakistani Bride*, the identity of the women folk. The novel mainly presents the stories of three brides – Zaitoon, Afshan and Carol. Sidhwa has vividly depicted the traumatic and blurred picture of woman, sacrificed on the altar of social institutions of our male chauvinistic society which has never been able to give proper right to the women folk. They have just assigned them duties without sanctioning those rights. A shloka from Bhartrihari, the great Sanskrit poet, substantiates the point :

कार्येषु मंत्री, करणेषु दासी, भोज्येषु माता, शयनेषु रम्भा ।
धर्मेऽनुकूला क्षमया धरित्री, भार्या च षाड्गुण्यवतीषु दुर्लभा ॥
(Manusmriti. IX)

[Performing duties she gives advice like a minister, in serving she obeys like a maid servant, in feeding she is like mother, as a bed partner, she is Rambha, true companion during religious rites forbearing like earth, such a life partner possessing these six qualities is very rare.]

The above lines assign the women the duties of a maid, a housekeeper and of a wife but none speak about their rights. Women are supposed to be the speechless patient against patriarchal hegemonies and this universal question of women's subjugation is the central theme of this novel.

Both the writers witnessed the Partition themselves and tried to depict the terror of the conflict and the suffering of the people during those days in their novels. *Train to Pakistan* and *Ice-Candy-Man*, both the novels are set in the year 1947. However, all the actions narrated in the novel *Train to Pakistan* take place in a small village in Punjab, India, whereas action narrated in *Ice-Candy-Man* takes place in Lahore, Pakistan. The former is an Indian sub continental view of Parsi whereas the latter expresses Pakistani view of partition.

The freedom of India from British rule in 1947 and the splitting of the country into Muslim dominated country of Pakistan and the Hindu dominated country of India, is the greatest event in the history of modern India. What should have been the joyful culmination of decades of anti-British struggle became a shameful debacle as Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs turned on each other in a fury of religious bigotry. The violence surrounding partition is the main subject of *Train to Pakistan*. While India achieved independence, the world had the chance to watch the rarest event in the history of nation, the birth of twins – India and Pakistan.

As the novel opens, the very first sentence refers to the calamitous year of 1947. It was the time when the country which was in fetters for two hundred year, freed itself from the foreign yoke. The weather itself is symbolic of the complicated scenario, the newly born polity was confronting:

The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. It was hotter than usual, and drier and dustier and the summer was longer... There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins.... The summer before, communal riots, precipitated by reports of the proposed division of the country into a Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan, had broken out in Calcutta, and within a few months the death roll had mounted to several thousand. (*Train to Pakistan*, I)

As the division of country was formally announced, communal riots overshadowed the changes taking place in India. There are references to important cities like Calcutta which are lifelines of the country, brutally torn apart by the riots claiming lives of thousands people. The country that should have celebrated the newly won independence of its citizens has to mourn for their tragic deaths. In the border states of Bengal, Bihar there are people who are forced to abandon their homes to save their lives.

The summer of 1947 brought in its wake migration of ten million people – Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs as the creation of new state of Pakistan was formally announced. Within a month or two, almost a million of them were dead. The winds of terrorism were blowing all over northern India. There were only a few places in

the remote reaches of the frontier that were able to maintain peace. One of these places was the village of Mano Majra. It is a small village, close to the Indo-Pakistan border and serves as the setting of the novel. For centuries in this village, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs have loved each other as brothers and lived together in peace. But this tiny village becomes the target of communal conflict and violence generated by the partition:

Mano Majra is a tiny place. It has only three brick buildings, one of which is the home of money lender Lala Ram Lal. The other two are the Sikh temple and the mosque... There are only about seventy families in Mano Majra, and Lala Ram Lal's is the only Hindu family. The others are Sikhs or Muslims, about equal in number... It is the local deity, the *deo* to which all the villagers - repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing. (2)

The villagers therefore, represent the true spirit of India and Deo, the local deity becomes the symbol of communal harmony who is worshipped by the whole village irrespective of the religion, caste and creed. Before the partition, the life in Mano Majra remained unaffected by political events of the country. But the changes taking place in the country after independence affect the smooth lives of the people of Mano Majra as the village is caught in the whirlwind of partition :

The Sikhs retaliated by attacking a Muslim refugee train and sending it across the border with over a thousand corpses. They wrote on the engine 'Gift to Pakistan' (19)

Mano Majra is located near Sutlej river. The river is symbolic of the smooth course of life in the village. It also stands for vitality which is reflected in the lives of Mano Majra as the village symbolises secular values of the nation.

In the novel, the village is not presented as a place of perfect idyllic bliss. The peaceful life of the village is disrupted by the dacoits who murder the village moneylender Lala Ram Lal and loot him of all his property. Such violent incidents in the novel are a prelude to what is going to happen later on. It foreshadows the disaster that is soon to follow. Khushwant Singh observes :

The life in Mano Majra is stilled, save for the dogs barking at the trains that pass in the night. It had always been so, until the summer of 1947. (6)

The words are a premonition of what will happen later in the novel. At the time when the dacoity takes place, the hero of the novel, Juggut Singh has been to the fields to see his beloved Nooran, the daughter of the village Mullah, Imam

Baksh. Their love is unconditional as it transcends the barriers of religion – a Muslim weaver girl and a Sikh boy. Later on, it is in the same village that the innocence of their love is shattered by the brutal and savage forces of partition. To the north of the railway bridge, is an officer's rest house where the people of eminence, who come to Mano Majra, make a temporary stay. On one such morning before the dacoity, Hukum Chand, the District Magistrate and Deputy Commissioner visits the place. He has been deployed there to avert any kind of communal trouble in the area.

The writer uses first person narration technique to narrate the tear-jerking story of the partition in *Ice-Candy-Man*. It is the book, wherein Lenny, a polio-stricken Parsee child living in Lahore, narrates the story of the partition conflict. Lenny, being a child of a Parsee family, roams freely through the Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and Parsee society in Lahore. The character of Lenny in the novel can be assumed as the writer herself that shows that the novel has autobiographical elements in it. Further the writer gives an argument to claim the truth in her story by saying that Lenny's tongue was truth infected :

I am tempted to tell her the truth, but I bite my
wretched truth - infected tongue just in time. One
betrayal is enough. I, the budding Judas, must live
with their heinous secret. (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 239)

Both the novels show that there were co-existence and harmony among the people belonging to different religions in rural areas before partition. The riots and destruction caused by partition started from cities and reached to the small villages gradually. The novelists give the descriptions of pre-partition days of co-existence and harmony in the novels and gradually lead their readers to witness the conflicts and the tragedy that followed. Initially readers are informed about the conflicts through the conversation of the characters in the novels.

So far the descriptions in both the novels become light sometimes and gloomy sometimes. In *Train to Pakistan* the writer makes the description light by introducing the love making episode between Juggat Singh and Nooran after the terrible description of professional robbery and Lala Ram Lal's murder. In the same way, Sidhwa makes the narrative quite light and pleasant by allowing Lenny to praise her brother Adi for almost two pages. When the description becomes quite serious in the novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, the author introduces a light event with comic elements and suddenly some event makes the description serious. Here only the pre-partition descriptions have light tone in both the novels.

However, both the writers hint at the upcoming conflicts of riots and involuntary migrations of masses through the conversation between characters in the novels and then lead readers to witness the menacing and terrifying partition conflicts.

Both the writers describe the people belonging to rural areas having no knowledge of either freedom or even partition. They are not interested in the politics of the subcontinent. However, bad characters like Ice candy man in Sidhwa's novel, Mali in Khushwant Singh's novel get the benefit of the partition chaos and create problems for others. Villagers in both the novels have a sense of belongingness and they don't want to migrate. They expect police and government to do something to improve the situation.

The villagers in both the novels have a hope that all will be well after some time and they will come back to their own land. Here the description of involuntary migration of people makes readers feel as if they were themselves migrating from their motherland which brings tears in the eyes of the readers. Descriptions of the destruction caused by partition in both the novels are even more tragic. It includes the arrival of ghost train, funeral ceremony of dead bodies with kerosene and wood, burial of the dead bodies, evacuation of the villages and many more in *Train to Pakistan* and burning Lahore, evacuation of Pir Pindo, Rana's story and many more in *Ice-Candy-Man*.

In *Ice-Candy-Man* Bapsi Sidhwa shows her sympathy towards Jinnah and criticises the personalities and characters of Gandhi and Nehru. She defends Jinnah who has been criticised for demanding a separate nation that led to the partition of the Indian subcontinent. She does this task with the help of the dialogues of various characters in the novel and the narrator Lenny, who is assumed as the writer herself. In the novel Bapsi Sidhwa shows Jinnah saying :

You are free. You are free to go to your temples,
your mosque or any other place of worship in the
state of Pakistan.

You may belong to any religion or caste or creed
that has nothing to do with the business of
state...etc...etc...Pakistan Zindabad! (*Ice-Candy-
Man*, 79)

Bapsi Sidhwa has portrayed the character of Gandhi negatively in the novel. The narrator has been shown by the author wondering in following words, "I am puzzled why he's so famous." (87) Here, the portrayal of Gandhi's character in the chapter shows that the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* presents a Pakistani attitude about the character of Gandhi who has been respected in India as the Father of the nation. Had the author been an Indian, she would have thrown light on other traits and qualities of Gandhi character and personality, instead of focusing only on his advice to flush stomach by enema. Further Ice candy man expresses his doubt in the character of English people. He expresses his doubt in the character of Nehru and his relation with Mountbatten and his wife :

Nehru, he's a sly one...He's got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English's wife out of his other what-not...He's the one to watch!....
'Jinnah or no Jinnah! Sikh or no Sikh ! Right law, wrong law, Nehru will walk off with the lion's share... And what's more, come out of it smelling like the Queen-of-the-Kotha!' (131)

Here the writer clearly mentions that during division Muslims and Pakistan have suffered. British government has done injustice to Jinnah and favoured Nehru. Further, there are various jokes in the novel showing Hindus as timid and there are various comments that show Sikhs as cruel and blood thirsty and even the fighting arms of the Hindus. The descriptions here are given from Pakistani point of view and the writer sympathises with the Muslims, Pakistan and Jinnah. The novel can truly be called the Pakistani view of partition.

In *Train to Pakistan* when people plan to attack a train leaving for Pakistan, nobody could do anything. Iqbal a socio-political educated person, Meet Singh, a priest at the Gurudwara, Hukum Chand, a magistrate - all were helpless. A registered criminal Juggat Singh who believed in law of Karma saves the lives of his fellow villagers and he proves to be true to the Punjabi code. Though he has been considered as a *Badmas*, he becomes a real hero and a saviour who sacrifices his life to save the lives of his beloved Nooran and other Muslim leaving for Pakistan by the train. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa shows the role of Parsee characters that help Non-Muslim people to migrate safely from Lahore. She portrays the character of God Mother as a saviour who restores Ayah, a kidnapped Hindu lady from Heera Mandi, Lahore and manages to send her back to Amritsar. Thus Khushwant Singh shows a Sikh character, Juggat Singh as a saviour of mankind and Sidhwa shows Parsee characters, Lenny's parents and godmother as the saviours of mankind.

Train to Pakistan shows the strange role of police department and officers during the days of partition. The officers are after money. They want all the people of the area should leave safely. What they are interested in only their property. Indian officers are not even in favour of Indian government. The character of Hukum Chand, a magistrate shows the real character of the police department in India. Hukum Chand and Inspector are shown as corrupt officers expressing their views against the contemporary government, politicians and muslims. Iqbal is a timid socio-political worker who comes to stop killing on the border area. He has been shown running after political glory and finally becomes helpless in the situation. Here characters are giving their negative comments on the contemporary government and politicians and other religion but Khushwant Singh seems to remain neutral as he doesn't give any direct comment on any political ideology. The writer here even doesn't favour any religion directly.

Both the writers' objectives are to depict the destruction caused by the partition realistically in their novels. However love, romance and sex are also treated as major themes in the novels; they are interwoven with the partition story. Khushwant Singh shows the real love between Juggat Singh and Nooran, people's love for their home land, religion, fellow villagers, Iqbal's love for glory etc. He describes love making episodes between Juggat Singh and Nooran and Hukum Chand and the prostitute girl :

Juggut Singh's caresses became lustful. His hand strayed from the girl's face to her breasts and her waist. She caught it and put it back on her face. His breathing became slow and sensuous. His hand wandered again and brushed again her breasts as if by mistake. (*Train to Pakistan*, 13)

He brought the girl's face nearer his own and began kissing her on the back of her neck and on her ears...The two stood in silence for some time – the man a little apprehensive; the girl relieved of the attentions of a lover whose breath smelled of whisky, tobacco and pyorrhea....He took another whisky to make assurance doubly sure. The girl realized that there was no escape. (30-31)

However, the writer has drawn a line of limitation in describing the sexual activities. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Bapsi Sidhwa shows love for religion, love for land, (Ice candy man and other people) love for power (Tara Singh), physical love that leads to passion/sex (Ayah's admirers including Ice Candy Man), and love for human beings (Parsee's role), Sufiana love (Ice Candy Man in the form of a fakir) and an unconditional love between Lenny and godmother and Lenny's love for her cousin. In *Ice-Candy-Man* Sidhwa shows the sexual activities between Ayah and her admirers, and Lenny and her cousin. Her description of the sexual activities with a child narrator's innocence makes some description almost porn description of the sexual activities.

Thus the two documentary novels of Indian sub-continent reflect the conviction and concept of the citizens of the two countries – India and Pakistan. Khushwant Singh and Bapsi Sidhwa have coloured the partition trauma and misfortune by their imagination. Both of them have very candidly dealt with the readers' sensibility towards the most tragic events of the partition and the problems of this sub-continent.

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