

Savor of Communalism in Selected Indian English Literary Works

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The partition of India, being the darkest hour of Indian history, destroyed and stigmatized cultural vision of India. Some blame Political leaders, some condemn British and some blame their own fate for the holocaust they met. The writers of the time can be easily bifurcated into two groups; victims and witnesses. Literature written during and after partition documents brutalities executed by both the communities against each other as well as anguish and grief of leaving ones' homes. It is very interesting to look at how Indian writers started dealing with issue of communal violence. Das observes:

For the first time our writers realized how violence sustained by ideology could be challenged by unmotivated violence or violence that totally commodifies human-beings. Violence could be a game, a source of pleasure, like sex. And it is not a coincidence that both violence and sex became dominant in our popular literature after 1948. Attempts were made by critics, and

other literary intermediaries, to legitimize both violence and sex under the banner of politics, psychology and modernity (382).

Violence and sex are two major motifs in partition novels, *Pinjar (Later The Skeleton in English)* too, takes up abduction of a Hindu girl, Puro, by a Muslim man, Rashid, and how the woman struggles to make sense of her life. Communal violence, here, operates at two levels; one at the level of inter-community violence i.e. a Muslim kidnaps, abducts, forcefully marries a Hindu girl and at the level of intra-community violence: Puro is not accepted back in her own family due to the scornful social attitude of her own community that she is “impure” now! Where would she go now? Puro goes with Rashid to Pakistan and starts living a “new” life as Hamida in all unfavourable circumstances. She even adopts a son of a mad woman out of her motherly concerns. Came as victim, Puro fights hard as brave-soldier with the help of Rashid to save her sister-in-law Lajjo from harassment and plight.

The representation of partition remains a subtext in the novel by focus on its repercussions; unlike many partition novels, the author does not go into the details of who partitioned India? What was the strategy employed? What was the latent politics? Rather, she is more interested in *what it did* to the lives of the folks, lives of people like Puro, Lajjo, Rashid etc. While narrating lives of these individuals, the novel condemns ossified social system and hypocrisy of the communities.

Throughout the novel, Puro stands for the woman power glorifying author’s own desire to invoke suppressed power within all women. The novel has an optimistic ending wherein Puro’s brother accepts his wife despite knowing that she has been abducted by a Muslim, and Puro’s sister-in-law is accepted by her husband promising to treat her with dignity and respect. The end is suggesting an expectation that there will be some attitudinal change among the masses. On one hand, the author tries to depict vivid picture of the communal disparities at the larger level, she peeps into lives of the victims of the events, on the other. In doing so, she comments upon the basic human follies that erupt during such events when

human life is at the stake. The entire course of the novel generates a dialogue between the victims of partition with the new forms of life, between the inability to understand what is happening at personal level and what should happen at communal level, between the fractured self' and abducted' bodies.

Train to Pakistan (1956) written in English by Khushwant Singh is one of the most powerful and popular partition novels. The novel has the setting of a village called Mano Majra at the Indo-Pak border in Punjab and the time is around 1947 when partition of India was taking place. Millions of people, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were migrating from both the sides; many got looted, women harassed and raped, children tortured and killed etc. on their way. Khushwant Singh being a master of narrative and a witness to the holocaust gives an excellent account of communal brutality of the time. The village is far from the maddening crowd and that is why remains relatively untouched by the happenings of the city. We find in the opening of the novel how Singh was trying to balance his communal stand, "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" (1). The village has equal population of Muslims and Sikhs which made them live quite peacefully.

To the news of sending Muslims from the village to Pakistan for their safety, a character proclaims, "What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst (Sikhs) brothers".

Very soon communal wind started blowing in and around the village; a group of religious agitators and provokes a local gang to try mass murder while Muslims leave for Pakistan in train. Communal violence was being engineered and came the corrupt government officials who irrespective of partition problem were harassing the common people. The educated people were trying to pacify the tension by explaining hopes of freedom.

Jugga and Iqbal Singh Bhinder, a man who believes in action and a man believes in ideology are two important characters along with Hukum Chand. They have been accused of murdering a local money lender called Ram Lal but they have not committed the crime. Both of them try to save mass murder of Muslims in the train to Pakistan. These three characters are put together at a crucial point in the novel which tests their integrity of character, religion and community. Singh puts highly complex issues of right and wrong, ethical and unethical through the character of Iqbal Singh in order to make readers wonder whether people of that time could think on these lines. For example, he ponders over:

The bullet is neutral. It hits the good and the bad, the important and the insignificant, without distinction. If there were people to see the act of self-immolation...the sacrifice might be worthwhile: a moral lesson might be conveyed...the point of sacrifice...is the purpose. For the purpose, it is not enough that a thing is intrinsically good: it must be known to be good. It is not enough to know within one's self that one is in the right.

This is how by putting questions of ethics during violence, Singh is trying to glorify the presence of human conscience in conflict. Much like Amrita Pritam, Khushwant Singh is also not interested in the politics of the Partition, rather he is searcher of the human element in it. For a novelist like him, the kind of change that partition brought in humans is more important than the genealogy of the actual event. Nearly everyone is to be blamed, but in doing so sufferers go unnoticed that is why nobody is blamed in the novel. Quite ironically, Singh depicts the evils that came with freedom which could have been otherwise evaded. One wonders what might have happened to those Muslims whom Hukum Chand, the magistrate passed an order to leave India and go to Pakistan; people were subjected to loss of all kinds including life'.

Train to Pakistan remains successful in capturing the local pulse of the aftermaths of partition. Though Iqbal, Jugga and Hukum Chand save many lives, it is not implausible to think that such a happy end could not have been possible during actual exchange of trains full

of dead bodies! The novel brings together religious conflicts, local politics, reform movements etc. in order to show traumatic violence people had to face.

River of Fire (1959) is magnum opus of Qurratulain Hyder which discusses historical and philosophical legacy of Indian cultural integrity and pluralism. Though the novel is not directly written on or about partition or communal violence, it raises some of the very serious issues of religion and community in India. Spread on a grand scale of time and space, the novel takes up a journey from 4th century BC to the post-independent India.

A Bend in the Ganges (1965) by Manohar Malgonkar stands out to be an excellent work of literature on partition. Novel's setting is a pre-partition India and the onset of the independence. Malgonkar was brought up in those years of Indian history when freedom fight movement was at its peak as well as the disease of communalism was spreading. *A Bend in the Ganges* gives a stunning account of that time when the author juxtaposes joy of freedom with murder, rape, mayhem, chaos etc. The novel is one of the exemplary works of literature on partition for its treatment of violence; as during partition three hundred thousand people were slaughtered and more than hundred thousand women were raped and abducted. Millions of people wondered homeless. Novel depicts vivid background of these events.

Midnight's Children (1981) by Salman Rushdie is novel much discussed and appreciated for its treatment of Indian history and magic realism. The novel analyses various phases of Indian history of which India's freedom is the key event. The allegory tells us that on the stroke of midnight, August 15, 1947 a thousand children were born with supernatural powers. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel is one of them who can assemble the rest of the magic children in his mind. Saleem Sinai stands for India and his life suggests what happens to India before and after independence. Rushdie says:

A nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary;

into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will-except in a dream we all agreed to dream (129-130).

Midnight's Children chronicles three generations of Saleem's life i.e. India's history; starting from his grandfather Adam Aziz- (is pre-independence India) followed by his father Ahmed Sinai- (the time of partition) and Saleem, the protagonist stands for (India's fate after independence) covering events like India's war with China and Pakistan, creation of Bangladesh and Emergency-sterilization campaign of 1975.

Needless to say that the novel is blaming the history itself and the children of Independent India for what happened to the country. Though it does not depict communal riots and violence in detail as other partition novels, its significance lies in explaining the historical and political background in which communalism was firmly rooted in the hearts and heads of the people.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1988) is the first novel by woman novelist from Pakistan in which she depicts conditions of people in Lahore during and after partition. The story is narrated from a child narrator Lenny's perspective. She observes that people like beggars, holymen and young men are so much interested in her Hindu Aya Shanta's beautiful body.

The Shadow Lines (1988) is a novel by Amitav Ghosh exploring events of partition of Bengali culture and East Pakistan. Ghosh is indulging himself in re-reading history and details of political decision in order to make sense of personal and social order of life. He does not see history as mere data or facts but as something extremely valuable that people experience and live and that is why all the characters in the novel tell some part of the history while telling their respective stories. They present their views on how freedom, nationalism and communalism during various phases of Indian history changed our lives. August 15, 1947 was a historical day for many to celebrate independence but it was also historical day for others to mourn, to part from their homelands, to get killed. This date bifurcated Bengali

community and culture. *The Shadow Lines* is an attempt to bring about the futility of drawing lines across a nation and make it two (later on three).

The communal tension got worst in India during and after 1970s; the number of people dying in the communal riots and techniques of engineering the riots have increased. Now, it is not just communal as it used to be during the time of partition; it is more, much more than just “communal”. The meaning of communalism’ and communal violence’ is expanding in a big way; fanaticism, terrorism, class-caste violence, gender violence, regionalistic violence, intra-communal violence etc. are now the part and parcel of communal violence’. The promise that partition would solve all the problems, including that of communalism, could not stand after independence.

In post 1970 India, riots are recurring phenomena in the country. Political opportunism is governing communal scenario of the nation. In total we have 87 riots between 1970 and 2010. Some of the major riots that took place in country were in Ahmedabad 1969, Jalgaon, Bhiwandi, Mahad 1970, Varanasi 1977, Sabhal-UP 1987, Jamshedpur, 1979, Moradabad 1980, Biharsharif, Godhara, Pune, Solapur 1981, Meerut, Vadodara 1982, Hyderabad, Malur-Karnataka 1983, Bombay, Aurangabad 1984, Punjab, Delhi (Sikh Riots) 1984, Ahmedabad, Kashmir 1986, Meerut 1987, Bhagalpur, Indore, Kota, Orissa 1989, Kashmir, Jaipur, Agra, Kanpur, Patna, Hyderabad, Beawar, Maharashtra 1990, Baroda 1991, Mumbai, Surat 1992, Madras, Kerala, Bihar 1995, Ajmer, Kanpur, Moradabada, Hyderabad 1998, Ahmedabad, Surat 1999, Kolhapur, Karnataka 2000, Jammu, Kanpur, Rajsthan, Orissa 2001, Ahmedabad-Godhara, Kathiyal, Hariyana 2002, Marad, Kerala 2003, Aligarh 2006, Orissa 2007-08, Bareilly-UP, Degana, 2010, Assam 2012, Muzaffarnagar 2013 etc. In total ,we have 87 major riots between 1970 and 2010.

It is perhaps this recurrence of the communal riots that disturbs writers and compels them to articulate their voices. Besides, these riots are now coloured with internal politics unlike the partition violence wherein there was always the third enemy- the British to blame. There are

two very distinguished aspects of communal-political scenario of India: 1984 Blue Star Operation and Sikh Riots, Demolition of Babri Masjid.

Let us review post 1970 Indian novels written on communal violence in order to understand, firstly how they differ in representing communal violence and secondly what is character of communal violence found in these novels.

Tamas (1972) is a significant novel by Bhishm Sahni on communal violence for several reasons. The events described in the novel are real accounts of communal riots occurred in Rawalpindi during partition which were witnessed by the author himself. However, it is actually written as a response to the writer's visit to riot-stricken Bhiwandi in 1970. Apparently, we feel it is a typical partition narrative but apart from being one, it looks deeper into to the nature of new communal riots which were taking place after partition. It has bifocal agenda; one is to narrate the role of the British in inciting the inter-communal hatred, but simultaneously it links repercussions of partition in the small towns with the emergence of local politics around communalism.

The very beginning of the riot in the town by throwing dead pig on steps of the mosque is an archetypal way in which riots of 1970, one like in Ahmedabad, occurred. It is a terrific narrative of how neighbours living harmoniously for decades, suddenly turn monsters eating away each other. The first part of the novel deals with politically charged discussions of leadership and commitment of Congress party along the line of the nature of work undertaken by socialist peace workers, nationalists were criticising the non-violence movement. Needless to say that it is a subtle attempt to comment of the role of government after nearly twenty years of freedom. In the process Sahni unfolds minds of the rioters by diving very deep in the psychological layers of violence.

Communal violence which started as a phenomenon of communal hatred as the corollary of partition was gradually going deeper and deeper of individual psyche and the collective

unconscious. *Tamas* brings to fore some of the highly complex issues of psychology of human relations during troublesome situations. As a Sikh couple came as refugee in a Muslim house, killing of Milkhi, incident of Iqbal Singh, violence in the Gurudwara etc. represent what was happening in the middle class narrow-minded people of small towns during riots.

Tamas highlights the role of local political leaders in engineering riots and failure of educated people to pacify communal tension. While discussing the rise of Indian middle class, the novel unlocks the webs of the economics and religious complexities exploited during riots. Interestingly, Sahni problematizes the issue of caste and class in fostering communal affairs. Post -1970s riots have the unique colour, they are organized and targeted forms of communal violence with full support of political-religious leaders wherein socially backward class is manipulated to take active part in the riots, religious places and communities prepare/train themselves for riot, polarizations of mobs etc. In this sense, *Tamas* is a record of how communal darkness started spreading from partition, was now emerging from within. That is why we would call this a 'link-novel' between pre and post 1970 communal violence prevalent in India.

The fashion of writing novels on haunting memory of partition continues in the 1980s and 90s also, for example we have *Ice-Candy Man* and *Shadow Lines* published in 1988. In the same year, *Curfew in the City* by Vibhuti Narayan Rai got published which represents various nuances of what happens during a curfew. As one observes, in all communal riots, the curfew plays an important role in the lives of ordinary folks. Generally, novels dealing with communal riots do not adequately deal with the time of curfew. That is perhaps because no writer, except one like Vibhuti Narayan Rai as a policeman, has any experience of actual curfew. *Curfew in the City* is one of the characteristic post 1970 novels written as an eye-witness of an actual communal riot in India. It is written as a response to the first-hand experience of Vibhuti Narayan Rai in the Allahabad Riots as Senior Superintendent of Police.

Significantly enough, the novel unravels role of police during communal riots and curfew, for example, it shows how police searches homes of common men in order to find “supposed” weapons and explosives and what they “do” during searches. The story does not depict loud images of rapes and murders, killings and brutality which are generally found in other such novels, but rather shows problems of ordinary people during riots and curfew. Here, we can see subtle forms of violence and the undercurrents of extremely prejudiced governments. For instance, there is a character called Sayeeda whose little daughter dies of cholera during the curfew and the family has to struggle to get some water from the public tap to wash the corpse and seek curfew passes to take the dead body to the graveyard. There is yet another feature of post 1970 communal riots i.e. communities are not only physically attacked but they are also kept deprived of the basic facilities for days to “teach them a lesson.”

Rai has conducted a research project on role of police during curfew and we can see his analysis being reflected in the novel. For instance, novel shows children shouting how Police and Hindus have ganged up to torture Muslims. Not only this, police receives great hospitality in Hindu lanes and that is why Hindu are free to roam during the curfew in reciprocation. One really wonders if the curfew is to control communal violence or it is another tool to subjugate Muslims! Though there is a chapter on rape, but it can hardly be compared to the rapes that are found in other literary works on communal violence. The girl and the rapist remain anonymous that suggests how such incidents become so normal during riots. The novel decodes how political leaders, authorities and journalists join their hands but do nothing except for constituting some peace committees that would do nothing.

Curfew in the City is the novel making significant remarks on the subtle exploitations of minority which is a counterpart of *Lajja* wherein the situation of minority in Bangladesh is portrayed. It is interesting to note that post 1970 novelists refer to journalist reports and participate in activism in order to authenticate the representation. Being an insider, author has become one with the victims and gives true account of reality without complicating it with imagination.

As we have mentioned that the controversy and demolition of Babari Masjid has changed the face of Indian history of communal violence. *Lajja* (1993) is written soon after the demolition of the masjid in 1992. The novel, though written by a Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, it has all the aspects of Indianness for considering it as potentially an Indian novel. By the way how do we decide that a novel belongs to a nation? Based on the borders? Author's citizenship? It is a documentary account of communal violence erupted in Bangladesh due to the demolition of Babri Masjid in India and what happens to Hindus, as a minority in Bangladesh. It interrogates some of the very basic questions of communal violence across the borders by interweaving the common past.

Post- 1970 communal violence is more subtle in nature; Sudhamoy is discriminated because he is a Hindu, as he is not promoted in his job, his son is denied jobs and is unemployed at the age of 33. The novel is asking serious questions to the so called intellectuals whether they have any intellectual solution to this problem. In fact, the novel shows how due to their idea of love for the nation and homeland that entire family is suffering from many years. Most of their relatives started going to India which reminds us that around 10 million refugees moved to India due to Bangladesh liberation war. During the riot, Dutta family is attacked and Maya, Sudhamoy's daughter is abducted and she gets lost or kidnapped or may be raped and killed, and never returns home. Suranjan takes out his frustration of his sister's loss by raping a Muslim prostitute in his house! What kind of a violence is it, self-directed, inter-personal violence or communal violence'?

Needless to say, *Lajja* is written from a secular viewpoint which makes it objective and sympathetic account of the real events occurred and that is why the author has to suffer a lot from her own community. People believing in secularism and democracy would certainly get disturbed by death, arson, rapes, murders etc narrated in the novel. Though novel is not written on those aesthetically pleasing literary sense, the very disturbing elements are of great value. We need to read it from a different perspective and see how the issue of communalism

gets more intensified with journalistic data. Taslima Nasreen is continuously asking why Bangladesh converted itself into an Islamic state treating Hindu minority violently.

The birth of Bangladesh has generated a new space for communal violence to take place with the suffering of Hindus as minority which is the counterpart of the kind of communal violence felt in India by the Muslim minority. Many critics deny the role of majority and minority in leading to communal violence but *Lajja* shows how it is one of the major tools to exercise and take away power.

Riot (2001) is an analysis of how history was smartly manipulated in order to demolish Babri mosque, both ideologically and practically. Shashi Tharoor conducts network analysis of communal violence caused during the demolition of the mosque wherein he complicates religious, intellectual, political, economic, social and moral concerns. The novel is actually based on the field data on communal riots in 1989. The story begins with the murder of Priscilla Hart, an American student who had come as a social worker in a small town called Zalilgarh in the midst of a riot.

Initially, Priscilla's parents visit to India along with an American journalist and meeting various people with a view to investigate murder mystery becomes the main text. But as we move on, it becomes the subtext and issues of communalism become the main text. Throughout the story, author shows multiple perspectives of looking at the problem; for example we have a Hindu fundamentalist who elucidates why Hindus want to erect the temple at Ayodhya and why he hates Muslim, we have a Muslim professor who explains rise and growth of minority psyche with his scholarly historical and ideological reasons. The reader gets amazed by the incessant dialogue that takes place among characters on the very Indian problems of the age like communities, cultures, professions, religions, genders etc. For example: time and again we find characters justifying their stands, communal or otherwise, for sorting out Ram Janmabhoomi issue. Often we find one or the other idealist character

which has lofty solutions to communal tension but *Riot* depicts characters with their peculiarities.

The novel allows discussion on communal violence at individual level and at communal level by involving intricacies of emotions like love, hate, anger, guilt which get affected by communal tension on one hand and history, fundamentalism, communal prejudices, political opportunism on the other. It is made possible by the author by employing an interesting narrative technique wherein the story is told through letters, diaries, poems, interviews, reports, transcribed conversations etc. Communal violence is condemned on one hand and justifications of a layman are weighed too in order to understand the problem in a better way. Such a technique of multiple narrations is helpful in order to understand multifaceted nature of truth in the time of postmodernism. The narration goes back and forth in times, with various viewpoints weaving together to form a novel.

After the volumes on one sided views (secularist, nationalist and communalist) on communal violence around partition, we have a very comprehensive treatment of the issue by innovative mode of representation. When we look at the plot, narrative technique, language and characterization around the theme of communal violence, we find *Riot* as an excellent work of art on communalism. But one observes that it shows how in the post- 1970 riots are mere tools in the hands of political parties who can use it as a vote-bank strategy.

Kamleshwar's *Partitions* (2004) is one of the most complex narratives on violence and communal violence. It starts a journey back in the time-space in order to understand the root of the problem of communal violence in India. The story, as such, has three main issues; one being the partition of India, second is the preparation and demolition of Babri Masjid and violence of all kinds in various parts of the world. The narrative tells us impossibility of making the full sense of communal violence in the country; for it is encouraged and justified by so many agents like history, politics, language, religion to name a few.

The narrative takes shape of courtroom of an anonymous author-*adeeb*-who is now hearing pleading of injustice done during various ages in the various countries of the world by making every victim and victimizer stand in the court of Time and share their versions of the truth. The novel depicts various incidents situated around the traumatic event of partition; like the political leaders and their split commitments, British, faiths and blind-faith in superiority of one religion over the other etc. One of the potential issues that the novel challenges is the fabrication of history by colonizers and neo-colonizers. The author shows how manipulations of history has caused and is still causing communal tension in India to attain all kinds of political agendas. We see in the novel that the so-called written history is contested and during the trial our well celebrated heroes are found guilty.

During the trials, we find causes that give birth to communal violence due to the issue of Babri mosque and Ram Janma Bhoomi. The issue is juxtaposed along the lines of reasons for partition so that we can see through history. The novel claims that Babar has got nothing to do with erection of a mosque at Ram Janmabhoomi rather he challenges the very existence of Ram's Ayodhya.

As we distance ourselves from actual events of partition and demolition of Babri Masjid, we tend to analyse the cause in a more objective manner. In the similar manner, novel is a series of revelations about some of the unknown and unsaid aspects of the history.

For example, it declares British officials as solely responsible for manipulating history after 1857. It also reveals some of the unnoticed facts about Allama Iqbal, Jinnah, Savarkar, Chengiz Khan, Chandrakant Bhardwaj, Aurangzeb etc. How does one otherwise explain communal violence if not by putting all the accused on the same ground? The narrative calls everyone into the courtroom box for cross-questioning regarding their role in fostering communal violence in India.

Like *Riot, Partitions* also criticises politicians and their selfish interests which cause riots in the country. Besides, it also talks about how violence is getting deeper and deeper in human heart that has become integral part of the modern socio-economic mechanisms. Written in the first decade of 21st century, the novel is recognizing terrorism as a dangerous phenomenon merging with communalism and anticipates the worst problems that it may cause.

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