
THE COALESCENCE OF TRAUMA AND CHAOS IN BHISHAM SAHNI'S *WE HAVE REACHED AMRITSAR*

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The Indian Independence Bill passed in the British Parliament on July 18, 1947 marked the end of British rule in India and initiated the process of transition. It was an event of landmark importance as the masses had understood the real intention of the colonisers and so wanted to set their nation free from the foreign rule. Little did Indians know then that this independence would cost them dearly. The British Raj did finish but with some serious and grave repercussions for India. The colonialists who earlier entered the Indian Subcontinent with 'Divide and Rule' policy, devised another plan to 'divide and quit', and so the transfer of power from British Colonialists to national rulers had a great political design which saw the unity of the country breaking up into two nations first and later into three. The partition of the country which was thought to solve many problems indeed brought with it more complications and raised many more questions. The immense suffering the people of India had to endure then because of triggered riots, mass casualties and a colossal wave of migration is a bloody legacy in the history of India and finds place in the writings of partition scholars. Generally, great tragedies or great historic events inspire the writers and artists to create great works of art in language and other forms of art. This tragedy of great magnitude produced a large body of literature in Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, English, Sindhi etc.

Partition Literature refers to that literary medium which focusses on the loss, trauma, violence and displacement arising from the partition of India in 1947. It gives a fictional as well as a non-fictional account of the turbulence that shook the lives of the people on both sides of the present-day border. It voices the dilemma, uncertainty, loneliness, rootlessness and grief that affected individuals across the undivided nation. Partition literature not only preserves the memory of partition but also serves as a reminder of the events that shaped the lives of millions of people. The reverberations of partition over the past seventy five years have been encapsulated by many writers. To name a few Khushwant Singh, Saadat Hasan Manto, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Sahir Ludhianavi, Amrita Pritam, Amitav Ghosh, Salman

Rushdie and Bhisham Sahni have written heart wrenching stories about loss and inhumanity. These writers have felt the pulse of all those wretched people who had to suffer the burden of an invisible line drawn between India and Pakistan. Ravikant and Tarun believe, "The best of the literature that emerged in the wake of the Partition bears the imprint of the struggle to grapple with pain and suffering on a scale that was unprecedented in South Asia" (xi).

According to him, these fictions have stood the test of time, offered an insight into the nature of individual experience, and broke the silence. It is a storehouse of localized truths, which the historical discourses on Partition have tried to undermine due to a number of reasons. The Partition stories are not collective and uniformed like historiographies. Each of them is of different types and exhibits its own idiosyncratic characteristics.

My paper will focus on one such horrors of partition as expressed by Bhisham Sahni in his short story "The Train Has Reached Amritsar." The story is about a journey on train where we see the migrants travelling from what has now become Pakistanhope to reach a safe haven. The refugees clamoured for the space on the train, as they placed their trust on its sanctity. The trains without adequate protection from the government (frequently containing a limited number of soldiers who themselves may have had communal allegations) were hardly safe. The passengers inside the train got into bouts of fear when they encountered fire, cries, chaos through the windows of the train. A similar tale of struggle and horror is projected in Ashis Nandy's book *The Invisible Holocaust and the Journey as an Exodus: The Poisoned Village and Stranger City* in this way:

The exodus in north India often took spectacular forms; in Punjab caravans of refugees escaping from the carnage and the plunder sometimes stretched for miles. At places, it turned pathetically low-key, too, as in Bengal and Bihar where tens of thousands of poor peasants and artisans trudged their way towards the newly created borders [. . .]. Observers talk of four- or five-mile columns which, in turn, attracted marauders eager to plunder not only the often-plentifully- small amounts of belongings the refugees could carry but also the young women among them. (307-8)

The story from the very beginning presents a picture of stable and integrated social harmony. We find that the decision to create Pakistan has had no effect on the populace as Muslim passengers are enjoying the company of Hindu and Sikh passengers. Normalcy is what we Indians like to see and the writer has perfectly projected it in the initial setting and dialogue. When the Muslim Pathans offer

meat to the Hindu Babu, they show their acquaintance with the Hindu prohibition related to food. Therefore, the Pathan who offers the meat to the Hindu, assures him, "O zalim, if don't want it from our hands, pick it up yourself. I swear it's only goat's meat and nothing else" (148). Such statements not only depict the harmonious relationship but also the spirit to cooperate with fellow passengers irrespective of what religion they belong to. The statements of jovial Pathans and the responses that he receives in the compartment from their co-passengers are the signs of how pure are the common people at their heart. They are willing to live together in peace without any complain even at the time of crisis.

Inside the train they seem to be completely unaware of the evil design of the politicians and the change the partition has brought into their lives. They cannot foresee the darkness that looms in the future for all of them. Being completely naïve to which side of Lahore or Gurdaspur they would find themselves in, they only indulge into speculations. The narrator says: The Sardarji, sitting opposite to me, asked me repeatedly whether I thought Jinnah Sahib would continue to live in Bombay or move to Pakistan. My answer was always the same, "Why should he leave Bombay? What would be the point? He can always go to Pakistan and come back". (147) Such questions only reflect on the actual scenario where the author highlights that the common people were not so effected by partition. For them it only meant "the division of land and not of people". Such naïve statements by the characters signifies the ignorance the people had as far as the partition of the country is concerned. It hardly has any value or importance in their lives. The author wishes to highlight that partition was not the voice of common people, it was not something the common people ever called for. Partition simply happened for the political few in connivance with the colonisers.

However, the conversation that takes place between the Pathans and the Babu in the train do reflect the signs of communal fragmentation that is visible in every society of the Indian-subcontinent. The way Pathans become critical of the religious choices of Babu by using in vulgar slangs indeed shows the wide gap that exists between Muslims and Hindus in practical life. This ungracious reality however shameful it may be has been shown by Sahni in this story.

The train journey that at the commencement meant a normal travel is soon disturbed by the unusual and strange activities outside. The lighter mood inside turns sullen when the train stops at a station before Wazirabad. The reader sees how a calm and jovial atmosphere inside takes a sudden turn when all realise the panic created outside is due to the communal riots. The way a passenger who had got

down to get some water abruptly runs toward his compartment spilling water everywhere startles all others who too start to run towards their respective compartments fearing for their lives. This incident adds to the fury and creates a general panic among the passengers. Although no one knows what has happened, the activities around are enough according to the narrator to suggest that there has been a communal riot nearby. The panicky activities of the passengers create a vivid picture of riot. With this event, it becomes clear that the story is set in the background of the communal violence that broke out during the Partition of India and Pakistan. During partition, the trains were the favourite place to attack. It enabled the rioters to cause maximum damage to the other side. The author brings the terror in travelling through train in mid-40s in the Subcontinent.

An ominous uneasy silence descends on the compartment after the train has left the station. No one has dared to ask anything to Pathans. This is because the human beings are thrown into a certain time and space and attuned to carry out a certain fate. They cannot change it. The riots outside deeply inflict upon the minds of the characters inside the compartment. There's a change in the trust, faith, bonhomie that is visible in the start of the journey. Suddenly the 'strong-ties' become 'weak-ties'. 'The Sardarji gets up from his seat and sits next to the narrator. The Pathan on the lower berth climbs up and joins his two companions on the upper berth. Each passenger of the compartment looks nervous and suspicious about his neighbour. The communal harmony, which has been the characteristic of the compartment at the beginning of the story, is changed into communal fragmentation. This is actually the reality of the Indian society.

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