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The Theme of Partition in Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

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Abstract:

Significant historical crisis have always been attractive to the writers. Partition and migration holocaust became a source for Indo-Anglian writers. Partition novels like *Train to Pakistan*, *A Bend in the Ganges*, *Azadi* gave a vivid picture of the horrors of partition experienced by the North-West people of India. *A Bend*, which is a *magnum opus* describes the freedom movement, the turbulent period of partition, the consequent animosity, the massive exchange of people, the brutality of religious fanatics. *Train*, a prominent realistic novel, portrays the great upheaval, the traumatic effects, the migration, bloodshed etc. *Azadi*, a moving saga of partition, deals with recent history of India and associated disaster. They assimilate real history to a fictional narrative and highlight Indian nationalism, the British Colonialism and religious fanaticism. The novelists condemn the inhuman atrocities perpetrated on the innocents. Loot, murder, rape, train disaster are transformed into proper artistic creations in these novels.

Keywords: historical events, partition, freedom movement, religious fanatics, violence, inhuman atrocities.

Introduction:

Many important events of history of national crisis have always been powerfully attractive to the writers. 1947 was the year of great joy and equally great sorrow in the Indian history. The 15th of August was celebrated all over India with a lot of joy and enthusiasm, but along with freedom came unending lines of refugees from Pakistan to India and vice-versa, with stories of innumerable and inhuman sufferings. In Fahmeeda Hilal's opinion "The partition of India and the subsequent 'migration', holocaust and turmoil turned out to be 'a great reservoir' for Indo- Anglian novelists who weaved it within the imaginative scenes, stories and settings of what is popularly called the partition novels: *Train to Pakistan*, *A Bend in the Ganges*, *Azadi* etc. These novels, one way or the other, assimilate real history to a

fictional narrative" (Hilal 65). The partition and the associated blood-shed and violence stirred the consciousness of the nation and many writers tried to give picturesque description of the momentous events in their novels by weaving the plots with the stories, settings, scenes and incidents based on the event and called them the partition novels. They gave a convincing and vivid picture of the horrors of partition experienced by the North-West people of India soon after she gained freedom. The popular partition novels considered here are Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1962) and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) which depict the traumatic experiences of the tragic event. If Khushwant Singh deals with the situation prevailing in India in his *Train to Pakistan*, Nahal and Malgonkar deal with the situation prevailing in Pakistan in their *Azadi* and *A Bend in the Ganges* respectively. *Train* and *Azadi* are personal memoirs of the novelists. The present paper is an attempt to explore the nature of freedom attained and its impact in the form of the holocaust in the wake of India's partition, which disturbs the peaceful and complacent life of the people in the border.

The Theme of Partition in *A Bend in the Ganges*:

Manohar Malgonkar is one of the leading Indian novelists in English whose novels are valuable documents in faithful presentation of the particular phases in Indian national life. His fourth novel *A Bend in the Ganges* is considered to be his *magnum opus* which mainly describes the socio-political environment of India prior to independence. In this masterpiece he takes us back to the turbulent period of partition. He introduces a domestic tale of a bunch of characters against the background of the ten years of freedom struggle. It is almost a documentary of that period and its sequel bloodshed in Punjab. In the author's note, Malgonkar says, "Only the violence in this story happens to be true; it came in the wake of freedom to become a part of India's history. What was achieved through non-violence, brought with it one of the bloodiest upheavals of history: twelve million people had to flee, leaving their homes: nearly half a million were killed, over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, mutilated" (*A Bend in the Ganges* Author's Note). One can see a logical account of socio-political history of the 30s and 40s - unfolding an epic movement for independence and its attainment at the cost of the division of the subcontinent. About Malgonkar's sense of history Hilal says, "While giving a graphic detail of the historical background, beginning with the terrorist movement of 1930's, leading to the spilt among the revolutionaries resulting in the partition and its havoc, Malgonkar employs the techniques of a novelist and a historian. As a result of it *A Bend in the Ganges* becomes a fine combination of

history, novel and romance... Malgonkar gives a comprehensive account of thoughts and feelings of the people associated with the historical events” (Hilal 90-91).

The novel mainly focuses on the three young men Gian Talwar, Debi Dayal and Shafi Usman and their involvement in the events for some years, preceding and following the partition. In the novel Malgonkar makes use of the charged atmosphere at the time of freedom movement. It depicts the young men who are fixed in the political drama and in their personal conflicts. In the beginning of the novel, the novelist focuses on the two groups of people with one aim, to attain the freedom of the country by the terrorist movements on one hand and on the other by following the non-violent principle of Gandhiji. Gian, who comes from an orthodox Brahmin family, believes in non-violence whereas Debi, son of a businessman and Shafi, a common Muslim youth are the members of a terrorist group who believe in violence. They have one thing in common; they are all freedom fighters, who advocate a new religion of brotherhood. The members are nationalists and fellow-hardliners, who are united in the sacred cause against the British rule. They respect both Hinduism and Islam equally. They were all patriots, dedicated themselves to overthrow the British from India. Though all of them come from different family backgrounds, the common factor among them is their love for the country. These men in the movement know that the religious differences among the races of India are the root cause of the country’s slavery and the British have learnt to take the maximum advantage of these differences playing the Hindus and the Sikhs against the Muslims and vice-versa.

Gian believed himself to be a staunch follower of Gandhiji’s principle of non-violence. He declines the offer of Debi to join their group but later the situation forces him to reject non-violence and kills Vishnu Dutt, the murderer of his brother Hari. Later he broods about the philosophy of non-violence and realizes the inadequacy of this means. All his theoretical knowledge of the philosophy of non-violence did not get him an answer. When faced with reality his entire idealism evaporates and shows that non-violence is an impractical philosophy and it cannot be followed in real life situations. This leads Gian to violate the principle of non-violence professed by Gandhiji and he sacrifices it for the sake of brotherly love and revenge.

The novel depicts the split among the ranks of communal lines. Hafiz, a man of Muslim League convinces Shafi for the need of creation of separate Muslim State and according to him Muslims would be crushed as soon as Hindus come to power. The betrayal of Debi by Shafi was a glaring example of the rift between the two communities. As the poisonous seed of

communalism starts to grow in the mind of Shafi, he intentionally keeps Hindu boys of the 'Hanuman Physical Culture Club' uninformed about the raid of the club. The unity between Debi and Shafi is broken and Debi, an important Hindu leader is arrested by the police. The novel not only depicts the revolutionary activities of these groups but also depicts the miserable condition in the final phase of freedom struggle. Debi is sent to the Cellular jail of Andaman, so also Gian, for murdering Vishnu Dutta. Both developed enmity when they are in Andaman. After his release from the jail Debi stayed in a tea- garden. Gian, who played some tricks to attract Sundari, Debi's sister, is successful in getting a job in Debi's father's firm.

When Jinnah, the spokesman of the Muslim League, demanded for a separate state, the partition of country looked imminent because his voice was at its high pitch, and the violence was let loose among the Hindus and the Muslims. Both the communities were determined to smash each other, hence civil war was at hand. The cities and towns were riot-torn. The game of divide and rule was in full swing because right from the beginning, the British in India resorted to this policy. And they pushed the situation to attain its logical culmination. For the Muslims, the demand of a fatherland (as Jinnah termed it) was a sheer necessity. Hence, the Hindus were to be eliminated from their land. They resorted to terror; and the Hindus were inevitably forced to take to violence hence the bloodshed. Muslims were active in achieving their goal in Rawalpindi, Multan and Bhagalpur. The Hindus were forced to leave these districts. They were to ensure that no Hindu would remain in that part of India which was going to be theirs. Shafi was waiting for the right moment to plunge into war against the Hindus. He assumed that Hindus were also planning to do the same.

The trick of the British to divide the people of India into warring camps bore fruits. The demand of Muslims for Pakistan became persistent and fruitful. The division was complete and the communal hatred showed the signs of a ghastly tragedy. Debi's decision to accept Mumtaz, the Muslim girl as his bride looks as his emotional blindness. But it clearly demonstrated that the love has no barriers. Debi was deceived by Shafi but Shafi's betrayal did not make Debi to hate the whole Muslim community. He stayed secular amidst the hatredness and accepted Mumtaz as his wife. In the same way in *Train* we come across communal frenzy and simple love of a man for his beloved. Juggat, who is considered as a *budmash* of the village realizes that the attack on the train may cause danger to his beloved Nooran and manages to cut the rope.

The stream of men, crossing the borders, presented a pathetic sight. Everywhere there was disorder. Sleepless nights were filled with fearful sights of fire, arson, wailing, crying etc. Duriabad had turned out to be peculiar riot-torn town. Debi's attempt at reaching Duriabad along with his wife, Mumtaz narrates the horrible scenes of train disasters that preceded and followed the partition. Debi too was suspected and detected. All the protests and assertions of Mumtaz, his wife, who had forcibly accompanied him, proved to be in vain. He was stripped, blinded and mercilessly killed. Mumtaz was snatched away from him. The last scene that Debi saw was the rising sun of the freedom.

The situation at Duriabad at that time was like any other towns, which was full of turmoil and chaos. Periodic disturbances between the Hindus and Muslims were a common feature. The riots were the anatomy of partition and were the direct consequences of the unfortunate division. The realization of the guilt in Gian assumes significance during the post-independence communal violence. When Shafi and group raided the house of Tekchand, he saves Sundari from being raped and murdered. Shafi's intentions were clear that he wanted to snatch away Sundari in a spirit of revenge. Gian and Sundari killed Shafi with the image of Shiva. Sundari, Tekchand and Gian joined the convoy to move out of Pakistan, but on the way Tekchand dropped out. He had a great emotional bonding with what he had left behind. At the end Gian and Sundari reached India.

Malgonkar shows a sound historical sense which is amply revealed in the presentation of the national tragedy which is artistically portrayed in this novel. The horrible consequences of partition are frankly explained. Millions of people became homeless and lost their belongings as well as their near and dear ones; fell victim to violence and insult, faced new challenges in the new land and had to start all over again. And both the communities were brutally thrown away on the other side of the artificial border between India and Pakistan. The novel powerfully portrays the freedom movement of the Indian nationalists, the animosity which was the result of the partition, the massive exchange of people and the brutal and disgraceful acts caused by communal hatred.

The emotional separation, the result of the partition was the most unfortunate development in the history of mankind. In *Bend* Tekchand never intended to be separated from Duriabad, the town of his forefathers. He had great attachment with that city. In *Train* also many Muslims were reluctant to go away from Mano Majra because of their attachment to the place. In *Azadi* Lala Kanshi Ram feels hurt when he had to leave Sialkot forever.

A Bend in the Ganges is written on a grand scale which depicts the Gandhian era in all its manifestations. It concentrates on the painful drama of partition thoroughly and also looks deep into the causes of the partition. It starts with the freedom movement and picturizes the basic cracks between the Hindus and the Muslims, the division of the country and the consequent violence. It describes how the terrorist movement which was believed to be a symbol of national solidarity, which was determined to oust the British from the India, degenerated into communal hatred and how the emphasis from the struggle between Indian nationalism and British colonialism turned out to be communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims. Thus the communal conflict overshadowed the nationalist movement. Malgonkar shows how India had to sacrifice a lot for gaining freedom from the British and how the country had to suffer the partition holocaust.

The main reasons for the partition are communal hatredness, suspicion, the fear of being ruled by the majority and the propaganda of not to be ruled by the people of other community etc. which brought about mass exodus of inhabitants. The innocent and poor people became the victim for the craze of the politicians. They were on their way from Pakistan to India and vice-versa, the land that most of them had never seen. And they were cut from their familiar environment and relationships.

The Theme of Partition in *Train to Pakistan*:

Train to Pakistan (1956) is one of the finest realistic novels in Indian fiction in English by Khushwant Singh which is considered to be his supreme achievement. His first novel *Train* depicts the impact of partition on a small village Mano Majra, located on the Indo-Pakistan border. He is the first novelist who chose the theme of partition holocaust in this work. It depicts the traumatic effects of the partition, the surpassed migration and bloodshed which the event brought in. The main purpose of the novelist is to venture a picture of the great upheaval that was caused by the tragic event. He has produced a gripping and powerful story of partition. It occupies an important place in the Indo-Anglian novels. Mano Majra has Sikhs and Muslims almost equal in number, and contained the only Hindu family in it. Sikhs and Muslims worked together in the farms. However it was a peaceful village until some uncalled-for events took place. On an August night a dacoits' gang led by Malli, murdered Lala Kanshi Ram, the money-lender, when he refused to give his material resources like money, gold etc. While leaving the spot they dropped some bangles in protagonist Jugga's house, when Jugga was spending romantic moments out in the fields, with his lover Nooran – a Muslim girl. When they returned to the village they found that people are gravely disturbed by the dacoity.

Jugga was arrested as he was suspected in the money-lender's robbery case. Later on Malli and his gang, the real murderers are also arrested but are released later. Events move fast and the fate of the people in Mano Majra is completely affected by the catastrophic events of the partition.

The arrival of the '*ghost train*' loaded with thousands of corpses at Mano Majra from Pakistan created a commotion. The dark cloud of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs as well as Muslims, who have lived together as brothers for centuries. This suspicion divided the village into two halves. In the process of partition the Muslim habitants of the village are displaced to the refugee camp, later to be sent to Pakistan. When Juggat is released from the jail he goes to the village to find that whether Nooran has been taken to the refugee camp and she would be going to Pakistan by train. The Hindu fanatics thought to take revenge on the Muslims, for what Muslims did to the Hindus in Pakistan. They planned to tie a rope across the bridge. When the train passes under, the people who sit on the roof of the train would be swept off. When Juggat Singh comes to know about it he rushes to save his beloved Nooran and other Muslim refugees by clinging to the rope with his hands and cuts it into pieces, but loses his life in the process. The novel is packed with partition horror incidents like arson, mass massacres, loot, accidents etc.

While portraying the upheaval of the subcontinent Khushwant Singh makes use of history. He himself witnessed the events which claimed the lives of countless innocent people. Hilal opines, "Train to Pakistan contains a 'true' picture of the events of contemporary Indian history, the partition, presented through imaginatively realized characters and in an artistically conceived plot" (Hilal 78). So the masterpiece contains a well thought of structure, an artistically conceived plot, an absorbing narrative style and imaginatively realized characters. The predominant quality of this work is its scathing exposition of one of the most moving events of contemporary Indian history.

The Theme of Partition in *Azadi*:

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* predominantly deals with the recent history of our country. In this monumental novel, he presents a great historical event, the partition, in terms of its human implications seen, felt and experienced through the lives of a few individuals. A moving saga of the division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan and the associated disaster that hit these two newly - declared independent countries in 1947 forms the backdrop of the novel. The migration of Lala Kanshi Ram's family to India at the time of the dismemberment

of colonial India into two nations is one of the most comprehensive fictional accounts of partition holocaust in Indian English literature. It is an ambitious undertaking. Nahal is vigilant in his use of historical documents about recent Indian event such as the Champaran agitation, the Lahore Congress Session, the Quit India Movement, the arrival of Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy and the Radcliffe Boundary Commission etc. The greater focus is on the family of Lala and many others who suffer due to the traumatic effects of a disastrous event marked by brutality, bloodshed, mass murder, rape etc.

Azadi, a novel of *Gandhi Quartet*, is considered as one of his best works. Nahal was inspired to write it from his personal experience of having lived in Sialkot at the time of partition, who witnessed the atrocities committed on the minorities after the announcement of the same. It is in a way autobiographical in nature which gives an intensive picture of the painful experiences of the partition. It is based on the horrifying communal frenzy which gives an exhaustive picture of the effects of partition and its effects on the lives of the people living in Sialkot, the north-western border town of India, which is now in Pakistan. It begins with the announcement of the partition and this is where Malgonkar's *A Bend* ends. *Azadi* deals with the tragedy of partition and its aftermath- the mass migration and the massacre and also the arrival of large number of people as refugees to India. It covers the events from June 3rd, 1947 to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on the 30th January, 1948, eight tumultuous months in the history of the Indian subcontinent and portrays the dilemmas of innocent victims.

Nahal's deep sorrow and anger are vividly expressed in *Azadi*. It more gravely questions the meaning and significance of the kind of freedom that India wins and the price paid for it. Nahal's Sialkot is not like Khushwant Singh's imaginary village called Mano Majra, because in Mano Majra various communities co-exist, whereas Sialkot is dominated by the Muslim community. Lala Kanshi Ram, the protagonist, has a great attachment to this place. That is why he feels distressed and alienated when he is uprooted from the motherland, which has nurtured his family for many generations. *Azadi* deals with how he and his family, who led a contented life, are affected by the partition. He lives with Sikh families harmoniously and also maintains healthy relationships with his friends and neighbours irrespective of their religion. But his world is shaken and dreams are shattered by the creation of Pakistan. His experiences symbolize the pain and sufferings of the millions affected by the partition.

The stage for independence of India was prepared by the British government. In March 1947, Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India had to finalize this process. On 3rd of June, he made an important announcement in radio about the partition of India and emergence of a new

nation, i.e. Pakistan. A Boundary Commission was set up to demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of the Punjab and Bengal. Like an average Indian, Lala is shocked and disturbed to listen to announcement and horrible consequences of the proposed partition. It was decided to give a section in the East and a section in the West of India to the Muslims. The harmonious co-existence among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs which prevails in the Muslim dominated city is affected by the partition which turns into a riot-torn city. Consequently, the Hindus' houses are burnt down and they had to leave their homes. Punjab and Bengal are filled with the incidents of murder, arson and rape. Violence turns uncontrollable and completely ruins the atmosphere of trust, love and solidarity and is replaced by hatred, disgust, murder, rape, fire etc. Trains are targeted by the violent mobs. The life of Hindus in Sialkot becomes miserable as their shops and houses are looted, men are killed and women are raped. Lala who is unwilling to leave Sialkot, expresses his anxiety for having become a homeless and rootless man when his shop is looted by some Muslims. The life of Hindus becomes miserable and despite their deep emotional attachment to their land and home, they are forced to undergo the painful experiences of displacement and migration. The government has arranged refugee camps to facilitate the process of mass migration from one country to another, by providing shelter for the Hindus and Sikhs. Independence brings more violence and killings. Lala's daughter and her husband are killed in one of the train massacres. Shocked and completely broken by it, Lala decides to migrate to India as early as possible abandoning all hopes of ever returning to Sialkot. Lala and others refuse the hazardous train journey and join the foot convoy to the border town on the Indian side, which is forty-seven miles away from Sialkot. When people die of illness, starvation or exhaustion, they are cremated on the roadside or left to rot. The partition throws millions of people in this flight. Nahal suggests that rioters are cruel enough to derive beastly pleasure out of their behaviour which should have put them to shame.

Finally, they cross the bridge of the river Ravi and enter the Indian Territory. Now they realize that India is going to be their true motherland. Lala's family moves to Amritsar, where he is terribly shocked to learn that there is a Hindu retaliation for the Muslim atrocities committed in Pakistan on Hindus. What was being done to the Hindus in West Punjab was being done to the Muslims in East Punjab. He is shocked to see a train with hundreds of slaughtered Muslims. Parading of Muslim women through the bazaar is such a common sight even in Amritsar. On either side of the border, minority communities are either killed or turned into refugees. The government has not done adequate preparation to meet the situation arising out of the brutal act of partition. Private and charitable trusts helped the refugees at Amritsar.

Indian soldiers failed to protect the lives of Muslims in India just as soldiers had failed to protect the lives of the Hindus in Pakistan. Lala and his family finally reached Delhi where they faced the problem of relocation. He failed to get a rented house because the natives of Delhi refused to let out room to him on the grounds that he is a Punjabi and obviously quarrelsome. Soon the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi comes as a jolt and he realizes that it is the end of everything. The partition makes Lala to feel the loss of his dignity, respect and also identity. He is painfully conscious of the fact that freedom or *Azadi* has been achieved at the cost of huge sufferings and hardships. Having seen both the Hindus and the Muslims resorting to violence in the name of religion, Lala is convinced that both are guilty being responsible for the communal conflict. He feels miserable and repentant and seeks to apologise all the Muslims on behalf of all the Hindus. The novelist, however, demonstrates that even after partition, some Muslims like Chaudari Barkat Ali who stands for communal harmony, does not support any anti-Hindu violence. Looking at the novel from the fictional perspective Hilal says thus:

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, as its title indicates, enacts India's Freedom Struggle and what it means to the common people of the country in general and the residents of Sialkot in particular. The novelist narrates with fidelity and feeling what actually happened and the manner in which it happened. Like Khushwant Singh, Nahal had a firsthand experience of the horrors of partition, and like him, he made a specific use of history in his novel. However his dealing with history is different from Khushwant Singh's, and is to be viewed in the light of Nahal's own theorizing about writing a historical novel...The novelist must be fully acquainted with the details not only about the layout of the geographical region, but also about the people living in that region, their mode of speech, their dress, their food habits, their peculiar traits and many other characteristics of the particular community" (Hilal 98-99).

It is not only the story of Lala but millions of people like him. It depicts India's Freedom Movement and what *Azadi* means to the common people of India in general and what the residents of Sialkot in particular. Partition resulted in the monstrous holocaust ever witnessed. There was wholesale destruction due to communal frenzy and the whole balance of human relationships is disturbed. Yet, the novel which has a symmetrical and well organized plot reveals a ray of hope and regeneration before it closes.

Conclusion:

These three novels assimilate real history to a fictional narrative. Though *A Bend, Train* and *Azadi* are written in a later period, they portray the pre and post- independence situation of India. In these works the novelists discuss Indian nationalism and British Colonialism on the one hand and religious fanaticism and consequent events on the other. They explore this disturbance with profound sympathy and condemn the inhuman atrocities perpetrated on the innocent people. The narrators have thorough knowledge of all the facts but still they are neutral in presenting them. The novels put the fictional characters in the midst of the historical events around independence and reveal these events through concrete descriptions, which give clear cut picture of the troubled times. The common scenes of loot, murder, rape, brutality, train disaster etc. have been transformed into proper artistic creations in these three novels. Both Khushwant Singh and Nahal had a firsthand experience of the horrors of partition and they made specific use of history in their novels, whereas Malgonkar is in a way, an observer of history from a distance. They have written exactly about events in relation to time and close to the facts. They depict how passions were aroused during these fateful days that preceded and followed the sunrise of the Freedom. The novelists take up this theme and portray the period, what Malgonkar calls ‘one of the bloodiest upheavals of history.’ It offers potentialities of turning out gripping and powerful accounts of rioting and bloodshed, and Singh and Malgonkar strive to present stories that despite their various merits and drawbacks, manage to rise above the standard of sensational journalism. While graphically depicting the horror and futility of partition riots, Malgonkar deeply probes the validity and ideology of violence and non-violence and their relevance to life. The novel almost approaches the epic proportions in its authentic evaluation of human tragedy, so also other two novels. Right from the beginning the British in India resorted to the ‘divide and rule’ policy and ultimately left behind a ‘fractured subcontinent’, a divided India in which the tussle between the two countries – India and Pakistan – continues even after seven decades.

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