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Violence and Politics of Terror During the Period of Terrorism in Punjab: A Study of Waryam Sandhu's *The Fourth Direction*

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Abstract:

The Khalistani moment (emerged in 70's) which advocated the liberation of Sikhs by demanding a separate theocratic state for them marked a historical epoch in the history of Punjab. It began with a violent confrontation between the breakaway sub-sect of Nirankaris and the followers of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala, a non-descript youngster who had been named the head of Dam Dami Taksal. Both the political parties, the Congress and the Akalis tried to exploit him by feeding his vanity. In due Course his influence unfortunately continued to grow and the situation in Punjab began to deteriorate (largely due to the passivity of the Center government). A phenomenon which unleashed the endless cycle of terror, unrest, bloodshed, brutal murders and spread of communalism which is inevitably followed by the fake police encounters, brutal torture, human rights violation and state suppression. The people of Punjab found themselves caught between the two sides of 'grinding mill' where on one hand was the state machinery and on the other hand were terrorists. The present paper aims to analyze Waryam Sandhu's well acclaimed story *The Fourth Direction* which tries to unravel various dimensions of the crisis that struck Punjab after the rise of Khalistan Movement and the myriad ways this political phenomenon upturned the lives of common people of Punjab from an essentially humanistic perspective.

Keywords: Terrorism, Punjab Problem, Fake Encounters, State Oppression, Violence.

Waryam Sandhu is one of the most discussed story writers of Punjabi in modern times. Though he started his literary career as a poet, Dr. Raghbeer Singh Sirjana calls him 'the man who now covers half the sky of Punjabi story' (Til Phul:2001,11). Being a versatile writer, he has contributed to other literary genres as well. He has written a biography, an autobiography,

two travelogues, many essays and has also edited a number of books. But Sandhu has left his unique footprints in the genre of short story. By expanding the horizon of short story, he has brought exclusively new possibilities to Punjabi story-telling.

Being one of most discussed story writers in Punjabi language, Waryam Sandhu has to his credit four volumes of short stories entitled *Lohe De Hath (1971)*, *Ang Sang(1979)*, *Bhajjian Baahein(1987)* and *The Fourth Direction and Other Stories(1998)*. Although, he originally writes in Punjabi language, his works have been translated into various other languages like English, Urdu, Bengali and Hindi. His well acclaimed story *The Fourth Direction*, being written in the backdrop of terrorism in Punjab artistically addresses the issue of complexities of human existence in an essentially complicated era.

The Khalistan movement which initially came into being with a religious and political agenda was directly headed against the Central government being led by Hindus in general and against the Hindus living in Punjab in particular. As Khushwant Singh captures in *My Bleeding Punjab*, "The terrorist go on attacking Hindu families. The period was predominantly marked by the genocide of the innocent Hindus on the name of religion by the communal terrorists. (75) The terrorists killed innocent Hindus by dragging them out of the busses and raped their women. It led to the mass migration of Hindus from the different villages of Punjab towards the cities and other regions of the country. *The Fourth Direction* unfolds the fear and distrust that automatically grew between Hindus and Sikhs "as much greater damage was done to the Hindu-Sikh relations, by driving a wedge between the two communities who had always shared a common historical, linguistic and religious heritage." (ibid)

The story explores the psyche of the people living in an atmosphere of constant fear and suspicion. Through flashbacks, the narrative moves between past and present, darkens their fears as well as delineates the complicated yet strained relationships shared by the two communities. The narrative revolves around two Hindu characters Raj Kumar and Jugal Kishore, two clerks posted in some rural area of Punjab who on their way from Chandigarh to Amritsar missed their last bus. In their effort to reach their home soon they decide to reach Jalandhar by bus and then catch train to Amritsar from there.

The element of mystery, suspicion and distrust remain deeply embedded in the story. Their deep delved fear that the approaching night brings to their minds, their grumbling about the slow speed of bus, their act of counting turbaned and non-turbaned passengers, feeling disturbed as the turbaned passengers came out to be more in number, their hilarious misreading of the instructional phrases written inside the bus as, 'Passengers are responsible for their lives as well and 'please do not put out head, arms we will come inside instead' further add to the aura of terror. As Raj Kumar reflects:

It appears as if that very moment someone would place the cold barrel of pistol at the driver's temple asking him to divert the bus to the side road and the very next moment, the Sikh sitting behind me would pen his score of the evening with me.(13)

The narrative switches between the past and present with certain anecdotes as Raj Kumar remembers his grandmother, a true embodiment of the liberal and tolerant cultural values of Punjab. Despite herself being a Hindu, she used to bring her grandchildren to Harimandir Sahib every day and chant Gurbani. Raj Kumar remember his cousin's letter who calls Punjab 'the fourth direction'. In folktales, it was the forbidden direction where a brave prince goes, encounters his worst fears and came out victorious with many precious gifts. Raj Kumar thinks that ironically his name is also Raj Kumar but unlike the brave prince of folktale his journey is not his choice but a sheer compulsion.

After reaching Jalandhar Railway station, they came to know about the departure of last train to Amritsar. They decide to take another train which is going to Amritsar but takes no passengers along with. They met a middle-class turbaned Sardar with a suitcase who proposed to request the guard. They approached the guard who initially refuses but after their consistent requests allow only one of them whereas the other two forcibly entered the cabin. After settling down, Raj Kumar noticed that there are four people already sitting inside the cabin. Instead of two officials of the Railways, there are two Sikh youths sitting in the cabin. Due to their 'mysterious silence' and sympathetic attitude of the guard towards them Raj Kumar doubted them to be terrorists. He even refused to take the seat offered by one of those Sikhs youth. Unable to uproot the fear lurking in his mind, Raj Kumar recalls the terror which he witnessed about a decade ago.

Going to attend some wedding in his in-law's village with his family, Raj Kumar got late. To save time, he decided to take a shortcut but he lost the trail. Being lost in a winter night, along with his young wife and infant son, he decided to seek help from the people living in a *haveli* (a farmhouse situated on the outskirts of a village). The family of the house turned out to be their old acquaintance and the elderly lady of the house Tayee Kartar Kaur not only attended upon them affectionately but also sent her son Surjit to guide them who returned only after leaving them on their destination. He said:

“Sister! Let me carry my nephew. Don't bother brother...” Parvati said...And then Surjit switched on the torch and moving ahead, stood and threw light on the drains and raised embankments, showed us the way and kept walking. He returned after leaving us at the borderlines of the villages.” (24-25)

This should be kept in mind that the force working behind the incident when Raj Kumar was helped by Tayee Kartar Kaur and Surjit is not the common religion but the strong socio-cultural values of the agrarian society of Punjab. In an agrarian society, religion occupies the secondary position whereas the cultural affinity and mutual brotherhood carry the primary place. Harcharan, Tayee Kartar Kaur and Surjit signify those liberal cultural values of agrarian society of Punjab. But the narrative also highlights a significant difference between the past and present as the agrarian society with its setup, value system which came to rescue Raj Kumar earlier is not present anymore. Now the setting has been shifted to the urban system. Which has its own money minded, mean, self-centered set of values and where nobody has time to help the other people. The narrative returns to the present with the guard rebuking them for their forceful entry to his cabin. To console him they decide to pay him some money as bribe. The guard takes money from them but refuses to accept the money from the two Sikh youths which further strengthens Raj Kumar's doubts. While reaching the deserted outskirts of Amritsar city, the guard slows down the train and they jumped out. Being afraid of Sikh youths (thinking that they would definitely chase and kill them) both Raj Kumar and Jugal start walking briskly. They are about to run when the voice of the elder looking youth almost glued their feet to the ground. He told them that he got late while bringing his cousin from the other city for his mother's cremation. They are afraid that the police would shoot them merely for being Sikhs.

As a matter of fact, we both were afraid that the C.R.P.F or the police may kill us noticing that both of us are Sikhs....who asks questions before killing....In case we encounters someone, we will be saved if we are in your company...(29)

They feel safe in the company of two Hindus which lifts the mist of distrust and suspicion from Raj Kumar's mind. The folk image of the brave prince and Surjit began to juxtapose in his mind and he began to assimilate himself with those intermingling psychic images signifying that his self-esteem and pride has been revived. The story is a dialogic text as we find different voices in the narrative which represent the perspective of different classes and ethnic groups toward 'Punjab Problem'. The perspective of Sikhs extremists gets manifestation through the character of D.P.E (one of Raj Kumar's colleague):

"Earlier they had said come and join us .Let us get freedom ...we will give you land to live and enjoy warmth of freedom ...and after independence that you are a criminal ...and instead of providing warmth , they put burning tires around your necks."(14)

The state makes uses of every possible means to crush the movement, (even the staged encounters):

Now the police are killing the youth in fake encounters like Meer Manu ...where have the law and the courts vanished?...the police are the law ..the police are the witness...the police are the judge...the police...the butchers ,this is democracy.(27)

The perspective of the Hindu community is presented through Raj Kumar's friend Naresh who held the extremists responsible for this hue and cry. Whereas the view point of a common sensible man is presented through Pandit Mahaul who is sad over the deteriorating situation in Punjab:

It has become difficult for a sensible person to survive...those were also the times when the people loved each other like brothers, helped each other, felt happy embracing each other. Those leaders hungry for power have poisoned the atmosphere. People distrust each other ...human beings are thirsty for each other's blood. (18)

Being rooted in the cultural paradigm, there are two strong but opposite forces which run parallel in the text. On one hand, is the fear, distrust, disparities, suspicion, hate and on the other hand lies the strong bonds of ages old collective cultural, historical, religious and social heritage which has always bonded the two communities together like one. If the forces of darkness gets represented through the terrorists and the people like D.P.E , the essentially liberal and tolerant cultural heritage of Punjab gets manifested through Raj Kumar's liberal and affectionate grandmother who used to take them to Harminder Sahib to pay obeisance , his friend Harcharan Singh who lent him a large sum of money for his sister's wedding and Tayee Kartar Kaur and Surjit who helped them on that dreadful winter night when Raj Kumar and his family lost the trail to their village .They all together build up a humanistic platform and stand in sharp contrast with the prevailing reality of the age which is predominantly marked with mistrust ,terror and violence.

The narrative highlights the plight of the people by drawing parallel between the peaceful period of past when love, trust and peace prevailed among all the communities and the present period where communities are torn apart by terror and violence. The hurricane of communal violence has robbed the society of love, faith and humanity. The contemporary Punjab has been dipped in the blood of its own glorious heritage and cultural values. It has become 'the fourth direction' (the forbidden direction full of dangers, challenges and death) where nobody feels safe anymore. The people representing different communities whom we meet in the story be it Raj Kumar , Jugal and the Sikhs are equally terrified. Every sensible reader can hear the silent sigh that the narrative heaves (in its nostalgic yearning) for that Punjab which has become a piece of history now, "It appeared to me that Punjab has now been reduced to a thing of past. Like a dreamaway...far away...it has been left somewhere far behind". (12)

The title of story is significantly symbolic as it further adds to the thematic development to the story. Sandhu uses the mythical concept of 'the fourth direction'(the forbidden direction of the folktale) and assimilate it with the present Punjab. But Sandhu not only makes use of images from the folktale but also redefines it by reconstructing it. The protagonist of the story Raj Kumar through shares the some nomenclature with the prince of the fairytale but as he himself admits lacks the bravery unlike the former:

“My name was also Raj Kumar but I am not the prince of the story. I was only a clerk. Whose mind desired to that the bus should reach Jalandhar at the earliest at least before the time of departure of the last train to Amritsar”.(11)

His journey which is not an act of bravery but sheer obligation signifies that the prevalent situation has robbed the common man of all his bravery and heroism. The narrative thus presents a sorry picture of the suffering Punjabi people who have been caught between the ‘two sides of the grinding mill’ and were badly insulted and humiliated. The narrative initially begins with the presentation of doubts, suspicion and dilemma of the two Hindu characters (Raj Kumar and Jugal Kishor) but towards the climax the situation turns upside down as the Hindu characters who earlier appear to be the victims turn out to be the saviors which in turn resurrects their self-esteem and valor .As Raj Kumar walks in front of the two Sikh youths his heart sinking with fear and suspicion gets filled up with confidence and faith which gets its metaphorical representation through the amalgamation of the mythical image of the heroic ‘brave prince’ and ‘Surjeet’ with the protagonist himself:

I started walking ahead of them confidently and told them not to worry while walking ahead, I thought I was Surjeet with the lathi and torch in my hand.
And I, who was prince, just a namesake was walking towards the fourth direction with a broad chest.(29)

Thus, the strength of narrative lies in the fact that it not only portrays the contemporary reality but by constructing a humanistic platform also provides the solution to save and revive the dying soul of Punjab. The climax of the story seemingly suggest to create such material circumstances where both the communities could feel complimentary to each other. Thus, the narrative enlightens our mind with the spark of love, trust and mutual brotherhood.

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