

Post-Independent Agony of Distress and Disintegration in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Shiv. K. Kumar's *A River with Three Banks*

¹Dr.P.Chitra,

*Assistant Professor of English
Department of English (A)
Kongunadu Arts and Science College
Coimbatore*

²Dr.M.Pradeepa

*Assistant Professor of English
PG Department of English
Kongunadu Arts and Science College
Coimbatore*

Abstract

Indian Independence struggle and partition are the major events of Indian history concurrent to each other. Many writers of India expressed the agony and anguish of India in their literary artifacts. In lieu with the respective melee, Kushwant Singh and Shiv.K.Kumar depicted their distress in their novels published Post-Independence. Kushwant Singh's novel, Train to Pakistan, brings forth a picture of bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border during the partition days of August 1947. To Singh, that was period of disillusionment, crisis of values, distressing and disintegrating period of his life and Shiv.K.Kumar has also written the same subject in his only novel, A River with three Banks. Both the novels with common background focus on religious riots, mass killings, exhibition and resentment of humanism over massacre and their impact on mass psychology, etc. are strongly felt and portrayed in them in different ways. The present article exposes the two prolific Indian novelists who unfolded their personal trauma of Indian Independent struggle and agony of partition in particular in the novels.

Key words: *Agony, Partition, Distress, Disintegration and Inhumanity*

Indian English literature traces its origin from Calcutta. The Post-Independent India did not have facilities to propagate the vernacular languages and produce clerks to the imperial rule of East-India Company. The government imparted only English education, modelled on the Lord Macaulay system of Education. Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, MulkRaj Anand, Kamala Markandea and others, have imprinted the names in the annals of Indo-Anglican literary history even during the period of the English rule. K.K.Sharma and B.K.Johri in *The Partition in Indian English Novels* have stated:

It has been a compelling experience, resulting in irresistible creative urge for several Indian English fictionists, who have dealt with the theme of partition...like Kushwant Singh, Manohar Malgoankar and Chamal Mahal predominantly treated the theme of partition” (413)

Khushwant Singh, Shiv.K.Kumar, Kamala Suraiya, Manohar Malgoankar, V.S.Naipaul and others are the contemporary writers of the Post Independent India who expose their intimate knowledge about the agony of the partition of India, its consequence continuing to hit the headlines of the National Press. Khushwant Singh was born in 1915 in Hadali, Punjab. He had his education in Delhi, and at King’s college, Cambridge University. He studied Law in the famous Inner Temple in London and became a Barrister-at-Law. He returned to the undivided British India and practiced law at Lahore High Court until 1947 which was the fateful year that divided India. During the same year he joined the Ministry of External Affairs of Government of India. His association and contribution to the All-India Radio cannot be ignored. He edited ‘Yogana’ an official organ of the government of India. Being intellectual, he was totally independent in his views and principles that forced him to change his place of work, nature of work and organization. In the meantime he became a writer whose views have always been respected and accepted by everyone and occupied positions of power in the Government of India.

Shiv.K.Kumar, the prolific writer of Indian English Fiction was born in Lahore in 1921. Having born in an orthodox Hindu family, and his grandfather and father were headmasters of a local school in a suburban town near Lahore. He had his early education care and guidance of his father. The environment in which he has been brought up was of strict discipline of the Arya Samaj doctrines. He has grown among books and drawn emotionally to his mother. The vision of life and perceptiveness of his mother facilitated the young Kumar to understand life better. Considering his education, he has completed an M.A in Forman Christian College, Lahore and became a lecturer in D.A.V. College, Lahore and taught English Language and Literature.

The partition of India left no other option to the family of Shiv.K.Kumar to go for a safer place. His family landed in Delhi. He worked as a lecturer in Hansraj College. He has been awarded with a doctoral degree at Cambridge University. The man born in the Northern most part of the undivided India, travelled towards the south to Hyderabad where he became Professor of English at the Osmania University. To add credits to his career, he became Vice-Chancellor of the newly established Central University, Hyderabad. He has been honored with teaching assignments in the United States of America and elected as the fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, the United Kingdom.

Khushwant Singh is essentially an essayist and Novelist whereas Shiv.K.Kumar predominantly a poet and rarely a novelist. Khushwant Singh has four more novels to his credit but Shiv.K.Kumar has possibly got a single book to his credit that too contemplates the bitter taste of his personal wounds. Kumar has been forced to divorce his wife but took care of Singh's children and he originally dedicated to them. Rather his inspirations, his experience of agony during the period of Indian partition influenced him to write the novel, *Train to Pakistan* and other novels. Shiv.K.Kumar has also contributed his novel, *A River with Three Banks*, on the same subject the partition of India as the background for his only novel. No river has three banks but using the river with their banks as a symbol, he indicates the readers the third bank.

Both the novels, *Train to Pakistan* and *A River with Three Banks*, have a similar background. The religious rioting, the mass killings, the indiscriminate raping of the women, irrespective of exhibition and resentment of humanism over the killing and its impact on the mass psychology, and so on are felt and portrayed in them strongly as, "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, both tortured, both raped" (TP 1). The way Khushwant Singh explains the incidents are impersonal and narrates everything without any attachment, in the third person singular narration whereas Shiv.K.Kumar possibly uses of his personal emotions. He utilizes every opportunity to identify himself with the main character, Gautam Mehta, who went abroad in pursuit of knowledge and outwitted by his own wife. She left herself willingly into the hands of Mohinder Singh, the colleague of her husband, Gautam, without any humiliation and ignominy gave birth to a boy Rahul, bringing disrespect to the family of Mr.Mehta and a personal indignity to Gautam. No readers of Indo-Anglican Literature exhibit his/her ignorance over the personal failures of Kumar, when he was in London. Arriving India, his divorce to his wife. Arya Samaji, prones a sensible inference paralleling in the lives of the author and the protagonist for propagating his ideals.

Singh was conscious to represent the events happened at the small village with a river and railway bridge which borders the new born Pakistan and mother India. Whereas Kumar represents the ancient splendor of the Indian capital, New Delhi. The former exposes the heart of the rural Indians touching humanity, sympathy and concern for the fellow beings and are carried away by the honeyed poisonous words of the fanatics. The religious freaks have been succeeded in inflaming their surcharged emotions in looking, plotting and killing the Muslim brethren in the *Train to Pakistan* whereas Kumar in *A River with Three Banks* were concentrating on the senseless urbanites who revenge on a Hindu and Sikh for a Muslim and a Muslim for a Sikh or a Hindu. The opening chapter of *A River with Three Banks* is the right proof for this argument, "where a group of Sikh and Hindu fanatics joining hands to take revenge on anybody identified to be a person belonging to the minority community as an act of Vendetta for what the Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan had suffered." (RTB1). The quietest days have become violent, turbulent and fiery.

No work of art can be treated as a capsule to be swallowed and digested in the course of the process and absorbed by the body in the form of blood which run through the veins all over the physique. Instead, it cannot be put into a water tight compartment to signify something. Literary art is an exclusive creation of an individual presented to a vast multitude

of humanity to study, enjoy and get enlightened. The individual's entanglements in life, reactions to events over time and his personal imagination and attributions form the summum bonus of any work of art. Hence its analysis and criticism requires the fullest comprehension of its background historical knowledge.

The present article focuses on the *Train to Pakistan* of Khushwant Singh and *A River with Three Banks* of Shiv. K. Kumar analyzing an ardent Sikh and an equally strong Arya Samajit of Hindu fold. Both the literary pioneers underwent certain traumatic personal experiences of the Indian Independent struggle particularly during the moment of the agony of India-Pakistan partition. They were typical Punjabis and spent their early childhood in and around the old Punjab. The landscape has been a great attraction for them. Khushwant Singh begins his novel, *Train to Pakistan* on the banks of Sutlej which was a mute spectator for the communal carnage and Shiv.K.Kumar begins his novel, *A River with Three Banks* in Delhi and also set along the banks of the river, Yamuna. The River travels to Allahabad to be confluence with the visible Ganga and the invisible Saraswathi to become Triveni which washes the sins of those who has a dip. Both the novels provide significance to the rivers, probably to speak the neutrality. The rivers symbolise fertility, culture, prosperity, movement and depict the fact that as long as it runs, it helps every being under the sun to quench their thirst and subside hunger.

The novelists compare the rivers- Sutlej and Yamuna (Triveni) to the Human heart. The rivers are totemically compared to the blood running through the veins of human beings. If the essential human milk or blood dries in the veins, one would be self-centered, religion-oriented and region-oriented resulting to be blind. None looks into a river without water and it would be uncared. Similarly the human beings without humanity will also be uncared and unused. There is an undercurrent of this positive natural habit being equated and advocated to the humanity to be understood and followed. The authors advocate that the human beings, like the river are expected to keep their hearts open for anything and anyone to be believed throughout till the day of judgement.

Though both the authors belong to different religious faiths they possess a conception in common. They generalize love and concern for people belonging to other religions in their literary pieces. The exposure to the Western culture might have influenced them to feel for others, besides they were grown with the freedom movement amongst the preaching of Mahatma Gandhi. In an interview to Ashok Mahadevan and Mohan Sivanand of 'Readers' Digest' Khushwant Singh replies affirmatively to the questions:

"You admired Gandhiji?" and further states, "very much. I still do. I still think that the point of reference for every Indian when he is in doubt on any political or social issue is to say "What would Gandhi have done under the circumstances?"... He meant more to me than any of my path, my gurus" (107-108) subscribing to the idea that Gandhi was the conscience keeper of any sensible Indian. The writers agreed the Gandhian ideologies as, timeless, ageless and a kind of evergreen testament always directing the mass towards the path of Ahimsa, tolerance and non-violence. They have not pretended to be hypocrites in suppressing the fact of the violent incidents that took place even during Mahatma's life time as well.

In the case of Shiv K.Kumar, Gandhi stood for something and states :

“his self-professed saintliness wouldn't help anyone run the administration...

How can we call him father of the nation when he has dedicated himself exclusively to the welfare of Muslims? While he should have stayed back in Delhi to participate in the celebration of our Independence, he chose to work for the Muslim in Noakhali (RTB 84)

His recitation of Korean verses during his prayer meetings were an affront to the Hindu Dharma. He says:

“What has the Mahatma to say about the desecration of our sacred temples and the molestation of our women in Pakistan? If he persists in his one-sided commitment, he may soon have to pay dearly for it”. Infact, his speeches and actions doubtlessly left us in itching for his Martyrdom, so that he may be ranked with Jesus' Christ, Thomas Beckett and the Buddha... At this critical juncture, what we need is an Indian Jinnah, a Hindu Messiah, who would fearlessly weed out all treacherous elements from our holy land” (RTB 86-87).

When a man or woman frankly states that Gandhi was his or her guiding spirit, one can very well assess his or her character, mental equilibrium and attitude to the society. It is a historical fact that Gandhi was against the partition of India and always stood by the side of the weaker sections, children and religious minorities especially Muslims. Juggat Singh of *Train to Pakistan* and Gautam of *A River with Three Banks* went to the extent of risking their own lives in order to save the Muslim Nooran and Haseena. The former, extend a security cover to the train that carried Nooran, while the latter after bidding good bye to the members of the family decided to cross the border to have a permanent residence in Pakistan, marrying the victim Haseena and accepting her as his wife.

Singh and Kumar were pious and God-fearing and did not care for religion though they did not fail to state their own religious learnings. They hold on the intellectual honesty to accept and acknowledge whatever good is found in others. Shamlal, the father of Gautam had gone to the extend of thanking his son Gautam saying: “I should thank you for bringing me to this great book” (RVTB 191) and requests Gautam to read a particular passage from Koran which has got the caption, “The Laws” which reads:

All human beings are created as a family
A single community
Then God sends His Prophets
Bearers of glad tidings,
Who guide those who believe in Him?
And punish the evil.

As soon as the young frustrated Gautam finished reading, the old man questions and tells his son:

Now isn't that what Lord Krishna also says in the Bhagavat Gita? ‘Whenever righteousness declines and evil prosper, I assume a visible shape and move as man with man, guiding the virtuous, punishing the wicked...’ Don't you have here two prophets saying the same thing?”

to make double sure that all religions preach only one thing – the essential human milk.

If everyone understands and acts on that, no enmity would be seen, no bloodshed and no butchering of human beings would also be seen as well. The whole world will live in peace. Both the novels brought out a record how human disaster and the pitiable condition have been taken place during the gruesome period of the partition.

Expressing the sense of oneness, both Khushwant Singh and Shiv K.Kumar, try to propagate the message of one India, one Heart and one Goal by which the nation can reach any heights.

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