



## Partition Pains: Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan and Atin Bandyopadhyay's 'Nilkantho Pakhir Khoje' in Perspective

Nasir Ahmed

Assistant Teacher in English, Adhikari Krishnakanta High School, Siliguri, Darjeeling, West Bengal, India

### Abstract

The traumatised situation, personal agony and the fear are reflected in the article. Partition never binds, it only divides. We find the dire consequences of partition in this article. The above mentioned two novels focus the aftermath of partition. The sorrows and unflinching suffering of people are portrayed very carefully.

**Keywords:** the impact of partition on one's life

### Introduction

If anything ever existed so painful and traumatic in the recent history of India and with so overwhelming consequences, it is the event of partition. The sociocultural shifts experienced in the form of growing alienation, mutual suspicion, and religious fundamentalism that marks the wake of the event offers us new ways to rethink our experience in this post-partition world. In this paper I attempt to offer a rereading of the two great Indian novels-Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan and Atin Bandyopadhyay's Nilkantho Pakhir Khoje in the light of the agonies and pain that had quite naturally accompanied the horrors of partition. That the scar of partition afflicts not only the topographical map, but also the individuals, their families, and most important of all, their way of life will be my subject of exploration.

To begin with, Khushwant Singh's novel Train to Pakistan deals with the crisis of faith and degradation of human morality during the partition in the Western part of India. He has shown the mass displacements and migration are themes not to be romanticized, but which are inherently problematic, and open to interrogation, raising fresh questions concerning the idea of nation, the national imaginary and national identity. Singh enacts the horrors of partition in a dispassionate manner, making it a point not to give himself all away so extravagantly. Keeping an eye on depicting the terrible happenings of partition, he has done so much as to make them brutally realistic and vividly alive. Mano Majra was a small isolated village of Punjab which hardly knew of the upheavals that the country had been going through during this time: people hardly were aware that there is a greater world beyond where all the events and happenings were taking place and was soon to make its presence felt in Mano Majra. Things begin to change as train appears with loads of dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs with "Gift from Pakistan" written on the engine.

Subsequently violence flares up from this side of India, this time the Sikhs avenging the death of their countrymen by murdering thousands of Muslims. It is interesting to note that as long as people of Mano Majra had lived a premodern life,

untouched by any elements of modernity (save the train), as long as they had not bothered themselves with the grand narratives of nationhood, religious unity and solidarity they dwelt in peace, unknown of any hostility that divides religious sects. But once their modernity had forced them to choose their own identity and that in terms of religion and national loyalty did the problem begin. This is exactly what happens whenever a nation is born, it fixes up an imagined space for its subjects and seeks to celebrate and glorify it at the expense of anything, even death, which it euphemistically names martyrhood. Muslims kill Hindus and Sikhs and Hindus and Sikhs kill Muslims- all in the name of sacred nationhood and religion which, however, goes on to show that religion and nation are not so dangerous as the cultural mapping it engenders and the violence that it subsequently follows it. The magic lines drawn by the politicians to define national identity slice the country according to their choice and determined the fate of the countrymen.

The displaced Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs in the wake of partition represent what Homi Bhabha calls the 'margin, of the nation. They are cared for by none: even Hukum Chand's roles as a district magistrate and a deputy commissioner reveals the reluctance of the government in decreasing the whirlwind of brutality.

Hukum Chand's interest in saving lives is, however, not driven by humanitarian consideration. He just seems to be interested in keeping up a façade of law and order without compromising his official position. It is not difficult to see the duplicity in his attitude when he talks with the sub-inspector of police:

"We must maintain law and order. If possible, get the Muslims to go out peacefully....No...inspection Sahib, whatever our views- and god alone knows what I should have done to these Pakistanis if I were not a Govt servant- we must not let there be any killing or destruction of property. Let them go out, but be careful they do not take too much with them."

This is how a tragic fate for people ensues when the exercises of power meet that moment of history that coincides with the event of the birth of a nation. That the emergence of a nation,

however much it be a moment of glory and pride for people, almost inadvertently fails to take note of the bloodshed and violence upon which its identity rests, that the gruesome politics of division and displacement are legitimized and sanctioned in the name of development and modernity.

The purpose of partition has always been freedom as was with the partition of India 1947. Atin Bandhopadhyay's novel *Nilkantho Pakhir Khojye* paints a clear picture about how the Partition turned out to be a 'mirage' - the consequences of the partition i.e. the psychic trauma amongst the citizens of East Bengal, the anguish of displacement, the estrangement in the embraced land, the constant dream to return back to the forfeited land, the unwelcoming attitude of the citizens towards the altered name of their country - 'PAKISTAN' -, depiction of culture as more bifurcating than uniting, the lost control of 'culture' in co-adjudicating the various communities - these are the themes of this novel.

For the people of East Bengal, 15th August, 1947 is the Partition Day, not the Independence Day of India - Various crises concluded towards the tragedy of Bengal - C.R. Das had passed away, Subash Bose ceased to exist and Aurobindo Ghosh had bid advice to politics for a spiritual life.

In the midst of such crises, after Partition, the family members of Bhupendranath became vagrant. They found it rather difficult to acclimatize themselves in the country called India - West Bengal's Hindus, the Ghoti, unconsiderably humiliated the East Bengal's citizens. The depiction of the East Bengal as uncultured, campestral, agrestic, georgic, countrified and West Bengal as urban, civilized, cultured, is clearly pronounced. Soon they were spelled out as citizens of No-country. They suffered from a sense of conflict between Bangladesh roots and Indian space. Was it identity confusion or was it identity crisis? The citizens of East Bengal were among the nameless living dead bodies. Word 'refugee' came to existence and disturbed the whole social structure of the subcontinent with the sobbing of the 'have nots' - World independence assured the form of 'derision'. These 'refugees' came India to save their caste, only to realize that they were the prey of capitalist society.

The detachment of the sacred love between Fatema and Soma depicts that even their bond got unconsecrated. The widow Malti who commanded respect in the pre-independence and pre-partition Bangladesh lost the dignity even of a human being in India. She was labeled as one of the lawbreakers only to face the torture of police. She contrasted the imperturbable cadence of her previous life with the jungling sounds of the train. the déjà vu of the pond, "sarpathi fish", odour of fresh "illish fish", Bangladeshi "pitha"- all well her paradise even at the suffocating moment and this offered her a moment of relief.

In the last part of the novel, Sona undergoes a sheer pain- he did not clearly understand the real political perspective of their departure- His cry- "Isom dada, please go back. We would return here again." (Atin bandhopadhyay 1971, pg.379), is similar to the Sikh neighbours of Mano Majra who assured the Muslim neighbours that their departure was temporary. The adult members were however aware that their motherland was seized. It became unsubstantial to them now - they could not welcome India even as its substitute. Herein lies the parallelism between the two novels.....

Nothing unusual, as Muslims many a times blame the Hindus as the snag of their economic and educational development. This idea is represented when Felu soliloquies "Hindus are reluctant to divide the country and have the country. They always keep us downtrodden and make fun of us." this actually proved conducive behind the partition where Muslims longed for their departure. After partition refugees of both the countries faced the same fate. A sense of reminiscence mixed with skirmishes of endurance gave a halt to all the members of the subcontinent. New identity, new citizenship though defined them politically but not economically. They lost the peace of their lives. The question of caste however remains significant when Soma working under the commander of navy, had to sacrifice his caste by eating beef. Thoughts of having sacrificed his caste brought him utmost distress. The second generation of the independent post-partition India sacrificed caste system to convenience. This was only because their survival was at stake economically. This also narrates the idea throughout that Muslims could have compromised a little, the history of India would be different, yet underlying is the idea that even though partition deliberately separate the Bengali community in eastern part, but could never solve the heart-scorching question of caste system. The fear that striking at the roots of someone's caste would fetch profanity is visible when the officer who had ordered Soma to eat beef got afraid of his tears. After gathering some courage he commented in the core of his heart; "My father is Aghor Chandra Chattopadhyay, my grandfather's name is Haribilash Chattopadhyay, my great grandfathers name is Jadunath Chattopadhyay. Are you scaring me by your tears boy? It was the first generation of independent India who could not accept India as their homeland; the lost the meaning of life and prayed for death. the crave for death is in sharp contrast to the pre-partition era where amidst the beauty of nature- midst the pond, the field of watermelon, the Arjun tree, the family members of Bhupendranath cherished a hope for new and fruitful life; "morite chahina ami sundar bhubane,/ Manober majhe ami bachi bare chai".

The concept of partition is boldly rejected by both the novels. Hindu-Muslim hostility could not have a solution in partition. Both the novelists' show us how culture and nationality divide more than uniting mankind. Though "opaque" their message is still "cellophane".

## References

1. Bandyopadhyay, Atin Prakashani. *Nilkantho Pakhir Khoje*. Karuna, Calcutta, 1971.
2. Chandola RP. *History of Indian Freedom Movement*. Raj Kumar Prakashani, Japan, 1988.
3. Pabby DK. (In *The Novel of Amitabha Ghosh*, Dhawan, R.K. (ed.); Prestige Books, New Delhi, 1999.
4. Singh, Khushwant. *Train to Pakistan*, Ravi Dayal, Delhi, 1988.
5. Tarinayya M. (In *Writings on Indian Partition*; Mathur, Ramesh and Kulaserestha, Mahendra (ed.); KUFS Publication, Japan, 1976.