

## **Fraternity Amidst Violence: A Study Of Selected Short Fiction**

**Sheeba Parveen**

Assistant professor

Delhi University

### **Abstract**

The Partition broke into pieces the Indian tradition of harmony, plural culture, and continuity between the communities. The fragmentary form of the short story itself becomes the symbol of the partition (partition). partition riots inspired many creative minds in India and Pakistan to create literary/cinematic depictions of this event. While some creations depicted the massacres during the refugee migration, others concentrated on the aftermath of the partition in terms of difficulties faced by the refugees in both sides of the border (Artistic). In fact, millions died during partition violence. The Muslims died chanting the slogans- "Pakistan Zindabad" and the Hindus and Sikhs died chanting the voice of their liberation and demanding separate state on the basis of their religious principles (Panthi 700). amidst such a scenario of violence, blood and terror, there are some Hindi and Urdu writers who have given expression to the feeling of fraternity and have tried to propagate the message of brotherhood and progressive vision in their short fiction. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas in "A Debt To Pay", S. H. Vatsyayan Ajneya in "The Avenger" and Samaresh Basu in "Aaadab" have given the message of fraternity and brotherhood. This paper is an attempt to analyze these short stories in the light of above mentioned point of view.

**KEY WORDS:** fraternity, identity, partition , progressive vision, violence.

The forced human migration that followed partition was one of the biggest tragedies in history. As it turned out, on "the sub-continent as a whole, some 14 million people left their homes and set out by every means possible — by air, train, and road, in cars and lorries, in buses and bullock carts, but most of all on foot -- to seek refuge with their own kind." Many of them were slaughtered by an opposing side, some starved or died of exhaustion, while others were afflicted with "cholera, dysentery, and all those other diseases that afflict undernourished refugees everywhere". Estimates of the number of people who died range between 200,000 (official British estimate at the time) and two million, with the consensus being around one million dead.

"Ten million of them were in the central Punjab. In an area measuring about 200 miles (320 km) by 150 miles (240 km), roughly the size of Scotland, with some 17,000 towns and villages, five million Muslims were trekking from east to west, and five million Hindus and Sikhs trekking in the opposite direction. Many of them never made it to their destinations" (Walia 253).

The event of Partition of Indian sub-continent can be undoubtedly termed as a holocaust, an event of unprecedented magnitude and horror. History has not known a fratricidal war of such dimensions in which human hatred and bestial passions were degraded to the levels witnessed during the dark epoch when religious frenzy, taking the shape of a hideous monster, stalked through cities, towns and countryside, taking a toll of half a million innocent lives. Collins and Lapierre quote a testimony of Captain Atkins of the British army in *Freedom at Midnight* (1976), "every yard of the way there was a body, some butchered, some dead of cholera" (p.444). Deceitful old men, defenseless women, helpless young children, infants in arms, by the thousands, were brutally done to death by religious fanatics of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. To be a Hindu, Sikh, or a Muslim became a crime punishable with death. Madness swept over the entire land, in an ever increasing crescendo, till reason and sanity left the minds of rational men and women, and sorrow, misery, hatred; despair took possession of their souls. The communal nature of violence has made people of religious groups in India suspicious of each other that from time to time flare up in many communal riots. One may say that the legacy of partition still continues as a residual factor of history as reflected in these communal riots. Partition was not about the division of a geographical territory, it was also Partition of hearts that did not heal as yet (Sarvani 74-75)

Amidst such a scenario of violence, blood and terror, there are some Hindi and Urdu writers who have given expression to the feeling of fraternity and have tried to propagate the message of brotherhood and progressive vision in their short fiction. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas in "A Debt To Pay", S. H. Vatsyayan Ajneya in "The Avenger" and Samaresh Basu in "Aaadab" have given the message of fraternity and brotherhood. A debt to pay is an interesting story about a muslim and a sikh. Sheikh Burhanuddin is always afraid of his Sikh neighbour but in the end of the story the sikh saves his life from the rioters at the cost of his own life and gives the message of fraternity and brotherhood. "The Avenger" by S. H. Vatsyayan Ajneya is about a woman, Suraiya and a Sikh who are travelling in the same compartment of a train. The violence that was unleashed during partition and migration of communities was massive and the worst sufferers were the women and children especially women of all communities were at the receiving end. Women suffered violence in its most brutal forms- abduction, rape, kidnap, forced marriage, honour killing etc. The male of both the communities took revenge by committing most barbarous crimes on the womenfolk of the opposite community. Literatures of both the nations captured this tumultuous event in all genres of Literature which led to emergence of a new genre in Literature known as the Partition Literature. Many works, especially short stories accurately narrated the agony of women who underwent heart wrenching physical, psychological and emotional suffering in the hands of men of other religions. Prominent short stories depicting the anguish of women are Lajwanti by Rajendra Singh Bedi, Pakistan Zindabad by Kartar Singh Duggal, Exile by Jamila Hashmi, Revenge by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Cold Meat by Saadat Hasan Manto, Kulsum by Kartar Singh Duggal etc. These stories depicted the physical,

psychological and emotional trauma faced by women in the hands of men of other religion which was the most accepted and discussed fact during the Partition. The story Lajwanti, depicts the emotional suffering of Lajo, who return to her husband Sunderlal in the process of government's recovery and rehabilitation of the Lost women. She desperately struggled to tell her side of story to Sunderlal but Sunderlal always shrank from her and she longed for an ear who could listen to her story. The story ends with a sad end where a man fails to understand the point of view of woman sufferings. Kartar Singh Duggal's short story Kulsum depicts the story of a young girl who is confined by an old Sikh man to offer her as a gift to the young school master. The schoolmaster felt that the gift was fit to be swallowed. When she poses resistance, she is first raped by the old man and then handed over to the school master. Revenge by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas narrates about an irrational desire of revenge by a father, Hari Das, who pledged to stab a Muslim girl to avenge the brutal killing of her daughter Sita. Thus almost all the narrative in the genre of Partition Literature depicted the trauma of women unleashed by the men of 'other religion' throwing the blame on the religious affiliation of the Women. The unspoken truth of the atrocities committed on women which was unexplored by most of the literary and historical writings is the crime of rapes done on them by the men of their own religion and community. The men who were overpowered by lust and desire used religion as an "ethical pretext" to fulfill their desires and this physical lust knew no boundaries and distinction of religion, region and even relationships (Sarvani 75-76). Anthropologist Veena Das writes that 'woman's body became as a sign through which men communicated with each other and the political programme of creating two nations of India and Pakistan was inscribed upon the bodies of women' (Kudaisya).

But in "The Avenger" a Sikh refugee saves the life of a Muslim women from rioters and says; "a women's shame is a women's shame; it is not the shame of a Hindu or a Muslim, it is the shame of the mother of man., I know what happened with us in Shekhupura but I cannot avenge it because for that there can be no revenge. I can only make reparations: offer penance and not let what happened to me happen to anyone else. It is for this reason that I keep shuttling back and forth between Delhi and Aligadh, escorting people from one city to another. It helps me pass my days and also to make amends. If during these journeys someone should kill me, my penance would be complete-whether the killer is a Muslim or a Hindu. What I strive for is that no one should have to see what I have seen, whether he is a Hindu or a Sikh or a Muslim." (p.51, 52)

There is another riot story, "Adaab" by Samaresh Basu. It is a powerful story about two men—one Hindu and another Muslim—who build up a bond of concern and care for the safety of each other. It is a story about a Hindu mill worker and a Muslim boatman being caught up in a grim situation of a riot at night. They hide behind a dustbin at the opposite ends not as deadly enemies, but as neighbors in their attempt to save their lives. The initial suspicion about the intentions of the other subsides. Gradually, a bond of humanity, which is beyond the narrow confines of community and religion, develops between them out of their common predicament. Each tries to support the other in his attempt to reach his home with his life intact. The riot occurs all of a sudden. 'Suddenly, without any warning, the riots had struck. Like thunder! Amidst all the laughter, the chatter in the market place, suddenly death swooped down on everyone: killing, looting, blood flowing like water down the river!' (p. 23) In the midst of the riots and killings, the common people suffer a lot by the death of their kith and kin and the destruction

of the means of their livelihood. They do not understand the usefulness of the unnecessary killings. They say: “I don't understand all this. I'm only asking as to what will come about from so much killing... How will the country gain?” (p. 25) And they wail over the loss of humanity: 'We are not human beings' (p. 25) and thereby highlight the need for harmony and humanity by setting an example of their human bond and friendship. It is very pathetic that the boatman is shot dead by the police and he does not reach his home and join his children, wife, and relatives to celebrate the Id. (partition)

Analysing this story, Bidyut Chakrabarty says:

What is remarkable here is the articulation of a powerful human voice that cuts through artificially created divisions along religious lines. Not only did the boatman or the worker lose their sources of livelihood but were also the victims of circumstances that did not discriminate between people on the basis of religion. The boatman, identified by the police as 'a deceit' was shot dead as he was running away when asked to stop. Evoking the sufferings of the innocent, the story articulates a common theme underlying the experiences of people in similar circumstances where religion or community emblem hardly matters.(partition)

Thus, the story gives the picture of violence and bloodshed in riots from a common man's point of view and hints at the futility of all the violence in the name of religion and nation. Both of these people represent the common people who were the worst sufferers of the holocaust. Their plight has been depicted by the writer through the boatman's words who asks the mill worker; “I ask you who gains by fighting. Some of our people would be killed; some of your people would be killed. So what is the point?” There is satire in the mill workers words on the politicians who never think about the common people. He says; “we die and our children go begging and that is all we gain.....the leaders are comfortable in their fine seventh floor flats. They just order you about\_ and we face the music”.....We have turned into dogs, haven't we, brother—fighting each other?”.....(partition)

“*Adaab*” “*The Avenger*” and “*A Debt To Pay*” are catchy stories which depict the individual's identity crisis caused due to the trauma of partition. It was the major event that gave new shape to the history of the subcontinent (thakur 221). Samaresh Basu, S. H. Vatsyayan Ajneya and khwaja Ahmad Abbas have very well depicted the partition realism and among many writers who have written about the holocaust, these writers will always shine bright for their progressive vision reflected in their short stories.

## Conclusion

The incredible suffering that partition caused in some areas through exchanges of population has become a favorite topic for Indian, Pakistani, and Sikh writers. Dealing in various ways with the human tragedy endured by people on both sides of this newly created border, these writers, argues Alok Bhalla (editor of one major collection of these stories), share a theme. “There is a single, common note which informs nearly all the stories written about the Partition and the horror it unleashed, a note of utter bewilderment”(Partition.1). Most of the writers who have written about partition, had themselves witnessed the holocaust and the violence, blood and terror it

caused. perhaps this is the reason that they have given us a painful but honest perspective of what the politics of borders can do to human lives and civilization and They want to propagate the message of peace and prosperity to the people, by showing them the way that leads them to a land, where there is no division in the name of religion, where liberty, equality and fraternity predominates and where wind blows only to disperse the fragrance of *Shantih, Shantih and Shantih*( Thakur 221).

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