



Dislocation of Social Structures Caused by Partition in Sunlight on a Broken Column

Abstract:-

The partition of India is composed of a variety of people, possessing various religions, practising diverse rites, speaking different languages and having manifold cultures from times immemorial. Irrespective of their disparity, they liberated their country from the British regime on 15th August 1947. But, the wonderful moment of independence caused the tragedy of partition “an original trauma” which constitutes the most tragic chapter in the history of India. The partition of India was the route of separating the sub-continent into two parts namely a Muslim dominating northern state of Pakistan and Hindu predominating southern part of Republic India. Both the countries had to pay high price of partition in the form of riots, rapes, murders, looting and migration. This paper tries to diagnose the malady of partition and its indescribable consequences through Attia Hussain’s novel Sunlight on a Broken Column. This novel deals with India’s struggle for independence and proceeds to present the ironic reward of this struggle. It depicts the ugly acts of communal violence which shows how the fight of the Indians against the British rule turned into the fight among themselves. It depicts for the first time the Muslim perspective on partition. This paper expresses a feeling of guilt and sorrow because the original impulse for the partition came from the Muslims. So, the aim of this paper is to evaluate the novel on the grounds of dislocation of social structures caused by partition and to examine how it is unique in its response to the holocaust –Muslim perspective of the tragedy.

Keywords: - disparity, trauma, malady, communal violence, dislocation, holocaust

Attia Hussain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* was set from 1932 to 1952 against a feudal, landlord, aristocratic Muslim backdrop in the United Province (now known as Lucknow). This novel consists of four parts covering a period of about twenty years in the life of the narrator-heroine, Laila, the orphan daughter of aristocratic and orthodox Muslim family. It deals with a young woman's personal crisis set against the larger historical background of communal hatred. This novel sharply brings out the undergoing change, because the individual lives suffer a change just as the country's political situation changes. It shows that one change goes hand in hand with another. On one hand, Laila revolted against the traditional values of her family and continued to grow and change. Similarly, the country also revolted against its rulers and underwent a drastic change through partition. Laila was a “passive observer” so far as political actions were concerned but she was also a 'central agent' of the personal drama that was enacted against the political background. This paper examines how the social structure was dislocated by a historical and a political event partition in 1947. As Veena Singh commented in her paper “How Difficult are Difficult Daughters? Sunlight on a Broken Column as Female Buildings roman”.

“Partition no doubt was a political decision but not an event in isolation for it had repercussions on the lives of people as it resulted in geographical, economic and most important of all, emotional and psychological dislocation.” (Veena Singh: 191)

The novel shows in detail the traditional way of life among the Muslims in India. The people were deeply rooted in the soil of India. It was a time of great political upheaval. The Muslims, in the vein of true nationalism, came out on the streets, followed Gandhi's non-violence and shouted slogans for freedom. Parades and processions became a common feature on the streets of Lucknow. Quite clearly, this political amity between the Hindus and the Muslims became clear from the composition of Laila's family which consisted of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. But, then unfortunately united struggle degenerated into a communal one when religion entered politics. Attia Hosain discerned the British game of divide and rule in the unfortunate developments. Asad made it very clear in the first part of the novel that the British encouraged and helped the communal and sectarian riots. He made it explicitly clear that the British had given us the message: "Hate each other and love us." (SBC: 13) The novelist showed that the British had a hand in dividing the Indians but they were not solely responsible for it. The Indian freedom movement suffered a setback the moment religion entered politics. The atmosphere of the country grew grave and it buried with heated arguments. Envy, hatred and the will to hurt the other community became dominant. The rift among the Muslims became wide when the "Secular" Muslim nationalists remained in the Congress fold while "Communal" Muslim level charged against the Congress, terming it as a purely Hindu organization. It was declared that the policies of the Congress were fraudulent and deceptive. The communal politics entered even in sophisticated houses and heated arguments between uncle Hamid and Saleem were seen. They found themselves in opposite camps. Criticizing the Muslim league, Uncle Hamid told Saleem sarcastically: "The Muslim League in which you are so interested, I have heard it called communal and reactionary by nationalist Muslim". (SBC: 233)

Saleem had fear in his mind that the Hindu majority might rule over the Muslim minority after getting independence. The same feeling of fear and distrust made Aunt Saira said abruptly: "It would be better to have British stay on than the Hindus ruling". (SBC: 234) Similarly Engineer said: "A minority always and somewhat naturally, fears that it will be dominated by the majority community and that it will be denied proper share in power on one hand and on the other, its religion cultural tradition will come under attack".(Engineer:28) This fear ultimately became the very basis of the formation of Pakistan. Saleem was afraid of the Hindu's feeling of revenge and stated: "The majority of Hindus have not forgotten or forgiven the Muslims for having ruled over them for hundred years. Now they can democratically take revenge. The British have ruled for about two hundred years and see how much they are hated". (SBC: 234) The novelist tried to trace the causes of the growth of communal hatred and did not solely blame the British for generating seeds of communalism but she held most leaders of both the communities responsible for it. Saleem said," The Muslims who are in the Congress are being used as dupes to give it a secular appearance". (SBC: 255) This proved that only the British were not responsible for generating the venom of Communalism. Kemal expressed surprise at this change in attitude and said to Saleem : "How you've changed, You used to say the British encouraged Hindu-Muslim quarrels and drive them apart in order to divide and rule".(SBC,255) Kemal's amazement was promptly responded to the narrator, "And now I wonder how far apart we will drive each other ourselves".(SBC:256) This shows that the two communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, didn't have need for an outsider to draw them apart. They have by now become enemies of each other.

Part Four shows the effect of partition on the members of a family living far away from the Punjab which showed the exodus of people leaving their homes behind in search of a homeland. It witnessed great

atrocities and massacre and became the scene of violent actions. The novel portrayed the impact of the Partition on the members of a family living safely and quietly in a nest like house, Ashiana at Lucknow far away from the main streams of bloodshed and cruelty. The creation of Pakistan offered Indian Muslims to migrate where they would have a sense of security and could rule according to their own choice. Both brothers Kemal and Saleem were parted and opted for different countries, means Saleem opted for Pakistan while Kemal decided to stay in India. Highlighting this predicament, Urvashi Butalia, said: "Thousands of families were divided, homes were destroyed, crops left to rot, villages abandoned. Astonishingly and despite many warning the new governments of India and Pakistan were unprepared for the convulsion: they had not anticipated that the fear and uncertainty created by the drawings of borders on head count of religious identity, so many Hindus versus so many Muslims would force to flee to what they would be surrounded by their own kind." (Butalia: 3.9) Thus, the Partition acted as a great stigma in the lives of the people. Saleem's choice of Pakistan was not due to his religious sanctity but because it provided him, a better market for his skills. Kemal like Laila opted for India who was aware of their uncertain status as a minor community because he conceived of nationalism emotionally in terms of one's commitment to the land of one's birth. Kemal was a purely nationalist who always loved India from the inner most depths of his heart. He decided not to leave India even after partition and the suspicion and hatred of the Hindus. He was not tempted and fascinated by the "Muslim new paradise across the border". Moreover, by presenting two pairs of brothers Saleem and Kemal, Asad and Zahid, Attia Hosain presented in a crystallized way, personalities like Jinhan and Liakhat Ali Khan on one hand and Maulana Azad on the other. Thus, the heated and at times objectives arguments over the dining table finally split the family of Ashiana.

The novel criticized the Muslim leaders not only for inciting communal hatred and anger against the Hindus but also for running away to Pakistan leaving their co-religionists behind at the mercy of the angry Hindus. The description of a refugee who lost his whole family in the communal holocaust was heart rendering. He showed his hatred towards all Muslims for not helping him and called them "all bloody traitors". Laila also criticized the Muslims for not helping her at critical junctures. Instead she praised the Hindus for protecting the helpless millions of Muslims left by their opportunistic leaders. She gave a beautiful rebuff to Zahra by remarking that Sita and other Hindu saved her, "Where were you Zahra when I sat up through the night, watching village after village set on fire, each day nearer and nearer? Do you know, who saved me and my child? Sita, who took us to her house, in spite of putting her own life in danger with ours". (SBC: 304)

At the end of the novel, the novelist has pointed out the fact that in spite of all enveloping fury of communal discord, the communal amity between the Hindus and Muslims had not completely disappeared. She showed this hidden communal amity when Saleem came home after a gap of two years of his stay in Pakistan. On his visit to India, Saleem was not only surprised but also felt happy with the warm reception he was accorded by his old Hindu friends. He was glad of the feeling of recognized identity in Hasanpur after having lived among strangers who knew him as an individual without a background.

The horror of the killings, the events of rape, abduction, the train tragedy in which Zahid was killed, fire and the trauma of partition which forced people to leave almost overnight, beloved people and cherished places were handled in this novel through graphic description, but in a more stable way, through the metaphor of the disintegration of the family home, Ashiana. The novelist didn't concentrate on the Punjab

scene of hectic activities of those days. It studied the psychology of a Muslim home that suffered at Lucknow on account of Partition. A joyous, beautiful home, Ashiana, the nest, was ruined by the partition. The division of the country led to the division of a Muslim house. Saleem and Nadira who saw the Islamic Renaissance in the creation of Pakistan, opted for new country of their ideals. Kemal took India to be his motherland. Asad too, though a victim of Partition remained in India and took active part in politics. Laila, the objective narrator, surveyed the deserted nest. She remembered her days spent there, felt the tremendous change brought out by the Partition and the abolition of Zamindari, recalled the scene in the house that ultimately caused the parting of ways of its different members and meditated on its impact. Thus, the partition acted as a catalyst by actually accelerating the process of disintegration of the family. Attia Hosain portrayed the Partition of India as a paradigm of the Partition of families, society and also of values. Laila's narrative subsumed all the rest of the narratives and traced not just her own growth into an awareness of irreparable loss but also of a nation divided against itself, a family divided against itself, yet both refusing to accept such change, women are left in the winds of change. The novel worked up the same trauma of dislocation of past and denial of identity. The subtext of India's struggle for independence highlighted Laila's struggle to free herself from patriarchal familiar cords and her attempt to reach out to define the self in an attempt to free herself.

This novel for the first time introduces a feminine and Muslim perspective into the Indian English partition narratives and presents the tragedy of Partition with great objectivity and sympathetic understanding. It makes a strong appeal to leave hatred and violence and to follow the philosophy of love, loyalty and non- violence. It is only by co-existence and tolerance that the world is going to survive and not by hatred and violence. Hussain wants to show that the freedom movement had no communal consideration but the induction of religion into politics poisoned the minds of Shikhs, Hindus and Muslims which was caused by the communal and power hungry leaders of the Muslim league. This created the partition even within the Muslims -the nationalist Muslims and the Leaguers, "Partition within Partition".

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