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The Prose of Otherness: Revisiting Catastrophic Indian Events through the Lens of Kamleshwar's *Partitions*

*Kanchan Yadav**

Abstract

This paper attempts to study the catastrophic events of India and their consequences due to arrival of the British through the lens of *Partitions*. Partiton of India and Pakistan has left an indelible mark on the psyche of the citizens of both the countries. The present generation knows about partition through many representations: historical, social, political, literary, etc. This traumatic partition has been recorded by journalists, writers, poets of the age. Most of the fictional and non-fictional works contribute to the history of Indian Partition. *Partitions* by Kamleshwar doesn't only deal with the partition of India and Pakistan but also discusses multiple partitions all over the world. It revisits the catastrophic events through various ages and poses significant questions about the same. This paper focuses on the events which took place in India due to the involvement of the British and had left terrible consequences. Kamleshwar has depicted the British as 'the other' and considers them responsible for the numerous catastrophic events which took place in India.

Keywords: Partition, India, Pakistan, History, the British, colonialism, decolonization

Introduction

Fiction, as a genre has contributed immensely to the literary world. Indian Partition novels have provided a comprehensive picture of the turbulent time. These novels can be divided into three categories: Novels that deliberated on the causes of Partition include Bhisham Sahani's *Tamas*, Vishnu Prabhakar's *Nishikant*, Bhairav Prasad

*Assistant Professor of English, Department of English and MEL, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj – 211002, UP, India. Email: drkanchanyadav@allduniv.ac.in

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Gupta's *Sati Maiya Ka Chaura*, Bhagwaticharan Verma's *Bhule Bisre Chitra*, Yashpal's *Meri Teri Usaki Baat.* The other category is of the novels which deliberated on the ramifications of Partition such as Ramanand Sagar's *Aur Insaan Mar Gaya*, Acharya Chatursen Shastri's *Dharma Putra* which was later adapted as a Hindi film by Yash Chopda, Yashpal's *Zhootha Sach* and the last *Desh Ki Hatya* by Gurudatt. The third category includes the novels which have much broader span of time. They cover the time period of 'before', 'during', and 'after' incidents of partition. These novels include *Aadha Gaon* by Rahi Masoom Raza, *Laute Huye Musaphir* by Kamleshwar.

Partitions (2006) originally published in Hindi as *Kitne Pakistan* (2000) is a daring project that poses crucial questions about major historical events of the world. 'Pakistan' serves as a metaphor to explain various partitions across the world which led to the atrocities, partitions, bloodshed which took place all over the world. The Indian independence can be rightly defined by the first few lines of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*- "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times…it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness" (3). Sekhar Bandyopadhyay in *From Plassey to Partition and After* states, "What happened in August 1947 in the subcontinent needs therefore to be treated as a twin process – Independence and Partition – both affecting the future trajectories of the two nations" (473). The canvas of the novel *Partitions* is so broad that it has etched the mishaps of the entire world. Through this novel the author expresses his dissent towards the partitions, bloodshed, discrimination based on caste, creed, religion, race, etc. which make the society unbearable and leave the people in discomfort and perilous zone.

The Prose of Otherness

A great deal of history has been written from the perspective of the victors. The struggle of the defeated and marginalized is hardly brought into light; they are omitted from the pages of history. Thus, history is liable to document the achievements of those in power. The British created the prose of otherness in order to rule the east behind the mask of their civilizing mission. "British imperialism had long justified itself with the pretence that it was enlightened despotism, conducted for the benefit of the governed" (Tharoor 194). Rudyard Kipling in his poem "The White Man's Burden" asserts that it is the moral duty of the nations of the west to civilize the people of the South and East. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* stated that the British divided the world into two parts: the orient and the occident, "us" (Westerners)

and "they" (Orientals) (45). In the Introduction section he states, "The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (3). This concept of Othering made the British perceive the colonized as 'not fully human'.

In Indian context the clashes between the Hindus and Muslims created another kind of prose of otherness between these two communities which helped the British rule in India for too long. Marja-Liisa Wallenius in "The Concept of 'Otherness' in Partition Narratives Finland and India" states:

> The Indian binary of 'otherness,' in reference to the time of Independence and the subsequent Partition, was derived more from religious identities than the drive to unite against a common enemy, the Colonizers. The British were well aware of this. They realized that if the Hindus, Sikhs and the Muslims fought each other, they would be distracted enough to not realize the strength they actually possessed to oust the British. (56)

During the colonial period, the British took every possible effort to create a rift between the two major communities of India – Hindus and Muslims to expand their rule for a long time. They succeeded in their divide and rule policy to a great extent. Taking advantage of the Hindu- Muslim relation, the British exploited the land to its extreme capacity by getting support from both the communities. The dissension between these communities led to violence and massacre, which left an indelible mark on the psyche of its people forever and they were bound to suffer from cultural trauma. According to Jeffery C. Alexander, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1). Ironically, the trauma faced by the Indians wasn't primarily a result of decolonization, as Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* states, "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon…decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men" (27). In light of this statement it can be said that "The independence of India was neither a voluntary withdrawal nor a forced extraction by a nationalist revolution" (Katarki). The decolonization took place by following Gandhi's Non-violent approach but with decolonization came partition which led to a great massacre in the human history. "For many Indians freedom thus came with a sense of loss caused by the partition" (Bandyopadhyay 460). Kamleshwar considers the British responsible for this entire cultural trauma and makes them stand in the court of humanity in front of the adeeb.

Partition and the Indo-Pak Conflicts

Since the Partition of 1947, both the countries have been involved in recurrent conflicts and military standoffs due to Kashmir dispute. Numerous wars have been taken place between the two which seem to stay perpetually. The translator of *Partitions* Ameena Kazi Ansari states that *Partitions* "subtly bemoans the fact that, in 1947, the people who mattered allowed the fragmentation of land, society and psyche, all of which resulted in one of the horrific bloodshed in human history." (ix)

Kamleshwar takes us to the ongoing episode of Kargil War which further leads the adeeb to recall the unfortunate Indian-Pakistan years of 1948, 1965 and 1971. Pakistan precipitated the first Indo-Pak war over the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir just after a few weeks of its independence. The relationship between both the countries worsened as:

> An unprecedented wave of racial unrest began in August and spread throughout the whole Punjab. In West Punjab and the North West Frontiers Province (NWFP), thousands of Hindus and Sikhs were killed, and women were kidnapped; thousands of Muslims had the similar fate in East Punjab. In massive columns, millions of refugees poured out of both countries. (1947-48 Indo-Pak War)

Similarly, another war over Kashmir was fought in 1965 which led to massive causalities on both the sides:

> On 24 April 1965, the Pakistan Army attacked the Rann of Kutch and penetrated six to eight miles inside the Indian Territory. The seventeen-day war caused many casualties on both sides and witnessed the largest engagement of armored vehicles and the largest tank battle since World War II. (Indo-Pak War 1965)

In 1971 another war was fought between these two neighboring countries and as a result Bangladesh was created.

The army too didn't remain unaffected during partition. The soldiers serving in all the garrisons too had to make difficult choices. Amidst dilemma they had to take decisions which would decide their fates. The repercussions of which could be seen in the Indo-Pak War of 1965:

> A fierce battle had raged in the hills of Poonch in Kashmir. Commanding the Pakistani troops was Yaqub Khan, formerly of Rampur. And facing him was the Gorkha Regiment led by Rampur's Yunus Khan! Two sibling ranged

> against each other, had met in battle. Both were paying the price for the partition of the land. (326)

In *Partitions,* the adeeb writes an open letter addressing the Prime Minister and Defence Minister, reminding them of the loss which the country has faced during the Kargil war. He requests them to do the needful for the suffering families of the deceased soldiers, who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the motherland. He states, "It is hoped that you have not lost all compassion for your fellow countrymen" (11).

In the wake of these Indo-Pak wars, people of both the sides suffered. Anita Inder Singh in *The Partition of India* states, "Between 1946 and 1951, some nine million Hindus and Sikhs crossed over into India from Pakistan and about six million Muslims went to Pakistan from India" (1). Trauma experienced by individuals and families has been depicted through this narrative. The tragic end of the marital relationship of Zainab and Buta Singh, love of a raped Sikh woman, Surjit Kaur and her comatose son; stories of Salma, Vidya, Bafati and Tannu provide glimpses of the stifling phase of partition. By presenting a few individual examples Kamleshwar reminds the world that there are millions like them who have something to tell. In *Borders and Boundaries* Menon & Bhasin state, Partition "marks a watershed as much in people's consciousness as in the lives of those who were uprooted and had to find themselves again, elsewhere…Partition and its effects what have lingered in collective memory"(3).We find the similar examples of individuals in the novel *Partitions*. Kamleshwar states:

> All truth stands here as the outlines of stories– Salma cannot live in peace anywhere with the truth hidden in her heart; since Partition, Surjit Kaur roams about, carrying her comatose son on her shoulder, a son who is more than fifty years old; Buta Singh is a mangled corpse; Vidya's tonga has flown into oblivion, no one knows where. These are not solitary figures; there are millions like them. Kabir here is the living symbol of two nations. (286)

Similarly, in the *Other Side of Silence* Urvashi Butalia presents several episodes of individuals who suffered trauma of partition and were affected so deeply by it that it haunted throughout their lifetime. It is not only about the individuals but also about the repercussions both the nations faced. Butalia states, "If independence in 1947 represented 'the triumph of anti-colonial nationalism' then partition, equally, represented the 'triumph of communalism', something which has had far reaching consequences for the India of today." (192)

The contradictory reality of partition still intrigues the people of both the nations. "A hard-earned, prized freedom was won after long glorious years of struggle but a bloody, tragic Partition rent asunder the fabric of emerging free nation" (Chandra 487). The recurrent wars between both the countries in various forms still haunt the people of both the sides.

Kamleshwar's Prose of Otherness towards the British

Kamleshwar clearly calls for humanity and looks forward towards a secular multicultural co-existence in utopian world where everyone lives in harmony. He has created the prose of otherness keeping the British in viewpoint and has portrayed the attitude of the British towards the Indians and their condition. He brings in Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India, as the primary character while doing so. He has depicted Mountbatten, admonishing his wife Edwina for advocating and sympathizing with the plights of the Indians. His unsympathetic behaviour is quite obvious in these sentences:

> Do stop defending a people broken by partition, massacres and death. In the history of nations these are but trifles…you are expected to honour the traditions of the British Empire. So, it's quite useless wasting your tears on the suffering of refugees and the massacres on the borders of Pakistan. The British Empire doesn't take kindly to such tears. (41)

Although Kamleshwar has represented the soft corner of Mountbatten's heart concerning Indian Partition, and also depicted him as a mere pawn in the hands of the British, he makes him stand in the adeeb's court. Mountbatten is made aware of history by Mahmood, his ancestors are accused of Partitioning India. Mahmood accuses and holds him responsible for the world's biggest and bloodiest migration. He is being questioned for the past happenings. The novelist brings in Raja Todarmal and makes him ask the peon to ask for an explanation from Mountbatten. He says, "It would be better if you sought from him an explanation of how he succeeded in enforcing a partition that even Aurenzeb had failed to bring out." (274) The other invaders couldn't divide the country into parts but it were the British who became successful in doing so.

While weaving the prose of otherness, he presents a very striking scene of the adeeb's court. He makes the British uneasy by posing pertinent questions and making them realize that any atrocity done to anyone is recorded in history and no one can escape the trial of humanitarian court. He gives power to the court of humanity and considers adeeb contemporary everyman who can summon the culprits and ask for

justification of their actions in past. Through Mahmood, Kamleshwar further accuses the British for partition and accuses Mountbatten of conspiring with Churchil against Gandhi to blame him for the collapse of the Bristish Empire. He even accuses the then Prime Minister Atlee to accede to all Mountbatten's demands. Kamleshwar makes Mahmood say:

> Mountbatten, this is a court of mankind's soul and conscience. There is no escaping it! Here, answers will emerge to those very questions you avoid addressing. You might choose to remain silent, but this particular court is attuned to the sound and meaning of the language of silence. (276)

Shashi Tharoor in *An Era of Darkness* states, "[W]hen we kill people, a British sea-captain says in the Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, 'we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this pretence of virtue, I promise you, that will never be forgiven by History'" (xxvi). Kamleshwar in *Partitions* makes Kabir, a well-known Indian mystic poet, appear in the adeeb's court and makes him speak against the oppression of the colonial power. He reminds Mountbatten that real history is the history of the oppressed and not of the oppressors. He fumes in anger and through Mountbatten he makes all the culprits stand in court. Kabir says:

> Mountbatten Sahib, real history is not the version written by the imperialist powers…It is that which has come to be engraved down the year on the souls of oppressed nations. Our history courses down the centuries like mighty rivers. Yours flows like canals…canals you have dug with spades of distorted logic and self-interest. So, don't you sermonize to us about history! You have written your history and we have lived it! (286)

It is not only about the rift which was created by the British, rather it is about the wrong time chosen for partition which aided in bringing such calamity. Nothing was clear, planned for the peaceful decolonization. The British, although left India without violence, pushed it in tragic situation which still persists between the two countries. After rule of such long years, the British did not care for those Indians whom they had exploited the whole time. Kamleshwar has also depicted the lack of seriousness of the British authorities. He makes Kabir ask Mountbatten the reason of indecent haste in choosing to grant India independence in August 1947, to which Mountbatten replies, "It was because the threat of civil war loomed large over India!... All the conditions were ripe for it." (287)The novelist accuses the British for hastily deciding the date of Partition. Kamleshwar writes, "In just five months, Mountbatten, Churchill

and Radcliffe had rest asunder a 5000-year-old civilization! And the Birth of Pakistan had been part of the same conspiracy" (327). This fact was ignored by the British that circumstances of the Partition of India and Pakistan were not in favor at that time. Kabir accuses Mountbatten of not leaving India to its own fate and deciding its fate by intervening which did not provide the favorable outcome, "You had arrived here with a well-defined notion of how to grant this country its independence, if it became absolutely imperative: Nehru and Patel had to be handed a crippled India and on Jinnah would be bestowed a termite-infested Pakistan" (287).

Cyril Radcliffe, a man who had never visited India was given the responsibility of drawing the borders for India and Pakistan. Kamleshwar has depicted the hesitation of Radcliffe as he had no idea of the land and Radcliffe sought permission for the tour of the land, to what Mountbatten replied, "We have no time for that. It's July now. By 15th August, all the formalities of partition have to be complete" (Saxena 319).

"The haste in drawing boundary lines were bound to be problematic, and leave many people unhappy" (Bandyopadhyay 477). India witnessed the anguish and pain over the massacres triggered by its partition. "No one knew where exactly Cyril Radcliffe's line had ripped the land in two" (Saxena 324). People celebrated festivals amidst the catastrophic event. Kamleshwar states, "But along the borders, the corpses celebrated Eid. They wore new clothes and embraced the corpses of the Hindus and the Sikhs that lay around them. This unusual phenomenon had stunned the world." (328) The displaced people became refugees as they were forced to leave their homes and there was no proper arrangement of any orderly exchange by the governments of both the countries which led to chaos and disorder.

Kamleshwar takes us to the year 1857, then 1757 when Battle of Plassey took place between the East India Company force headed by Robert Clive and Siraj-Ud-Daulah (Nawab of Bengal), when Mir Zafar, Nawab's commander-in-chief became a turncoat. His treachery became the reason of Nawab's defeat. Kamleshwar has narrated the horrific episodes one by one which took place after the arrival of the foreigners to India. He has also presented the foresight of the then rulers of India. Despite the fact that a few rulers knew the true intentions of the foreigners, they could not put a curb on the happenings. Haider Ali, a character in the *Partitions*, says, "Never, Begum! Foreigners can never be our allies. Be they French or English, they are both enemies of our freedom" (290). In support of this statement, Shashi Tharoor's mention of Sir William Hick's statement given in 1928 is appropriate, "We conquered India as an outlet for the goods of Britain. We conquered India by the

sword and by the sword we shall hold it. I am not such a hypocrite as to say we hold India for the Indians," (204). Hence, accepting the accusations made by the Indians.

The author also comments on the evil intentions of the British regarding education system of India by making Macaulay and Lord Curzon present in the court of the adeeb. In Macaulay's (a character in the novel) words, "By making English education compulsory, I had marginalized Persian and reduced Hindustan's intellectual and cultural elite to being illiterate ignoramuses" (Kamleshwar 328). In addition to this, Lord Curzon proclaims, "What Mountbatten has achieved today, is the culmination of what I had initiated in 1905. Through the partition of Bengal, I had divided the Hindus and the Muslims." (Kamleshwar 328-29)

Macaulay in his minutes advocated the use of English as medium of teaching and he further emphasized on the introduction of western education to Indians. He considered Indian knowledge system inferior and useless. Kamleshwar makes him speak in *Partitions*:

> To destroy the Hindu-Muslim unity witnessed in 1857, I had established boarding schools for the debauched offspring of India's Rajas, maharajas, nawabs and taluqdars…In each Indian principality and riyasat, I had succeeded in creating Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian "Taliban". To bring about the partition of India on the basis of religion and community, these riyasats served the purpose of our imperialistic designs. (329)

The Partition of 1947 gave rise to unrest among various groups of people. As a repercussion of partition, people from different parts of the country began demanding their separate land which led to chaos and mistrust among the natives. The scar of partition still reminds people of those horrific times. Kamleshar poses questions concerning the future of country through Nadeem Sahab, he states:

> So, how many more Pakistans are to be created now? The saraikis of Punjab, The Sindhis, The Pakhtoons, Ataullah Mengal, Mojahir Brothers are demanding their own nations, I've heard that hindus in Hindustan are demanding from their countrymen a Hindu Pakistan. The Tamils in Sri Lanka want a separate Lanka for themselves. (341)

The rift between the different religious sects of people widened leaving the country in perennial struggle of maintaining peace and harmony among its citizens. The blame of such grave situation has been put on the shoulders of the British by the novelist, if they had not intervened, the result would have been different.

As we embark upon twenty-first century, India has emerged as a flourishing democratic country with scars of the past given by the imperial power. In Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's words, India's journey "has been an intrepid journey through many obstacles inherited from a colonial past, but undertaken-with some success and some failures-with unbounded optimism and undaunted aspiration" (524). Sumit Sarkar in *Modern India* states, "Indian freedom was the beginning of a process of decolonization which has proven irresistible, at least so far as political independence is concerned." (453)

Conclusion

This paper has made an attempt to perceive the Indian catastrophic events from the lens of Kamleshwar's *Partitions*. By projecting the British as 'the other', Kamleshwar has posed several pertinent questions to the colonial powers. He questions the true intentions of the British by bringing various catastrophic events from History into light and holds them responsible for the traumatic past. He revisits and interrogates the dark history of the land and does not shirk from making the culprits stand in the court of humanity in front of the arbiter adeeb, who represents the contemporary common man. Kamleshwar has made people rethink about the atrocities which make men inhuman and he constantly reminds us about the bleak past in hope of creating a better and pleasant future where individuals do not have to suffer oppression and injustice.

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