

THE EXPOSITION OF THE HIDDEN STORY OF POST-COLONIAL INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO SHIV K. KUMAR'S THE TRAIN TO DELHI.

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Abstract

The Indian English novelist Shiv K. Kumar's novel *The Train to Delhi* mirrors the religious conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims after the Indian Partition in 1947. The Postcolonial India was torn by riots, rampant killings and sexual assault. Quite often, the common people and the innocent become the victims of the religious conflict. The novelist's agony over the trouble and restless Postcolonial India and the plight of the women find an echo in the novel. The novel also gives a vivid picture of forceful migration that has enforced the migrants to leave their homes and valuable property behind to save their lives. The novelist condemns the violence against women for being raped, abducted and force them into prostitution. Shiv K. Kumar criticises the Press and the Media for being biased and connivant reporting the fabricated news. Corruption has reigned every department of the Postcolonial India. As it has deep rooted in every field, the social evil couldn't still be rooted out from India. Shiv K. Kumar dreams for a country where the women are free from violence and oppression and enjoy social, political and cultural entity and freedom to emerge as empowered individuals. He envisages an India that provides the choice of marriage to women. The novel is a plea to rebuild India with love, compassion, equality and unity despite social, political, linguistic, cultural and religious differences.

Key words: Indian partition, postcolonial India, religious conflict, violence, plight of women, corruption, women empowerment, liberty, love and compassion

Colonial and Postcolonial India has encountered serious issues like riot, killings, rape, social and political oppression, cultural degradation and religious disharmony. In addition to it, the post-independent India has been caught in the cobweb of corruption from which the nation has not yet extricated. Pramod K. Nayar states, "Postcoloniality refers to the historical, material, and actual 'living' conditions of newly-independent Asian, African, and South American states with in the global system. It refers to the economic and political conditions in countries such as India after the European ruler handed over political power to the native population" (7). The hope of the Indians to enjoy peace and liberty has not materialized due to the conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims that has been furthermore aggravated by the partition of India. BapsiSindhwa in her novel *Ice-candy Man* rightly points out, "These are bad times – Allah knows what's in store. There is big trouble in Calcutta and Delhi: Hindu-Muslim trouble" (75). Shiv K, Kumar in *Train to Delhi* provides a detailed and realistic portrayal of common life during the postcolonial era of India, particularly human life in Delhi and Allahabad.

The novel *Train to Delhi*, first published as *A River with Three Banks, The Partition of India: Agony and Ecstasy* is set in the backdrop of Indian partition in 1947. Violence has been rife throughout India as the Muslims have been gifted a separate nation. Brutal killings, mutilation, rape, abduction of women and forceful migration have been the consequences of the conflict between the two communities in both the lands. The Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims were the victims of cruelty during the postcolonial era. However, the Christians and the Parsi community were not highly disturbed by the violence mongers. The novel begins with the merciless killing of Abdul Rahim, a commoner, witnessed by Gautam Mehta, a journalist and Father Jones at the gate of St. John's Cathedral. A subsequent violence broke out in Delhi taking away precious lives of both the community and ruining hard earned individual property. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru over the air has spoken, "This is not the freedom we'd fought for – this is not the India of Mahatma Gandhi's dreams" (40). The statesmen and the freedom fighters may not have expected such a terrific outbreak and they may not have imagined that Pakistan will be announced a Muslim country while India declared a secular and democratic country.

Violence against women has increased obnoxiously in leaps and bounds during the postcolonial period. Almost similar to the description of BapsiSindhwa in *Ice-candy Man* about the abduction of the

Ayah, Shantha, Shiv K. Kumar describes the abduction of Haseena, daughter of Abdul Rahim from the entrance of Islamia College. Gautam having learned about the pathetic state of Haseena through the unposted letter of Abdul in his pocket is worried for the condition of the women folk. He boasts, “I should like to rescue her from her abductors” (47). It is evident that not all men of the time are fanatic and illogical. Majority of the population have expected for a peaceful coexistence. The young girl has been kidnapped by Pannalal, a pimp and his men and forced her into prostitution in Delhi. Such is the case with Lakshmi who is kidnapped by another pimp Suleiman Ghani. Later Pannalal is killed by Gautam in Allahabad to save himself from being killed by the pimp and through the information provided by Berry, the Commissioner of Police William Thornton rescues all the girls including Lakshmi in a building by firing down Suleiman Ghani. Gautam and Berry also witness a Hindu girl stripped naked by a Muslim mob in the presence of her brother. The brother is kicked and heavily injured. One of the ruffians bawls, “We’ll let you have her first so that she knows the difference between a grass-eater and a beef-eater” (63). It is a humiliation to both the victims. They decide to gang rape her and order her to cooperate with them to save her brother’s life. The girl cries “Kill me instead” (64). Gautam is forbidden from rescuing the girl as the gang is armed with deadly weapons. Fortunately, the gang runs away at the sight of a police jeep. Gautam accompanied by Berry hurries towards the taking with him a table cloth to cover her body. Shiv K. Kumar laments that there was no security to women of the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim community.

Though Gautam has decided to convert to Christianity to make his divorce procedure easier and quicker, he expresses his contempt for the British who are keen to annex their religion in India and Pakistan. He accuses, “... the Englishman, who first landed on the Indian soil as a mere trader, and later ruled as the absolute monarch of this continent, had now assumed his new role as a missionary” (54). The imperial powers have converted the natives to Christianity wherever they have landed which has altered the customs and the traditions of the indigenous people. The African novelist Chinua Achebe has enough details of religious conversion and its results in his works. BapsiSindhwa has also discussed about the conversion of Hindus to Christianity immediately after partition to avoid migration and escape from getting killed.

Partition has provoked hatred for other community and has enforced forceful migration where the migrants have to leave behind their homes, lands and other valuable properties. The Hindus and Sikhs were moving out of Pakistan to India and on the other side the Muslims were moving from India to Pakistan to ensure safety. The novelist describes, “The refugee special had arrived from Amritsar only an hour ago to unload hundreds of Hindu and Sikh refugees from Lahore, Multan and Peshawar – men, women and children” (106). Almost such is the case of Sri Lankan Tamils who have migrated to other countries including India. The migrants may not be sure what lay ahead of them in life. Though the volunteers of Hindu Welfare Association have assisted the refugees from Pakistan and provided them first-aid to minor bruises, they cannot do with serious injuries. The novelist grieves, “But how could the volunteers help men with amputated penises, young women whose breasts had been chopped off after they’d been raped?” (106). Such incidents might have provoked the Hindus to avenge for the cruelty done to the Hindus. BapsiSindhwa on the other side has recorded that the refugee train to Pakistan was attacked and the same violence has been inflicted on the Muslims and many of them killed. It is not quite sure who instigated the attack first destroying human life. According to Shiv K. Kumar, any form of violence is contemptible irrespective of religion and nationality. It is clear that hatred and conflict are evident within the country and between the countries.

Shiv K. Kumar does not blame the British for all the turbulence shattering the nation. Gautam assumes, “I think we always tend to make them a scapegoat for all our lapses” (127). Though the imperial power has ruined the culture and tradition of India, the novelist has all in praise for William Thornton who has served the society with dedication and determination. The novelist does not wish to blame anyone for all the commotion and disorder. Violence due to discrimination is ubiquitous. Shiv K. Kumar believes that a day will dawn when people will learn to live in harmony despite the diversity.

Press and Media are expected to be honest and unbiased in reporting the daily happenings to the people truthfully. The novelist attacks the press for misleading people and stirring violence between the Hindu – Muslim community. For instance, the death of Pannalal has been misinterpreted by a news agency causing panic and fury in the minds of the people. The Pioneer has reported:

A member of the majority community was brutally killed last evening, by a member of the minority community. It came to light only when the body was washed ashore, near the southern wharf. The victim was identified by PandeyBhole Ram as Pannalal, a pilgrim from Delhi. The authorities are

taking every possible precaution to prevent outbreak of violence in retaliation. Armed police have been posted in such sensitive areas as MohallaBaradi, Ibadat, Meena and Kashana(176).

The novelist pleads to the news agencies to be socially responsible and publish true news to the public. This is perfectly suitable to the modern press too as perception are given more importance than the truth. The media and news agencies have become more powerful that they can bring a political change in a quick spell.

Corruption has mastered every department. It has been a threatening factor obstructing the growth of the nation. Materialism and dishonesty is the main cause of the social evil. On police enquiry, Lakshmi discloses, “The truth is that even the police were in league with the pimps” (197). William Thornton orders the Superintendent to investigate the credentials of all the policemen in duty around the area. The Commissioner regrets, “The entire set-up is rotten to the core” (198). The police who are expected to ensure the safety of the civilians and inspire confidence in the public have turned knaves receiving bribes from the pimps and encouraging prostitution and abduction of women. An old man who has assisted the Commissioner in the raid gets brutally killed.

Despite all these threats and social issues, confidence and hope is required to make life possible. Gautam overcomes his domestic issues and succeeds in rescuing Haseena from the pimp Pannalal. He also succeeds in escorting Haseena’s mother Begam Rahim and sister Salma to Wagah border with the help of Berry, Bob Cunningham and William Thornton. His confidence has aided him to win the hands of Haseena. Without confidence, independence would not have been possible. Gautam declares, “Yes, we’ll start a new race – sans caste, sans religion, sans nationality” (232). All religions preach love and compassion, but man has become fanatic by indulging in merciless killing and other unethical deeds. Humanity is the medicine that can cure the illness caused by discrimination.

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