

THE PORTRAIT OF SOCIO-POLITICAL LIVES IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN, MANOHAR MALGONKAR'S A BEND IN THE GANGES AND ROHINTON MISTRY'S A FINE BALANCE

Tarik Anower Abedin

Abstract:

A literary work is a representation of social and political facts- it tries to depict the harsh reality of society. As literature is the manifestation of society, it's a basic duty of a writer to unfurl the socio-political lives in their literary writings. Reality is the understanding of life's evolution in general as well as its specific manifestations at a particular period. A writer captures both the positive and negative aspects of significant historical events in order to disclose/dismantle this fact in his writings. The depiction of lives requires emphasising the significant issues that affect people's lives and novel facets of life. It is an act that acts as a link between the writer and society, bridging gaps in both time and social strata. This paper's prime purpose is to illuminate the socio-political lives through Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan, Manohar Malgonkar's A Bend in the Ganges and Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance. The first partition-related novel in English to be written by an Indian is Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan (1956). It only highlights the chaotic days of partition. Following the declaration of partition, Hindu and Sikh migrants flooded the trains and even overflowed the roofs. The issues, suffering, and fear of that specific period of partition are described in this book. Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus conduct a bloody conflict, killing trains and truckloads of people in an effort to destroy entire populations. In his book A Bend in the Ganges (1964), Manohar Malgonkar described the pre-independence socio-political reality in great detail. The evil edge of the Emergency, such as the cruellest feature of it—anyone, young or old, married or celibatarian—being forced to undergo abortion surgery—all these kinds of stuff are replicated in Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance. Social conditions, including the government's complete disregard, police fatalities in custody, the ills of Indian campuses, the administration's dismal breakdown or absolute failure, the anguish of the underprivileged, and the violence perpetrated against the lower castes are all reflected.

Key Words: Partition, Socio-political life, Emergency, Power and Politics, Religious Civil War, etc.

Introduction:

Most of the Indian writers touch on the horrific theme of partition. Here, they try to depict the brutality of some nationalist people under the musk of religion. Here, both the parties, namely Hindu and Muslim leaders, used religion as a tool to divide the nation. Both the nations India and Pakistan came up with a new diaspora. Here, people looked at both the nations from a new dimensional point of view. After partition, identity crisis, displacement, partition of place, and, more importantly, Geo-criticism become the topic of debate and discussion amongst scholars, writers, readers and intellectuals. Some of the writers focused on the cause of violence, whereas others concentrated on the pain and agony of partition. They talked about loss, displacement,

trauma and disorder in life, too. The novelist Khushwant Singh is the best one who always talks about the dark side of partition. The novel Train to Pakistan is the best example of that. He clearly mentioned the dusk spot of partition in it. He is considered a good historian, learned political commentator, and sophisticated social critic and above all, he was known for his clear-cut secularism and witty thought. People pondered him as a “cultured humanist”. In an interview with Mahfil in 1968, the novelist Khushwant Singh said, “I think I’m among the exceptions because I’m really English, although I’m a Sikh. I’ve spent so many years in England” (Mahfil Interview, 1968). Singh never wanted to divide the nation on the name of religion. Rabindranath Tagore, in his poem entitled Dhormomoho/ The Illusion of Religion, said, “dhormer beshe moho jaare ese dhore, ondho se jon maare aar shudhu more”, which means when illusion under the guise of religion takes over a soul, that blind wretch is forever doomed, to kill or be killed.

German sociologist and economic theorist Karl Marx considers “religion as the opium of the people”. He thinks it (religion) is like opium, which causes dormant reasoning capability, and people start prioritising faith or belief over rationality. In the novel titled Train to Pakistan, the writer Khushwant Singh depicts this harsh reality of our society. During partition, people forgot their long-bonded friendship and amity, forgetting that once they were neighbours. They didn’t hesitate to kill his friend or neighbour on the name of religion. People from both the community showed their atrocity and bestiality. It’s like an army in a war who don’t know why they are fighting. The people fighting in the name of religion also don’t know the exact reason why they kill their friends and neighbours. Both communities keep their thinking skills in sleeping mode.

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. (Arnold, Dover Beach)

Depiction of socio-political life in Singh’s novel Train to Pakistan:

The novelist Khushwant Singh rightly portrayed the entire nation through the fictional border village named Mano Majra. He depicted this small village as a miniature form of the entire nation. He discussed how people are facing difficulties in the boundary division. He rightly talked about the horror, believability, sense of reality and, above all, animality in human beings for the sake of religion in his magnum opus titled Train to Pakistan. Sikhs and Muslims surround this entire village. Sikhs think they are surrounded by Muslim mobs who hate them, whereas Muslims think that the Sikh mobs hate them. They were living under the bubble. Both communities think that their rival community has strong hatred against them. They made religion as a parameter to judge the people. They forgot their previous peaceful life. Earlier, they used to live as a family, but this border snatched away all the bonding they made. Sometimes, they heard some rumour about their life, and they came to know the status of the existing situation from word of mouth. Therefore, the Pakistan government decided to move the common people from Mano Majra to Pakistan, and the next day, it happened. Common people weren’t happy with the decision of the government. One Muslim said, “What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst [Sikhs] as brothers”. (126) Juggut Singh, a sturdy man who loved a Muslim

girl named Nooran. A group of religious provocateurs travels to Mano Majra after the Muslims depart for a refugee camp, from where they will ultimately travel to Pakistan. They sow discord among the local Sikhs and persuade a local gang to carry out a mass slaughter attempt as the Muslims board their train to Pakistan. Juggut moves instinctively and gives his life to save the train since he knows Nooran is aboard one of the train lines. Here, the novelist chose this as the title of the novel. This novel talks about the village of Mano Majra, where both the community used to live.

Here, we can't blame any particular community; they were the prey of circumstances. Some National leaders, for the sake of politics, from both the country astray them, sprout a seed of hate and violence inside their hearts. These pseudo-politicians contaminated the whole gamut of the village named Mano Majra. All of them were responsible for this brutality.

“Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped” (1).

The educated people tried to convince the common people and wanted to understand the meaning of liberty. But here, the common people showed/mentioned their exceptional reply. They said, “Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians—or the Pakistanis” (48).

The novelist Khushwant Singh didn't forget to portray the sociocultural structure in his writings. On one side, he has depicted love and affection with one other; on the other, he has exposed the lava inside the same people. Here, some corrupt people role played as adding ghee/clarified butter on the fire to lit the lava inside them. “The mullah at the mosque knows that it is time for the morning prayer. He has a quick wash, stands facing west towards Mecca and with his fingers in his ears cries in long sonorous notes, Allah-o- Akbar”. (4) The Indian English novelist, Khushwant Singh tried to depict the practice of Sikh as well. “The priest at the Sikh temple lies in bed till the mullah has called. Then he too gets up, draws a bucket of water from the well in the temple courtyard, pours it over himself, and intones his prayer in monotonous singsong to the sound of splashing water”. (5)

Depiction of socio-political life in Mistry's novel A Fine Balance:

The book details the social changes that occurred in India from the time of its independence in 1947 until the Emergency that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi proclaimed. In the book A Fine Balance, the novelist Rohinton Mistry generally criticised Indira Gandhi. But none of the characters ever use her name; they always refer to her as “the Prime Minister”. Economic pressures transforming India bring together the protagonists from different origins. The two tailors, Ishvar and Omprakash, are travelling by train to the widow Dina Dalal's apartment at the start of the book. On the train, they encounter Maneck Kohlah, a college graduate, as he travels to Dina Dalal's apartment to board. Maneck, who is originally from a mountainous region town in northern India, relocates to the city to pursue a college degree “as a back-up” in case his father's soft drink company cannot survive after a motorway is built close to their community. The two tailors and

Maneck become friends and visit Dina's apartment together. Dina is delighted to let Maneck stay after hiring Ishvar and Om for piecework.

For almost a year, Dina and the tailors' business operated rather successfully, but the Emergency's repercussions continued to cause them problems. The government's "beautification" program demolishes the shanty town where the tailors stay, leaving the occupants without compensation and compelled to live on the streets. Ishvar and Om are later apprehended by authorities during a beggar raid and sold to a labour camp. After spending two months in the camp, they use the Beggar master—a sort of pimp for beggars—to bribe their way out. Dina agrees to let Ishvar and Om stay with her because they are fortunate. The landlord is giving the tailors and Dina difficulty because she isn't supposed to operate a business out of her apartment. In their hometown, Om Prakash and Ishvar discover Ashraf Chacha, an old gentleman whose wife passed away and whose daughters were all married off. He provides them a place to stay while they look for Om's future spouse. They come upon the upper caste Thakur Dharamsi as they stroll through the village. He is acknowledged by Om Prakash, who spits in his direction. When Thakur sees Om, he decides to make up for Om's disrespect of a higher caste member. In the village, Ashraf Chacha, Ishvar, and Om come upon herders from the Family Planning Center. They pull individuals off the street and put them into a truck before driving them to the family planning centre because the centre in this city was unable to fill its quota. Ashraf Chacha, the oldest of the three, is severely hurt and later passes away on the street after being beaten into the truck along with the other two. Despite Ishvar and Omprakash's pleading to avoid forced sterilisation, the vasectomy is performed. As they are resting outside in a tent, Thakur Dharamsi stops by and instructs the doctor to castrate Om. Maneck makes a second trip home from Dubai eight years later to attend his father's death. Maneck finds the subsequent violence, which results in the murder of Sikhs, abhorrent after the Prime Minister is assassinated. Returning home, he goes to the burial but finds it difficult to miss his real father, only the one he knew in his early years.

While at home, he studies old newspapers and discovers that Avinash's three sisters committed suicide by hanging themselves because they could not stand the shame of their parents for not being able to pay for dowries for their weddings. After being shocked and shaken, he chooses to meet Dina in Bombay for better news. Dina informs him of the dreadful life that Ishvar and Om, one of whom is castrated and the other is crippled, have endured as beggars following their life. Maneck enters the train station with his world in ruins. As an express train reaches the station, he exits the platform and lets the train run over him to end his life. Om and Ishvar turned out to be travelling to see Dina. They remain friends, and she provides them with food and cash when the house is empty. Dina and the beggars talk about how their lives have altered and how Maneck went from being a friendly and outgoing college student to a remote refrigeration expert. Om and Ishvar adjourn with a promise to return after the weekend. Dina cleans their dishes and puts them in the cabinet so Nusswan and Ruby can use them later.

The socio-political novelist Rohinton Mistry has made a name for himself on the international literary stage. He is a writer of the Indian Diaspora and an Indian who currently resides in Canada. His books have a strong connection to the social and political climate. He is very interested in

history, just like Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Khushwant Singh, and Shashi Tharoor. Author Rohinton Mistry was born in a Parsi family. He regards himself as a Parsi who has experienced double displacement, and his sense of displacement appears frequently in his literary works. The Indian English novelist Rohinton Mistry describes the ambiguous space between the two in his short tale, *A Fine Balance*. His characters and narrators are working to define their hybridity, sometimes against their will.

Depiction of socio-political life in Malgonkar's novel *A Bend in the Ganges*:

Indian novelist Manohar Malgonkar's wrote *A Bend in the Ganges* in 1964. The book begins with the early 1930s civil disobedience movement and finishes with the Punjab partition riots. The Swadeshi movement, independence fighters' actions, the start of World War II, the British withdrawal from Rangoon, the Bombay dock explosion, and the partition of India in 1947 are all included in this novel. "At a bend in the Ganges, they paused to take a look at the land they were leaving," reads the novel's opening line from the Ramayana. Three male heroes make up this story: Gian Talwar, who is heavily influenced by the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence, Debi Dayal, and Shafi Usman are two additional people who frequently use the slogan "Jai-Ram: Jai Rahim [3]" to express how they feel about secularism. Their ideologies are the key distinction between the Talwar and Debi-Shafi teams. Debi-Shafi decides on violence as the last remaining option, while Talwar chooses "Gandhian non-violence" as his strategy to combat British injustices. Freedom fighters also found "The Hanuman Club," a facility for their physical and spiritual upliftment in a nation that is sharply split by its disparate political ideologies and fragile religious foundations.

A Bend in the Ganges also discusses the impact of the political environment on the common populace, including the influence of Gandhiji's nonviolent philosophy and the terrorist effort to remove the British from India. An in-depth analysis is done of the atrocities and turmoil that the British authorities' departure from the Indian subcontinent will bring, as well as the ultimate split between Muslims and Hindus. It sheds insight on the Holocaust that occurred during the 1947 division of the Indian subcontinent. Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, a novel on the partition, is chosen for study. The exodus process, the suffering of the people in congested rails and roads, the Sikhs reminding them of the crimes perpetrated against them by the Muslims in Pakistan, the Muslims thinking of Pakistan as a protected land, and other elements are covered in great detail. The religious Civil War that was heating up in Duriabad at the time of partition is depicted in the novel *A Bend in the Ganges*.

Manohar Malgonkar's magnum opus effort, *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), shuttles us back to pre-independence times and the bloody, violent partition of the nation that followed. The story begins with the Second World War situation and talks about the 1938 incidents, too. The book immediately became popular after it was published and was available in bookstores and libraries all around the world. *A Bend in the Ganges* was chosen by the renowned English critic and author E.M. Forster as "one of the three best novels" of the year. (Amur Qtd. 9)

A Bend in the Ganges by Manohar Malgonkar discusses modern Indian history, particularly the years 1938 to 1948. It focuses on the Gandhian dynamism-driven Quit India Movement, an anti-colonial conflict between the British and Indians. The Indian nationalists' fight for independence is powerfully portrayed in A Bend in the Ganges, as is the insane communal fervour that engulfs the entire country. A huge flareup has shattered the entire country to shreds. There is unthinkable turmoil sweeping the nation. The blood froze due to the brutal actions of imminent violence.

"Who had won? Gandhi or the British?" the author asks toward the book's conclusion through the character Debi, and he laments: the fact that "the land of the five rivers has become the land of rotting flesh". 'The rats, ravens, jackals, and vultures prowled around, pecking, gnawing, shredding, and glutted while proudly glaring at their train'.

It becomes clear that the flimsy communal unity that was held together by the British's shared hostility breaks down at the mere thought of independence, which portends varied outcomes for the various communities in India. With partition, the pattern of precarious intercommunal harmony between Hindus and Muslims crumbles to the point that the two communities are overcome by a devilish drive to kill without mercy.

The book serves as a significant historical record of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the subsequent Indian national battle for freedom. The Swadeshi Movement, the valiant efforts of liberation fighters, a scene from World War II, and the British departure from it. Additionally, it shows the Bombay Dock Explosion, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the terrible effects of communal unrest. It begins with a major civil disobedience incident from the 1930s before moving on to a number of other incidents and a discussion of the contributions made to freedom by the freedom fighters. A few distinctive aspects of Malgonkar's writing can be found in this book, including the characters' daring journeys, the intertwining of love and romance with tough periods, and the integration of historical views and upsetting occurrences into the text. The author accurately portrays the facts surrounding the Indian freedom movement. Prof. G. S. Amur mentions:

"A Bend in the Ganges is a highly satisfactory account of an individual's attempt at survival and search for moral identity and read as such offers but critical problems. The novel is not content to operate on a purely personal level. It is intended to be a political and philosophical allegory as well". (1)

Conclusion:

From the above analysis, we conclude that all the writers taken for this study are good enough to depict the harsh socio-political life of pre-independence India. All of them dexterously depict the social and political life of India. They talked about the power politics as well. The politicians who hold the power misused it and put the common people in many hurdles. The events of the Indian subcontinent's partition, which included numerous forced relocations, were described by Khushwant Singh. People didn't want to leave their friends, family, and possessions behind and travel to an unknown location. At the same time, it was extremely dangerous for Muslims to stay in India and for Sikhs and Hindus to be in Pakistan. Millions of people left familiar areas with

heavy hearts as they travelled. Outsiders abducted a large number of women, who were then abused and possessed by numerous males. Some were forced into marriage, forced into conversion, and forced to have children for strangers. Every second of their lives was spent being crucified, and that torment followed them until death.

Rohinton Mistry's status as one of the most significant and gifted fiction authors of the present is reaffirmed by *A Fine Balance*. He provides an insight into Parsi culture and accurately portrays its rhythm. As is customary for an expatriate writer, he frequently breaks up his story to insert phrases and expressions from his native tongue. His novels, which span numerous texts, civilisations, and languages, promote the acceptance of diversity and glorify hybridity, intertwining the shift that results from unique and unanticipated fusions of people, cultures, and concepts, as well as his diasporic cognisances.

In the context of India, the word "communalism" has a sombre history marked by human sacrifice and murder. As the phrase "communalism" suggests, India has a long history of killing innocent members of both groups for the meagre gain of its rulers. As

Malgonkar states in his book:

"Only the violence in this story happens to be true; it came in the wake of the bloodiest upheavals of history: twelve million people had to flee, leaving their homes; nearly half million were killed; over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, Mutilated." (3)

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