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Post – Partition Chaos in Mohan Rakesh’s "The Claim"

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the representation of the Indo-Pak partition violence and the chaos aftermath in fictional works especially focusing on Mohan Rakesh's short story "The claim" using the critical insights of trauma theory. An effort is made to show how Rakesh is different from general fictional writers who just write from single perspective and never try to be realistic in the act of representation. Such writers either use the language of otherness or martyrdom. It means, they either glorify or villainies Hindus or Muslims. In contrast, the writer is nearer to reality in presenting the suffering related to partition violence. This research work reveals how Rakesh does not blame any side but artistically shows the real trauma caused by the event of partition to simple people. He presents all four main characters as victims of the partition event and attempts to expose the chaotic situation in post- partition India. It shows how Rakesh blames the bureaucracy of India for making the situation more traumatic by delaying the task of providing compensation for the victims of the partition. Analyzing the data from the primary text using the critical ideas of trauma theorists especially Gyanendra Pandey about the violence, trauma and representation, this paper discusses about the literary representation of the cultural trauma. It tries to reveal how realistically Rakesh presents the continuity of the chaotic situation in India even after the partition event.

Keywords: Chaos, claim, partition violence, realistic, trauma

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Introduction

Post-partition chaos of Indo-Pak partition is represented in realistic and touching way in Mohan Rakesh's short partition fiction "The claim". Rakesh presents all four characters of the story as sufferer of India Pakistan partition event of 1947 and shows the traumatic situation that the partition victims face in new land. It is the reality that during the partition event thousands of people on both sides were killed, raped and captured. Those who reached the destination had to suffer much from the trauma of the event and struggle hard to manage the necessities for survival. They were compelled to live the life of suffering in a chaotic situation.

The writer blames Indian bureaucracy for making the situation worse by presenting the great trouble that the characters face because of their misdeeds. The government agencies never realize the traumatic situation that the people have to face in new land. New comers are treated like animals in much dehumanized ways. The compensation that the victims are allocated by the Indian government is not paid in time due to the corrupt nature of the bureaucracy. Using the critical ideas of trauma theorist Gyanendra Pandey in relation to the partition violence, trauma and literary representation, this paper shows how the whole story is based on the realistic representation of the trauma the characters face to collect their claim or compensation in post-partition India.

Review of the Related Literature

Few critical analysis of the story "The claim" has been made, there are numerous critical interpretations of the issues Mohan Rakesh raises and the literary representation of the Indo-Pak partition event. They are discussed in this chapter.

Mohan Rakesh always wrote with the view that as individual should have better understanding of his/her circumstances and surrounding. According to Sinha (1997) Rakesh believes, "An individual can realize his or her true potential when he or she masters his or her circumstance" (p. 33). Similarly, Kumar and Sharma (2021) remark the role of Mohan Rakesh highlighting the social issue in Indian literature. They assert, "Mohan Rakesh played an important role in highlighting social issues with his dramatic insight and skillful characterization" (p. 93). Not only in dramatic pieces but also in short fictional works, his depiction of the social issues is praiseworthy. His characters speak the voice of the Indian society representing different layers. Discussing in detail about the context, content and craft of his writing Jossen (1978) illustrates, "both the substance and artistic quality of Rakesh's writing by showing how he dealt in fiction with the subject matter of material discord in an urban middle class Hindu speaking setting" (p. 2). Rakesh is best known for raising social issues in his fictional works.

The event of partition of India and Pakistan is one of the most striking and most violent events that human history encountered. Partition event has absolutely testified to be a traumatic from which the Indian subcontinent has not ever entirely recuperated. Pandey (2004) takes the event as "a moment of rapture and genocidal violence making the termination of one regime and inauguration of two new ones"(p. 1). After the success of freedom fight, India got freedom from British rule but the joy of freedom could not be realized properly by the Indians as the independence of the Indian subcontinent was followed by the event of partition as planned by Britishers under their policy of divide and rule. The event of partition might not have become one of the most vicious events in history if it had not been given religious and cultural color. The catastrophe of partition incorporated both physical and psychological injuries, with the physical pain confined to the prospect of bodily-distinguished cultural individuality.

Bipin Chandra, a well-known historian, while discussing the consequences that emerged after Independence of India in his book *India Since Independence* states:

India was in the midst of a communal holocaust. There was senseless communal slaughter and a fratricidal war of unprecedented proportions. Unspeakable atrocities were perpetrated on the minorities in both India and Pakistan. In the

span of a few months, nearly 500,000 people were killed and property worth thousands of millions of rupees was looted and destroyed. Communal violence threatened the very fabric of society. Even in Delhi, under the very nose of the central government, the looting and killing of Muslims lasted several days. (Chandra, 2008, p. 83)

Indian independent movement passed through long history but the partition of subcontinent and the establishment of new independent states of India and Pakistan happened with unbelievable speed. Only there was seven years' gap between the first formal articulation of the demand for a separate state for the Muslims and the establishment of Pakistan. At that time, people thought partition as solution of internal violence but no one guessed about the devastating consequences of the event.

Discussing the partition issue Pandey (2004) remarks, "No one knew in August 1947 what the long-term consequence of partition would be; none could have predicted the devastation and bitterness it left behind" (p. 32). The violence during the partition was immense, in which hundreds of thousands were uprooted and slaughtered, raped and forcibly converted in a display of almost unimaginable malevolence. More than that the event of partition left far reaching consequence of enmity and caused great trauma to the immigrants in new land.

This literature review clarifies that Mohan Rakesh is a renowned Indian writer dealing with the social issues. And the Indo-Pak partition event proved to be one of the most aggressive events in Indian history depicted in literature in controversial ways. The research gap of this paper is to show the realistic and objective representation of the trouble and chaos caused by the partition event in Indian society as represented in the short story "The Claim" by Mohan Rakesh that the previous critics have failed to pay attention.

Methods and Materials

This research work follows the qualitative research design accessing data from both primary and secondary sources. Selected primary text "The claim" by the Indian writer Mohan Rakesh is the primary date under scrutiny. Other books, academic journals and different internet sources are utilized to obtain the data to support the claim. Critical, analytical and interpretative methods are used for analyzing textual data using critical insight of the Indo-Pak partition violence and trauma theory.

Indo- Pak Partition Violence and Trauma: A Theoretical Modality

The gravity, uncertainty and jogged edge of the violence that was partition violence proved to be greatly traumatic to the large number of people in both India and Pakistan. The trauma caused by the event of partition violence is cultural trauma. As stated by Ron Eyerman cultural trauma is a "dramatic loss of identity and meaning, tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion"(as cited in Pandey, 2008, p. 125). The event of partition violence proved to be threatening the identity of both Indians and Pakistanis who became the victim of the event. Alexander (2004) adds more to the idea. He writes " Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subject to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways"(p. 85). Partition violence proved to be the event that left frightening memory to both Indian and Pakistani people that they were the subject of a horrible, devastating event that threatened their identity and existence.

The event of partition proved to be great and epoch making and got great attention. Large number of writers wrote literary texts representing the trauma caused by the event. The description of traumatic violence seems more powerful in literature than historiography. Pandey (2008) has analyzed the partition fiction in the light of trauma theory. He writes, "An exploration of the language of trauma in Indian English partition fiction reveals the presence of cultural trauma in fictional representation- a presence which functions as a memory to settle old scores rather than a way to escape from the cycle of common violence"(p. 26). In the matter of representation, they are good but cannot lead to the

cure of the trauma.

In term of representation of cultural trauma of partition violence of 1947, most Indian partition fictions are inclined to two trends: the use of the language of martyrdom and language of otherness. Both representations are inappropriate for releasing victims of the partition trauma. Many of them are functioning as advocates justifying Nehruvian history of 1947 partition. In many cases, as indicated by Stevens (2016), "Trauma functions as a kind of servant and ideological apparatus because it helps to perform the work of shunting affect into appropriate and state supporting practice"(p. 31-32). Narrativization of the trauma gets infected with cultural politics. The need, as argued by Pandey (2008), is the representation of the trauma without any biasness. It should be in such a way which is not just "narrativization: a transmission of violence packed with the same intensity as that which underwrites violence bringing about metaironic rapture that tears a hole in the heart of the readers, making them feel of holocaust of the partition in their soul"(p. 150). The literary representation should put 'shock to thought' effect in readers. It should compel them to think about the event seriously than just making political issue. Only objective representation of the partition violence can make the true realization of the trauma caused by it that ultimately lead to aware readers against such misdeeds.

Results and Discussion

Realistic Representation of the Post-Partition Chaos in "The claim"

Critical analysis of the story "The claim" by Mohan Rakesh based on the ideas discussed in the previous part reveals that the story has majority of merits. Unlike most Indian partition fiction writers, he does not depict much of rupture, atrocities and violence in his fiction in such a way to blame the Muslims or Pakistanis. He does not believe in the act of creating otherness. In contrast, he presents the traumatic experiences of the characters in simple and touching ways, which compels the readers to rethink their previous ideas. His depiction is artistic and realistic to life. By presenting the chaotic life and suffering of partition victims without blaming anyone else, he successfully gives the message of working against such events. By presenting the corrupt bureaucracy, which has added the suffering of the victims of partition, the writer shows the failure of Nehruvian promise of idealistic state after independence.

The story begins with the description of a Tonga drive where all the characters of the story are brought together sharing same type of misfortune. They all are the victims of partition violence and are surviving with great difficulty being haunted by the trauma of partition violence and necessities of daily life. Pandey (2004) in his book *Remembering partition* states, "They had to struggle hard to overcome new fear to gradually rebuild faith and trust and hope and conceive new histories"(p. 16). Except the main character Sadhu Singh all three characters are making the journey for getting the claim that the Indian government has promised to pay as compensation of their loss in Pakistan. However, all four characters share certain aspects but differ in some way. The three passengers are expecting claim but the driver is different who has filled no claim and living in more pathetic situation than others, though all of them are sufferers.

The writer gradually introduces the characters to the readers. Among the three passengers, the woman is much complaining. As we precede, we find her situation very pathetic. "At home, she had two young girls whom she had to leave alone while making the daily round from Batalla to Jullunder. Her husband had died making such trips and she herself was constantly ill" (Rakesh, p. 75). The widow woman is the victim of not only partition violence but also the postponing nature of Indian bureaucracy to provide claim to sufferers. Even after waiting so long, she is not sure of getting claim during her lifetime as her husband passed without getting anything. "I don't know whether or not I'll get to see the money from these butchers during my lifetime! I guess I'll die in torment and leave my children behind, in mourning"(Rakesh, P. 75). Her family has left four houses and more than three acres of land in Pakistan as they flew to India for life. She is weeping and passing through the complex process of remembering and forgetting to be able to reconciliation. Her happy family in Pakistan has turned to a family full of suffering in India not because of other things but because of partition violence of 1947. "From her expression on her face, it appeared as if she had just suffered a

terrible shock"(Rakesh, p. 75). The trauma shocks her repeatedly when certain triggering factors come into play.

The situation of another character who is given no particular identity but called as man is worse. In his family there are his wife and children but till the time he has got nothing as support from the government. He reacts negatively towards the complaint and expression of anger using the remarks:

You are not alone there. We've all come here, leaving our ancestral home behind. Thank God, you got 6000! There are some among us who've not got even a paisa. Our problem is that both I and my wife are alive and well. If I were to perish my children might get a few pieces of bread! I am going blind, my joints ache-by living, I am any better than the dead? But there is such blindness in the government office that they don't see what a man needs- they just keep their account of the living and dying. (Rakesh, p. 76)

Similarly, the situation of Sadhu Sing is more traumatic and touching. His struggle for survival in new land is noteworthy. Even in unfriendly condition of parching sun, he is compelled to work otherwise he would not be able to solve hand to mouth problem. "He had made three trips since morning to Model Town, but has collected barely seventeen anas. His horse panted so heavily in the scorching June sun that it was hardly prudent to work him so hard for a mere ten paisa. But without it, Sadhu Singh could not even buy feed"(Rakesh, p. 74). He stands for those victims who continuously struggle with patience to establish themselves in chaotic situation.

After Sadhu Singh leaves the passengers in the claim office, he comes out in search of a shade to rest but faces difficulties to find a place. As he takes rest, the talk of the travelers of filling claim functions as a trigger and he remembers the most traumatic event of his life. When he was in Pakistan life was joyous as his wife Hiran was with him. Suddenly communal riot sprung in that area, Sadhu Sing managed to escape and came to India facing difficulties, but before his eyes his wife was forcefully kept in Pakistan. "Quickly, he decided to spring towards the backyards. But Hiran, standing a few times on tiptoe, was unable to make the jump. And before she could summon the courage to try again, a hand behind yanked her back Darkness, field and railway tracks- lifeless hands and feet and hunger- ticket coupon card and number"(Rakesh, p. 78). The travelers from Pakistan to India passed through extreme difficulties. The majority of them had suffered bereavement, their bodies sick and wounded their soul bruised with the shock of horror of the violence. Partition violence shattered Sadhu's dream of living happy life with his wife. The memory of joy with wife and the image of his wife being pulled back by a forceful hand become greatly traumatic and always haunt him. One inhuman aspect of partition violence was related to the treatment of women; they were raped, tortured and forcefully separated from their families. Maheswary (2021) in his article *The treatment of psychological trauma in the partition narratives* claims, "The separation of the nation twisted to be not only the partition of the country but also the partition of countless families. The chief agenda of the culprits of violence was the abduction of women; Innumerable women were violated in the turbulence of the partition"(P. 66). During the time of partition violence rioters had lost their human nature and had become most cruel and barbaric. They were like blood bathed tigers attacking whoever of another religion or community came before them.

While presenting the traumatized condition of the characters the writer has also accompanied nature. As all the characters are in pain and suffering caused by partition violence, the nature is also troublesome and unfriendly as the situation is for the characters. "In the full heat of the afternoon there was no shade and the whole vicinity seemed shriveled and desolate.[...] And the neighboring ponds, usually of a depth of nine feet, had completely dried up"(Rakesh p. 75). Trauma of partition violence is haunting the characters psychologically as the sun haunting them physically.

The above-mentioned description of the partition violence victims touches the readers' heart. Blindness of Indian government toward their extreme condition has added to their traumatic situation. Wishing for one's death for the survival of the children is more than reader's expectation. Indian government is doing nothing to decrease the pain and suffering of victims but turning blind eyes toward their problems. Government is there just to count the number of living

and dead but does nothing for the survival of the people. Actually corrupt bureaucracy of India never supported people to realize the value of independence. Regarding this issue Kumar and Sharma (2021) point the reality, "Immediate problem that people experienced after the partition was the influx of millions of refugees from the newly created nation Pakistan to India. Government had limited resource at its disposal to compensate the six million homeless migrants, who had lost everything they owned"(p. 90). This situation helps to prolong the chaotic situation even after the end of the partition event. Resources are limited and the number of the victims is extremely large.

Conclusion

The discussion of the different events of the short story reveals that the post partition chaos that the victims of Indo-Pak partition event experienced was traumatic. Presentation of all four characters belonging to the group of sufferer and unfolding their experiences in the new land is realistic. The readers feel as if they themselves are experiencing the traumatic situation in the act of reading the story. The characters cannot do anything but just passively endure the physical and mental pain, as they are weak before the state power. The ethics of literary texts representing cultural trauma of partition violence in Indian literature is directly related to patch up the tear in the fabric of their identity- a tear that was caused by the event of 1947. Most of the Indian writers demonize the Muslims using the language of otherness and some others go for the evils of Hindus; but Rakesh tries to be more realistic and represents the traumatic life that the victims of partition violence live in the new land in realistic way. The writer has brought all four characters from the victims of partition violence and one after another exposes their pathetic situations. They are the representatives of the different sectors of post partition India where the new comers are tortured in numerous ways. Absence of biasness in the representation is the true artistry Rakesh shows in the story. At the same time, by instituting the account of partition violence, the writer proposes a chance to the people of future generation to acquire a lesson from the aftermath of such dreadful holocaust and shows the need of rethinking our concept of morality and moral being.

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