

LITERARY RESPONSE TO PARTITION IN EAST PAKISTAN (I.E. BANGLADESH AFTER 1971)

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Abstract: The silence that attends Hyder's depiction of 1947 is also present in the writing in Bengal. It is surprising that such writers who witnessed violence chose not to talk about it. Representative Bengali writing does not deal with riots and murders. Instead, in both the Bengals, East and West, the fiction is concerned with displacement rather than with violence and death. Bengali writers ignored the riots to describe the attempt at building a new homeland, or on finding a new home, or on the continued struggle for a new order that independence had promised but not achieved.

Keyword: Literary, Partition, Witnessed Violence, Geography.

INTRODUCTION

Interestingly the East Pakistani writers differ from both the writers who emerged in Bangladesh after 1971 and from West Bengali writers. On the one hand, a writer like Abul Fazl's Ranga Prabhat (1957) stresses the need for socialism in this new land and also stresses that Islam is socialistic in essence. On the other hand, a writer like Abu Rashd in Nonagor (1967) can criticize the shortcoming of this new land and depict the growing conflict between East and West Pakistan, but also suggest that, even while not denying their past, East Pakistanis needed the Partition to establish their separate identity. Truly, the way a writer deals with his plot and knits his/her story reflects the time he/she lives in. The "Great Calcutta Killing", as it came to be known, is totally absent from Nonagor (1967) written by Abu Rashid (from Chittagong) this also shows that priorities change according to the passage of the Time. 1967 witnessed the language movement in East Pakistan., East Pakistanis faced an 'identity crisis' they only shared a common religion with West Pakistan, otherwise geography and language had separated them. The two-nation theory and the dream of the Promised Land were proving baseless. What was important in 1967 for Abu Rashd was not to invoke the gone past but to comment on the current crisis, which had roots in past in Partition. Therefore his novel is invoking Partition, a thing of past, to understand the ongoing language movement the identity-crisis, and the role of the State, a thing of Present! Turning to these Bengali novels, as in the other novels of the Partition, the closeness of ties is stressed in most Bengali novels through examples of Hindus and Muslims being close friends or lovers. Also, the stress, of course, in all these novels is that the Radcliffe Awards was unfair!

Shaheedullah Kaiser's Sangshaptak (The Crusades) is a far more involved novel. It moves from the village of Bakuliya to the city of Calcutta and then after Pakistan, to the city of Dhaka. He does not question the creation of Pakistan. Kaiser's depiction of Partition is only a small part of his vast canvas, but it is significant that though Kaiser describes the violence and the riots in some detail, he slides the actual

division. As said earlier, the passage of time changes the priorities. By the time Kaiser wrote Sangshaptak, the enemies of East Pakistan were no longer Indians but West Pakistanis. Sangshaptak was perhaps the first Bengali novel that told the tale of two cities, Calcutta and Dhaka. Alauddin Al Azad's novel Kshuda O Asha was published in 1964. Kshuda O Asha is not strictly a Partition novel as it ends before partition. However it raises the issue of partition and discusses both the communal conflict that resulted in this division and the Communal harmony that was disrupted by the division. Furthermore, though it ends before Partition, it suggests the hope that people saw independence and the creation of a new nation. Though horror and violence have undoubtedly been prominent themes in Partition's fictional representation, terrible nostalgia and feeling of exile also dominate various novels and short stories, especially written by Bengali and Hindi authors (i.e. literature produced in Bengal and East Pakistan and in north India). Terrible nostalgia is perhaps the dominant note in Partition fiction of West Bengal. It is this sense of nostalgia that also forms the focus of Taslima Nasreen's novel Fera (1993) about the return to Bangladesh of a young woman who had left after Partition. In Fera, she notes how Partition changed the people of East Bengal turned them into fundamentalists. In Sunil Gangopadhyay (Purba-Paschim, 1995) as well as Nasreen we see the attempt to define the self. What difference have borders made? How real are borders? It is the same question that inspires Amitav Ghosh's 'The Shadow Lines' (1988).

According to Niaz Zaman, writings on the partition cannot be unconscious of politics, of question of nationhood, and identity. The Indian-ness of writers, the Pakistani or Bengali identity of writers get manifested in their writings. Qurratulain Hyder's Aag Ka Dariya (written while she was in Pakistan before migrating to India forever) and 'Fireflies In The Mist' are silent about actual events of Partition and the horror and violence that occurred during Partition. Hyder migrated to Pakistan, writing Aag ka Dariya in Pakistan, then she returned to India forever. The question of loyalties perhaps prevented her from writing about the Partition in both her books. By contrast, it has an all India outlook.

Bapsi Sidhwa, while writing on Partition asserts her 'Pakistani' identity. Writers in East Bengal (later Bangladesh) are silent about Partition violence as they want to cherish the new homeland. Though certainly influenced by their political milieu, these literary texts do not always speak in the State's voice; the Partition in these texts is more than mere physical vivisection of India, into two enemy states. Partition Literature is grounded in a sense of loss, terror and uncertainty. It also point towards the ambivalence and the conflicting pulls of loyalty which the people experienced, and for which the State had hardly any sympathies. It is also astonishing/ amazing to note that Partition is one event, but it has different meaning to different people/group/States. Partition is division for Indians; a dream of Promised Land coming true for Pakistanis. It has different connotations in West Bengal a part of India, and different meaning in East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh in 1971. For some, it was opportunity lost', for others it was opportunity regained. It is this multi-affectedness of the event which keeps it alive in the memories of the three nation states India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

While Indian writers continue to play upon the idea of multi-cultureless, India as a plural society, the responses of Pakistani and Bengali writers differ. A sense of failure recurs in Pakistani writing, similar to the sad note in Faiz, and in Bengali writing. Questions of identity juxtapose the consciousness of political struggle that is not yet over. Despite our collective memory of the Partition each one of us sees it differently. There are discourses about the Partition but there are also disturbing silences.

REFERENCE:

1. A victim of rising fundamentalism in her country, Taslima Nasreen was in news recently for attacks on her and protests on her autobiography.
2. Zaman, op.cit., p.335
3. Qurratulain Hyder, Partition was "Aag ka Dariya" (i.e. River of Fire), for Bhisam Sahani, it was 'Tamas'.
4. Menon and Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries; op.cit.
5. Arjun Mahey, in Saint and Saint, op. cit., p.141.