

Fierce Communal Riots in the Novel the Rape by Raj Gill

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Abstract – Raj Gill in his novel *The Rape* records the fierce communal riots, the inhuman atrocities, the burning down of villages and the massive killing of the people, the three month-long communal violence in Gurgaon, the pitched battles in the different parts of the Punjab, the firing of the troops, the massacre of the Sikhs and Hindus in Rawalpindi and Multan and the innumerable cruelties perpetrated by people out of sheer communal frenzy. It relates the horrors of the chopping off women's breasts and the shameful scene of nude women leading the Muslim procession. Dalipjit did not find anything to celebrate on the day of the transfer of power; he only felt that 'the red-faced monkies' have been substituted by 'the black-faced lemur' to continue the chain of slavery for the people.

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His mother expressed her hurt feelings at the turn the events had taken for worse. She, too, grew bitter at the word 'independence', and expressed her contempt for it in a piercing, hysterical voice:

"Ashes be on the head of such independence", They burn your houses, they take your women and they kill your women and they kill your children, and you call it independence. Making people homeless is independence! True, it is, in a way, you're made free; no land, no house, no cattle, no work. All the time is yours and all the world is yours to wonder about. (TR, 65)

The above outburst expressed the distressed feelings of the people who saw danger and disaster clearly; they knew that they had to suffer for the misdeeds of their leaders who rode in motor cars and appeared in clean white cloths. The suffering humanity in west Pakistan could not celebrate the Independence Day. Dalipjit expressed the grievous sentiments of the victims of the partition in a severe tone:

I say, Father, after all how do they expect us the Sikhs and the Hindus in Pakistan to celebrate: by setting fire to our homes; by pinning the heads of our children on lances and sporting them in the street: by cutting off the breasts of our mothers and sisters? (TR, 66).

It is remarkable that Raj Gill, inspite of showing the scenes of brutal violence, maintains a commendable impartiality in his depiction of the incidents. He holds all the communities responsible for the dire events. He shows the loads of corpses on both the sides of the border and paints vividly the plight of the Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan. The rough and humiliating treatment meted out to the Muslims on the Indian soils also does not escape his vigilant eyes. He objectively

describes the holocaust that immediately followed the announcement of the partition thus:

The Sikhs and Hindus set with vengeance to scorch out the Muslim population from East Punjab as a belated vindication of the Hindus and Sikhs who were massacred in Rawalpindi. The repercussion were equally dreadful in Pakistan. Army tanks were used in Sheikhupur to mow down the non-Muslim population sheltering in the cotton mills. Armed forces connived at the general shooting of the Sikh and Hindu refugees awaiting evacuation in the Lyallpur camp. Police constabulary was employed in the senseless killing of the departing Hindu population in Jhang and Multan. (TR, 158-159)

Raj Gill tries vigorously to find out the causes leading to the ghoulish events, and graphically presents the untold agonies suffered by the people of the Punjab as an inevitable consequence of the violence.

In the same vein H. S. Gill's *Ashes and Petals* is galore in the pictures of brutal violence. It is with this-background that the novel opens significantly in a deathly stillness in the dark of night with a trainload of the Hindus and Sikhs on their way to a safe land. The train, halted at the outer signal of the station, were a dreadful look. A crack train-driver of the Lahore loco sheds, Anthony Peters, an Anglo-Indian of Jabalpure, felt extremely lonely when he jumped out of the train into the dark to inquire about the mystery of the red signal. All things looked deserted. He loved Lahore and wanted to stay in that beautiful city. But the recent violence there when the mobs went in for human blood dawned upon him the urgency of taking him family away to a safe place. Fire in Lahore made him leave the city in great haste, and this expressed the disturbed and

explosive situation there: "Had it not been for last night when the entire Railway colony was on fire they wouldn't have packed up in such a hurry." (AP, 2)

The train tragedy represented the image of the dangerous days of the post-independence period. Sardar Santa Singh could never forget the incidents of that eventful day all through his life. He was filled with destructive communal violence, hatred and could never reconcile with a Muslim. It was this attitude that prompted him spontaneously to say that Salma, his grandson's beloved, was "not one of us", as she was a Muslim. He expressed surprise, bitterness and embarrassment when his tall, athletic brave and gentle Ajit sought his permission to marry Salma: ".... 'What have you come down to, my grandson? Have you forgotten Baljeeto, your sister? Your poor sister I had to shoot dead in the train? How you forgotten the partition and the Musalmans?'" (AP, 179-180). Ajit pleaded fervently in vain that his grandfather had given him the permission to find the girl of his choice. He said that basically there was no distinction between the communities, and hence lived together both in pre-independent and post-independent India. He gave vent to the feeling that, but for the troubled days of the partition, the Sikhs and the Muslims had lived together affectionately. He wanted his 'Bapu' not to harbour perpetual hatred on account of the ghastly train disaster. He tried to impress upon the mind of the aged Risaldar that all the persons belonging to different communities fought for the dear motherland, and Aslam lost his life in saving him. There is still the aura of those happy days lurking in the consciousness of people like Ajit when they all lived peacefully as two parts of a composite culture, of a single nation. During his determination to marry Salma, he puts forth his views to his grandfather urging him to extend his blessings:

....Her brother died saving me. I own my life to him. And you say she is a Musalman. Is that a crime? After 47 aren't we all here? All sitting and eating, living and dying together. Before partition weren't we all the same? Have you forgotten Mida, Gama and Rauf, all your friends in the village in Pakistan? Are we any different, any of us? Bapu just think. You think I have forgotten Baljeeto. Or even a single moment of that bloody train. But how long will we keep on simmering and poisoning each other's minds? Out there, on the front, I have seen all the blood mingle. But never did anyone say it was Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Jat or Muslim blood.... (AP, 180)

Ajit said that everyone, unmindful of his community, fought whole-heartedly on the battlefield. He argued that Salma was not only one of them, but was an integral part of their lives and praising Aslam's adventurous and noble sacrifice and imploringly sought his Bapu's blessings.

H.S. Gill stresses that despite the Muslim cruelties towards the Sikhs and the Hindus during partition, in the new India Muslims and Hindu can dwell together

peacefully. The older generation who experienced the horrors must overcome their anguish and anger. *Ashes and Petals* is too much of a "thesis", however, to be really interesting as a novel. The representation of the argument in the novel is tilted towards the thesis that communal harmony is possible, and that Muslims are loyal Indians, willing to give their lives if necessary to save their homeland. The characters seem stalking horses to hang ideas on. They never come to life.

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