

The Holocaust Event of Partition and Role of Culture in the works of Kartar Singh Duggal and Ranjit Powar

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ABSTRACT

The catastrophic event of partition redefined the culture of love and harmony among the various religions. The partition represented the formation of a new Punjab that struggled with the cultural deterioration and cultural decadency. Kartar Singh Duggal's *Abducted Not* illustrates the amendments in the culture after the partition. Ranjit Powar's *Dusk Over The Mustard Fields* shows the flip side of Punjab which is unnoticed by society, the suppression faced by the colonized culturally and socially. The research raises the questions of identity and culture of Punjab. The chaos and dilemma after partition gave a new definition to the word culture. This study discussed the role of culture under the colonial power and how is it developed after the partition. Culture is the discourse which constitutes the role of colonizer and colonized, men and women, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The study of binary oppositions forces us to open the threads of culture that assigned the new identity to the victims of partition. The theoretical approach through the work of Homi K. Bhabha *The Location of Culture* allows the readers to critique the culture beyond the boundaries. Bhabha is of the opinion that western tradition by default possessed the claim of power to comprehend the world mysteries and hold the right to control. In order to have deep insight in the structure of power and control Bhabha's arguments are critiqued in the work of Kartdar Singh Duggal and Ranjit Powar.

Keywords: Punjab, Culture, Partition, Colonized, Colonizer

The culture of Punjab everywhere represents
Heer-Ranjha, Sohni-Mahiwal, food, dance,

poetry but the origin of culture, its essence is missing from today's Punjab. The culture is not theoretically critiqued in the Indian English Punjabi literature. The culture of Punjab today represents the pomp and show, loud music, and drugs which is exactly the opposite of the ideal culture of Punjab. The Punjab is rich in its cultural heritage and has the great history that is overshadowed by various decorative ornaments of society. Kartar Singh Duggal's *Abducted Not* illustrates the amendments in the culture after the partition. The catastrophic event of partition redefined the culture of love and harmony among the various religions. Ranjit Powar's *Dusk over the mustard fields* acquainted the readers with the typical culture of Punjab in terms of dresses, jewellery and numerous rituals. She beautifully exemplified the role of culture in colonial Punjab. The partition novels discussed the culture within the boundaries and beyond. The word 'culture' suggests the belief, ideas, rituals and regular habits of certain community, place and group. India is the country where different religion symbolized the harmony and love before the partition. The religion encouraged the certain value system and thought process that developed the culture. There was sense of humanity and togetherness before the

partition as Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs shared each other's values, festivals, foods and rituals open heartedly. Kartar Singh Duggals novel's *Abducted Not and other stories of Partition Holocaust* narrates various stories of harmony and compassion. Satbharai, the daughter of chaudhari Allahditta was also considered as the daughter of Sohne Shah also took the responsibility of Satbharai after Allahditta's demise in partition. There are various instances where the harmonious relation of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs are exemplified as Hindus and Sikhs used to clean the streets on the festival of Id. The respect for each other's culture is critiqued through the instance that if Muslims had to slaughter the animals in the name of God they did it quietly as it is against the cultural values of Hindu and Sikhs. Sohne Shah and Allahditta are symbolic of the mutual love and serenity of different culture as they exchanged their turbans, shared food together also took the responsibility of each other's family during the partition. Allahditta had taken the oath of Holy book that he would protect his village Dhamyal from the rioters to his last breathe. The cultural values of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs constituted the notion of respect and compassion for each other's mothers, sisters and wives before the partition.

The holocaust of partition deprived of such values as women were raped irrespective of their cultural and religious identity. The definition of love, culture and religion lost their meaning during the partition. The women are reduced to the object of sex, deterioration and rivalry. In the context of culture 'beyond' is associated with the sense of disorientation and disturbance. This allowed the individual to move away from the particularities and singularities of gender and class. In the realm of 'beyond' one discussed the subjects of the institutional location and sexual orientation. The acknowledgement of subjects arise the conscious to focus on the moments or process that are developed in the domain of cultural differences. Ranjit Powar's *Dusk over the Mustard Fields* depicts the reality of colonial Punjab. She provided the anecdote that beautifully emphasized the cultural differences. She illustrated the British interventions in India as they set up the cantonments for military in order to expand their colonial structure through Eurasian, Foreign Businessmen and Anglo Indians. The set up of cantonments in Indian is scrutinized as the power that exercised the control and induced the cultural differences in the society. The Britishers typified themselves with the most

sophisticate values that need to be followed in order to maintain their supremacy. The code and conducts were designed not only for Indian soldiers but the British soldiers also who carried the sense of liability to be the part of powerful institution that controlled the cultural values. For instance British soldiers were not eligible for marriage if they not reached to the certain rank. In all cantonments there was 'lal Bazaar' or brothels for the British soldiers to satiate their desire for the sex. These brothels functioned by the Indian women for the Britishers but restricted for Indian soldiers. The Britishers were prohibited to establish any relationship with the Indian women. The British authorities not only controlled the social and political life of soldiers but also monitored their sexual life within the walls of cultural discrimination. The cultural differences initiate the idea of 'in-between space' that elaborates through the collaboration, contestation and new signs of the identities.

The research paper 'Homi K. Bhabha's Thoughts of Post colonialism And It's Impact On Indian Literature and Writers' discussed the concept of in-between space and hybridity that impacted the society of Punjab under the colonial

values. The Indian writers broadly discussed the theme of identity crises, alienation, dislocation, rootlessness and culture conflicts considering the Homi K Bhabha's thoughts of post colonialism but the culture of Punjab is discussed only on the surface level. In-between space negotiates the experience of communal interest and cultural values. The themes of displacement, dislocation and overlapping are scrutinized in the emergency of interstices. The character of Nimmo in the novel of Ranjit Powar experienced the devastation as she failed to negotiate the cultural values being the wife of Hukum Singh, an army officer. Nimmo was the typical Punjabi girl, who failed to cope up with English values when her husband was transferred to the Ambala army cantonment. She could not arrange the dining table with the knives and forks also the idea of wearing sari, applying makeup and speaking English suppressed her as the Indian-Punjabi women. In the novel the readers encounter the English woman Mrs. Gillespie, wife of CO-Sahib who symbolized the values developed out of the 'in-between space'. The following conversation between Nimmo and Mrs. Gillespie acknowledged the relationship of colonizer and colonized:

"Welcome to the centre. Sab theek hai? asked Mrs Gillespie.

Hanji, Nimmo's Voice seemed to choke in her throat.

Koi pershani to nahi?

Hanji said Nimmo.

Is there anything you need? Kuch Mangta?" [Powar 95]

The negotiation of cultural values is vividly expressed the way Mrs Gillespie had conversation with Nimmo in Hindi. According to Homi.K Bhabha 'in-between space' does not always develop the idea of harmony and collaboration. The Indian English Punjabi literature broadly discussed the society that built out of the historical tradition and value system. The partition represented the formation of new society that struggled with the culture deterioration, deprivation of land and origin and sexual exploitation. The history of deprivation defined the social, economical and cultural crises during the partition. The European identified themselves as the superior, located at the centre of social domain only through the binary opposition. In colonial context the colonizers and colonized failed to locate their identity as an individual institution of knowledge. The artificial formation of

identity is interdependent as colonized established their identity as superior or masters by defining the colonizers as inferior, barbarous and uncivilized. Homi K Bhabha elaborates the discourse in the following words:

“How do the strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared the histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable”. [Bhabha 2]

The above statement defined the possibilities that articulate the function of culture beyond the boundaries. In the realm of partition readers can scrutinized the deterioration of values, dislocation of people, cultural discrimination and exchange of beliefs vividly discarded the collaboration that resulted into the riots, communal conflicts, mutilation of bodies and molestation. For instance in Kartar Singh Duggal’s *Abducted Not* the Britishers established the Ordnance Factory in the village Pothoar, this provided the space of power to the Britishers to exercise their

dominance over the villagers. The sirens of factory are symbolic of the deterioration and devastation caused by the communal riots. The power exerted through the institutional set up in the village that represents collaboration beyond the boundaries that led to the social and cultural disputes.

The histories of culture discrimination and deprivation never encouraged the tenderness, inclination and collaboration rather gave the birth to the question of identity, culture and religion. Kartar Singh Duggal’s work acquainted the readers with the various incidents of partition where people were forced to change their religion and were uprooted physically and culturally. Kartar Singh’s *Abducted Not* states:

“As the Muslim League leader was promising justice and fair play, news reached the Dogra Regiment that in the main mosque, a hundred and fifty Hindus and Sikhs were being forcibly converted to Islam”[Duggal 65]

The cultural hybridity articulated the cultural and religious engagements that initiated the animosity, hostility and antagonism during the historical event of partition. The process of colonization is defended as the benevolent institution for

spreading civilization as one of the justifications for colonial rule initiated the idea that savage or less developed nations would be controlled by the civilized nations. Ranjit Powar elaborates this idea through the character of Mrs. Sadiq as she raised the question if the colonial structure collapsed who would operate the posts, banks, telegrams and railways. On the contrary Nimmo was of the opinion that Indians had to move out of the slavish mentality developed under the colonial values but she could not gather the courage to express her opinion as she was suppressed by her Punjabi tongue. Edward Said rightly pointed out that western as occident constructed the image of east as orient, exotic and other. The eastern world looked upon as prejudicial, barbarous and savaged as contrast to those who represented themselves as civilized and industrious. The process of othering raised the question of identity of east and west as western world defined themselves as superior by developing the layers of binary opposition. According to Bhabha the notion of self of either nations or individuals lost as identities of east and west are hybrid. Hybridity is about the people who are scattered in other places and time in the other's nation to share their values, ideas and traditions in the time of gathering. Ranjit

Powar's work depicts the reality of cantonment set up by Britishers in Ambala, Karnal and Peshawar symbolized the cultural values that colonizer and colonized shared under the process of hybridity.

Kartar Singh discussed the zamindari system in India where zamindar families in the villages were considered as the masters and enjoyed the privileges given by the Britishers. This created the huge cultural gap between the zamindars and landlords as their values were typified within in the institution of social structure controlled by Britishers. Bhabha is of the opinion that western philosophical traditions by default possessed the claim of power to comprehend the world mysteries and the right to control. He discussed the notions of order and progress in the colonial world. Satoshi Mizutani's 'Hybridity and History: A critical reflection of Homi. K Bhabha's Post Historical Thought' discussed the imperial problem of miscegenation that seemed highly pertinent to the discourse of hybridity. The concept of miscegenation needs to be critiqued in context of partition. The word miscegenation means the marriage or sexual relation between two people from the different race and background. The term was first identified in 1863 used by anonymous

author in political pamphlet. The term is symbolic of powerful colonial institution as it is associated with the code and conducts that prohibited the cross-cultural marriage and sex. The discourse of miscegenation discards the colonial ideology of racial purity that required for the supremacy and power of white. The following statement from Ranjit Powar's work exemplified the discourse more vividly:

“These Brothels housed Indian women but were out of bounds for Indian men. Paradoxically, British officials were strictly discouraged from the establishing any relationship with the native Indian women according to a policy formulated in late 1830.” [Powar 30]

The concept of hybridity disturbed the structure of imperialism as the mixed, influenced and miscegenation otherwise it would have remained unmixed and uninfluenced structure of powerful race of dominance. The representation of Britishers in the history acknowledged as the light, knowledge and enlightenment for the colonized that signified the ultimate truth where the culture has the huge role to play. The culture is not only studied as the institution of suppression and dominance but also critiqued as the structure of powerful

resistance by postcolonial critics that upset the imperialistic ideologies. The Partition novels developed the theme of culture deterioration, cultural decadency and cultural trauma.

The theme of cultural trauma is discussed in the research paper ‘Using Culture Trauma: Gandhi’s assassination, partition and secular nationalism in post-independent India’. The cultural trauma is about the tragic narratives of the holocaust event of partition. Immediately after the partition there was no open discussion about the communal riots, sexual assaults and violence as it may complicate the situation so, media and politician suppressed the news of rape, abduction and violence. But after 1970’s the writers and artist from the literature took the initiative to discuss the cultural, social and political issues of partition. The narration of cultural trauma allowed the people to revisit the history and locate their lost identity. The decadence of culture defined the lost value system, identities, deprivation of religious and social beliefs. The Britishers continued to control and dominate with the clear idea of not being affected by the India’s socio- cultural environment. In order to maintain the supremacy of their legacy it is important to

classify Indians into the different caste and religion considering them as the subject to rule. The culture and religious differences between the Muslims and Hindus gave the opportunity to the Britishers to execute their power politically. The work of Kartar Singh Duggal and Ranjit Powar defined the cultural trauma as they broadly discussed the holocaust of partition, communal riots, women rapes and violence. The role of culture is critiqued broadly as it is through the culture that colonized were typified as the orient and colonizers as the occident that defined their position of power. The character of Nimmo could not adjust herself culturally so she was easily suppressed by her husband who represented the colonial value system of sophistication. She symbolized the land of Punjab that was ruled by the colonial powers and lost its origin of culture. The divided Punjab represented the deterioration of cultural values of Hindu, Sikhs and Muslims. Kartar Singh Duggal's *Abducted Not* states:

“It was said that the Muslims were killing Hindus and Sikhs; the Sikhs and Hindus were slaughtering Muslims, the British officers and their wives just watched, no one touched them. And all the officers in the factory were Britishers.” [Duggal 20]

The above statement signifies the dispute among the communities as the result of the decadence of value system after the partition. The Britishers can be critiqued as the absolute power developed out of the cultural suppression of colonized. The innocent people of India were robbed culturally to the extent that they targeted their own people. The deterioration of culture and value system gave the birth to the rioters and extremist who created the circumstances for two nation theory. This gave the opportunity to the Britishers to intervene politically and took the command in their hands to settle down the communal riots by dividing the country. According to Mizutani the concept of culture raised the discourse of acclimatization. It is about the process of adjusting to the new environment, conditions and place. The research paper ‘The Punjab Bloodied Partitioned and Cleansed in 1947: How and Why?’ discussed the history of Punjab and provided the details that Mountbatten organized the meeting between the Sikh leaders and Jinnah as Sikhs refused to live in north-west Punjab as the area was dominated by Muslim leagues. As the result of which Sikh villagers were attacked by Muslims in 1947 neither Jinnah nor other leaders took initiated to control the communal riots and

violence. Mountbatten derived to the conclusion that India could not kept united because of huge cultural and religious discrimination so he announced the partition of India where Punjab and Bengal assemblies required to give the verdict whether they wanted two nation theory or not. According to Mizutani the concept of culture raised the discourse of acclimatization. It is about the process of adjusting to the new environment, conditions and place. According to Mizutani the concept of culture raised the discourse of acclimatization. It is about the process of adjusting to the new environment, conditions and place. The Britishers were of the opinion that they were not affected or transformed by the culture of India but still pure and acclimatized alone. Mizutani mentioned the leading figure of British anthropological circle James Hunt who said:

“We have exhaustion and degeneracy but not real acclimatization.”
[Mizutani, 6]

The above statement is taken from an academic essay published in 1863. The partition novels acknowledged the readers about the various instances that rejected the argument raised by James Hunt. Ranjit Powar's work acquainted the readers with

the institutions developed by the Britishers in India that portrayed their acclimatization in the Indian environment, value system and culture. The East- India Company, cantonments, gymkhana, brothels were the institutions that induced the colonial values in India and exercised the control over the Indians through the culture. The term culture possessed the colonial power executed through the imperialistic ideologies. It cannot be innocently studied within the conventional aspects of Punjab such as clothes, spicy food, marriage ceremonies, and dance forms and so on.

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