

English /Sem.4/EC-2(B)/Partition Narratives

Discussion on the Text : *FATHER*

About the Author

Prafulla Roy born on 11 September 1934 at Dhaka is a prolific fiction writer in Bengali literature; he was awarded by Sahitya Academy award for his book *Krantikal* of Bengali Literature in 2003. He came to India penniless from then Pakistan after the partition of the country. He has had to struggle hard to gain a foothold in a newer land. Apart from the trauma of the partition he had faced the aftermath of the second world war, the great famine, the bloody communal riots. Once he took to travel throughout the country to experience the living of the struggling people to minimize his own. He had been among the tribals in Nagaland, the untouchables in Bihar, the rootless people from the mainland in the Andamans etc. These experiences could become part of his writings.

Prafulla Roy's writings depict powerfully and authentically the prevailing realities in both urban and rural situations. His characters are drawn from every segment of the society—be they professional, skilled or unskilled, of lower, middle or higher economic preferences. That helps the reader discover the multidimensional social maze in India. He has written more than 150 books including his novels and short stories. Many of Prafulla Roy's fictions have been filmed, and a few of them bagged the national and international film awards. He also worked in the literary sections of a number of Dailies in his later life.

In Bengali fiction, creative writers have mainly emphasised on the theme of nostalgia of the lost homes, lost companionships and dislocation. Bengali writers have consciously downplayed the element of violence and concentrated more on the new beginnings. Bengali literature is characterized by the theme of migration, the attempt of refugees to build new homes, their struggle to establish themselves, their feelings of bewilderment, emptiness and alienation in the new environment. Debjani Sen Gupta says: "*In Bengali literature, partition is often seen in metaphysical terms. The hurt is not in the body but in the mind, the soul. Madness is not a trope in Bangla stories, rather it is a nostalgia and a constant dazed search to know how and why and where of, instead of pathological experience. Partition is seen as a cosmological occurrence, a loss of world rather than a loss related to prestige.*"

Major Theme

There are several themes in this short story, *Father* by Prafulla Ray that run throughout the story. The honour of the family finds importance to the old man. Didi's husband is Muslim. Her husband saved her life and has provided a home and family with her. Still, Shekharnath remembers the old dissension between their people. Even though she was a child and had nothing to do with her predicament, if she had been raped or molested

it would bring shame to the family. That is why the old man had wished his daughter to be dead. Through her death, she would stay forever pure, and the family would not be dishonoured.

The importance of family surrounds the entire story. The son and his family enjoy each other. They work together to take care of the grandfather because he is their ancestor. Before his wife was tragically killed, Shekharnath's family was happy. When the old man realizes what he will miss if he allows his daughter to leave, he goes to her and proudly welcomes her and her husband into his arms.

Another theme is the old man's guilt. He could have taken his family away when his wife wanted him to go. He ignored her; and she died and his daughter was taken. Part of his difficulty in seeing his daughter is not the honour, but the shame that he feels for all the years that were taken from her because of his arrogance. The daughter has searched him out; she wants the relationship. Through this acknowledgement, the old man is set free to enjoy his new found family. Shekharnath took from the bag a gold necklace and a diamond ring. Giving his daughter the necklace, he said, *'I've not given you anything. Your mother had these made for your wedding.'*

Critical Analysis

Partition related short stories magnify the riots, arson, killing, looting, abduction and rape during the Partition. These stories reflect comprehensively in all its totality, reality, and variety of human suffering. As Alok Bhalla mentions about the writers of Partition stories: "They (the partition stories) are rather, witnesses to a period in which we fell out of a human world of languages, customs, rituals and prayers into a bestial world of hatred, rage, self-interest and frenzy". The writers of these stories frame the events in a variety of ways and read them according to their own sense of the multi-religious and multicultural past of the Indian subcontinent.

In the story *Father* by Prafulla Roy shows Shekhar Nath's daughter abducted, his wife killed and their house set ablaze, during the riots. She has come to visit her father after thirty years from Dhaka, when her father has the first glimpse of her: he reacts "*My God, let it not be her.*" He refuses to meet his daughter. He is determined that he would not look at the face of one who had come from Dhaka. He had been praying for her death year after year and had tried to oust her from his memory. But he was not able to forget her. His daughter Khukku is married to Harun, a Joint-Secretary in the Ministry of Education, who married her for respectability turning down several proposals. Shekhar Nath's son persuades his father to accept his daughter. He questions him whether he would have been able to find such a boy for his daughter in his community. At last Shekhar Nath puts off his prejudice. Both father and daughter cry inconsolably and in that flood of tears all the gross is washed away, a new relationship is established beyond the boundaries, of love and sharing bereft of any prejudice.

Traumatic experience is understood as a fixed and timeless photographic negative symptom; it remains stored in an unconscious part of the brain. However, it maintains the ability to interrupt consciousness and maintains the ability to be transferred to non-traumatized individuals and groups. Moreover, this concept of trauma perceives responses as fundamentally pathologic and privileges the act of speaking or narration as the primary avenue to recovery. In other words, presenting trauma as inherently pathologic perpetuates the notion that all responses to any kind of traumatic experience produce a dissolute consciousness.

The major aspect of this story *Father* moves around the traumatic state of mind. Prafulla Roy has set Bangladesh partition as its background in this fiction. It investigates the trauma experienced by a father (Shekharnath) who constantly needed to separate himself from his past recollections. These recollections included the homicide of his significant partner Hemalata and abduction of his little girl Khuku by the agitators in Dhaka during partition riots.

Above all this story presents a true picture of communal devastation during the period of Bangladesh partition. The characters are well drawn and they represent a lively picture of their agony and depression in India-Pakistan-Bangladesh with the cult of Bengali and Bihari ethos. The social fabric with the political upheaval is the culminating point in shaping this story.

Suggested Reading:

1. Original text in Bengla translated into Hindi, *Father*.
2. Partition Dialogue by Alok Bhalla (O.U.P, Delhi)
3. Indian Writing in English by K.R.S. Iyengar.

Courtesy : Dr. Md. Ejaz Alam
