

HISTORICAL REFERENCES IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS: AN ANALYSIS

Papri Mukhopadhyay¹ and Dr. Ranjana Das Sarkhel²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, MATS University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

²Professor, Department of English, MATS University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

ABSTRACT

The paper explores the mention of history in the book that connects to the story, discusses India's stark reality with changes in the present system, and raises the points that require attention by Indians. The novel's plot is structured around various social, political, and governance issues by referring to histories of places, rulers, personalities, and opportunists' actions and reactions. Historical references in the book have advocated people's feelings in the story and proved to be a turning point in changing the system and attitude of those at the helm of affairs. It combines imagination and factualism by capturing moments of crisis. With time, India's social and political fabrics changed due to various invasions by foreign powers, which brought in different religions, cultures, governing systems, and technology. The novel incorporates incidents from Medieval History, Early Modern History and Modern History. The fight for existence happened to be a routine of the largest democracy in the world. The author, lending voice to the voiceless, enacts as an eye-opener for the marginalised, forcibly living under the dictatorship of ungenerous people who prioritise personal growth and supremacy instead of developing a world order of equitable society acceptable by all.

Keywords: Dargah of Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed, Emergency period, Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, Gujarat Massacre, Historical references, Socio-political issues, Twin Tower Attack.

INTRODUCTION

“As always, history would be a revelation of the future as much as it was a study of the past” (Roy 401). This is what Arundhati Roy remarks about the significance of history in the novel. During the nineteenth century, history was an amalgamation of fact and fiction. The study of history was a skill instead of a science. It focused on significant events like battles, and the story of revolution, adoring important personalities to create an impact on the common mass to teach courage and patriotism. Considering history as art, is evident in the middle age history books. In the same century Friedrich Hegel, the German philosopher and historian, introduced a new strategy of study of history. Gradually it became a major content of study in the branch of social science, and after that, it also secured its place in literary work. In the article Historical Discourse and Literary Writing, Hayden White discusses the relationship between history and literary writing in any form of poetry or fiction. Hayden imparts that both genres do not complement each other because history deals with reality, whereas fiction roams in the world of imagination and figurative language. Looking in the modern period, the writers like Charles Dickens, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and so on have concentrated more on facts and depicted contemporary society with history in their works. Modern writer of Indian English literature Arundhati Roy in her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, shows her mastery in mingling history with fiction describing socio-political issues of contemporary India and vociferously claims her return to the fictional world. The gap of twenty years after the debut work, *The God of Small Things*, proves that good literature takes time to weave. By recalling history in the novel, the book connects the readers with the glory of the past, narrating the mistakes that shifted people's future in post-colonial India.

The skilful blend of history and imagination in the novel tells the truth of twenty-first-century India. However, the novel envisages a few glimpses of the past, though its deep-seated link with the story remains hazy to understand their uses. The present study is an effort to open the historical links ranging from medieval to the present day more elaborately, establish a clear picture of how these events are relevant to present-day society, and find out the message that can change or improve the living conditions of marginalised population. The book envisages various historical events ranging from personalities, agitations, and monuments that elaborate on the connected past. Hence, its significance in the fiction, giving the message that these historical events can bring change in the governing system, bring in economic self-sufficiency, assist in developing the concept of an integrated society, spread awareness of one India concept among the citizens, changes in governing policies, increase people's participation towards nation-building.

DISCUSSION

Medieval History (AD 476 - AD 1450)

Changez Khan: The Mongol Emperor

Mulaqat Ali's family lineage to the Mongol Emperor Changez Khan, born in 1162 near Lake Baikal, Mongolia and died on 18 August, 1227 takes the readers to the era where nature was considered a supreme power. Changez Khan was from the world of Shamans of the Gobi Desert and one of the most famous Mongolian warrior-rulers who consolidated different tribes into a unified Mongolia and extended his empire across Asia to the Adriatic Sea. Changez Khan allowed shamans to perform the state rituals of listening to the spirits of ancestors while dealing with state affairs. Mulaqat Ali's

explanation of the transition from Shamanism¹ to the enemies of Islam to the formation of the Mughal Dynasty of the Sunni sect and finally to the Shia sect establishes the origin of various social orders and religions is temporary. Social hierarchies and faith, which took place by neglecting nature's blessings, ought to change in the passage of times by redefining a new social conglomerate.

The world's greatest conquerors not only won battles by might but have also transformed societies. Similarly, Changez Khan not only used arms and bravery to conquer war but also ruled by using commerce and religion. He created the world's most powerful trading network, drastically lowered taxes for merchants, and allowed freedom of religion to his subjects in contrast to the Christian, Taoist, and Muslim conquerors who came before him. In the 13th century, Changez Khan struggled with many of India's same problems today. However, balancing religious freedom with the reign of fanatics is a challenge. Moreover, making the coexistence of diverse religions to live in peace is a challenging task when deep-seated hatred exists due to historical reasons. Nevertheless, a leader like Changez Khan is the answer to bringing everyone under one roof to develop a strong nation.

Early Modern Era (AD 1450 - AD 1750)

Hazrat Sarmad Saheed

Visit of Jahanara Begum with her baby Aftab to the dargah of Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed for blessings to cure him from sexual distortion without knowing the history of Sarmad, points to the acceptability of a naked saint, who was encapsulated equally among Jews, Muslims and Hindus for his illusion that all are one. The transformation from an educated young merchant to a naked fakir or saint can be seen from historical pieces of evidence from the rubaiyat composed by Sarmad and by many writers. Sarmad means 'everlasting' or 'eternal'. He was born in 1590 in a wealthy Jewish family in Kashan, Persia, situated on the road from Teheran to Isfahan, now in Modern Iran. Being intelligent, having excellent memory, and the incredible power of thinking and assimilating facts, he mastered Jewish scriptures and the Arabic language and studied Christianity, Islamic theology, and Science. Under Islamic teachers, Sarmad also learnt the Arabic language proficiently and later, under their influence he embraced Islam and became Muhammad Sa'id. Though identified as Muslim, he became mysterious, and his teachings were beyond the doctrine of any religion.

After completing his education, the Jewish Armenian Trader, and the mysterious poet, Sarmad came to Thatta in Sindh (now in Pakistan) by sea route through the Persian Gulf in 1631 to trade Persian (Iran) goods of rugs, dry fruits and other goods for Indian precious stones, silk textiles, gold and silver wares, spices, and many other things. In Thatta, at a musical concert, he saw a Hindu boy, Abhay Chand, the son of a feudal ruler of Sindh and instantly fell in love with him, and this brought transformation in Sarmad's life. The boy became Sarmad's devoted disciple and inseparable companion.

the separation from the boy brought such distress and madness to Sarmad that he abruptly gave away all of his material possessions, including his gold-worked garments and began to wander naked in the streets. (Ezekiel 6).

From Thatta, Sarmad, with his disciple Abhay Chand visited Lahore in 1634. He moved to Hyderabad in 1647, then to Agra in 1657 and finally, they came to Delhi and settled down at the Dargah of Khwaja Harey Bharey of the Qadri sect of Sufis in 1657. He walked naked in the streets, but people wanted to hear his rubaiyat²

they did not hold it against him but rather overlooked it saying that he, as a spiritually absorbed person, need not follow the norms of society. After all, they had seen many ascetics, notably Digambar Jain monks, moving about naked in Delhi... (Ezekiel 25)

Sarmad found no solace in formal religion and renounced orthodox Islam to seek spiritual insights of different religious convictions and bestow his wisdom and lessons to others. As the novel indicates, "...Few knew his spiritual search eventually led him to renounce orthodox Islam too..." (Roy 9). Sarmad's closeness with the mogul prince Dara Shikoh made him his spiritual teacher. Sarmad proclaimed that Dara Shikoh would become the monarch one day, which worried Aurangzeb, who killed Dara Shikoh by conspiracy. Threat from Sarmad loomed on Aurangzeb, and he targeted Sarmad for punishment for his closeness and blessings to Dara Shikoh. Sarmad was accused of following a lifestyle which differed in opinion from the established religious dogma for not speaking out the religious Kalima of Islam in full in the court of Aurangzeb lost his life in execution in 1660. The life of Sarmad established the truth that nature does not differentiate people. All are self-created. Sarmad achieved the status of a saint after renouncing the materialistic world and became a pure soul.

¹ It reads:

Shamanism and Shaman are widely distributed phenomena among the tribal and non-tribal peasant communities in the world. Shamanisms include those rituals and beliefs which are based on the principle that certain spirit enter into certain men who become 'possessed' and in turn are dictated by those spirits in performing various types of acts and rituals (Hasnain 101).

² "A short poem of four lines with a fixed metre in which the first, second and fourth lines usually rhyme" (Ezekiel 5).

Jahanara Begum went to the dargah because society's misfits visited the place for healing, hoping that people would accept Aftab the way he is if the saint blessed the child. When the materialistic world fails to give a solution, people search for the blessings of saints. Sarmad was above any religious boundary and faith, a brilliant example of cultural coexistence.

Wali Dakkani: The Famous Shrine

The rioters in Gujarat caused the deliberate demolition of the Shrine of Wali Dakkani, a famous classical Urdu poet (1667–1707) who encouraged Urdu ghazals. He wrote about 473 Ghazals using Indian language, themes, idioms, and imagery³. The lover's figure in his poetry represents both the worlds of the sensual and the non-sensual. He was also known as Wali Dakkani, Wali Gujarati, and Wali Aurangabadi. It was surprising that hooligans damaged the shrine under the administration's nose, destroying a monument of cultural integration. "They learned in passing that Wali Dakkani's shrine had been razed to the ground and a tarred road built over it, erasing every sign that it had ever existed" (Roy 46). During the ongoing political and social turmoil, the Shrine of Wali could sustain only due to more extensive mystic traditions of India of coexistence among different faiths. The demolish of Shrine gives a message that religious hatred brings in destruction resulting loss of cultural assets.

Shahjahanabad: A Walled City

Shahjahanabad still has an vivid impact on modern-day Delhi. It was a walled city and was erected by order of Shah Jahan from 1638 to 1649. Besides being the capital of the Mughal empire, it was a cultural centre where art, poetry, music, and artisanship all flourished. Shama Mitra Chenoy describes, "Shahjahanabad was a statement of a way of life achieved after many centuries" (Chenoy x). Shahjahanabad was fenced with extending walls of ten kilometres. In addition, it had ten gates that connected the city with the ambient. To quote Stephen P. Blake, one of the first historians to study the layout of Shahjahanabad.

The plan of Shahjahanabad reflects both Hindu and Islamic influences. The street plan seems to have followed a design from the ancient Hindu Texts on architecture, the vastu sastras (rules for architecture) (Blake 32).

Despite the killing, loot, and destruction of a flourishing city by invader Nadir Shah on 9th March, 1739 and attack of Britishers after the revolt of 1857, the dilapidate city still existed, although losing all its glory. The account of Mulaquat Ali's older sister, who returned from Pakistan to settle down in the city, indicates her affection for the environment and culture. The novel recognises the significance of a historical town with diverse and accommodative culture. It portrays the coexistence of different religious groups and the dignified status of the eunuch is inspiring. The narrative conveys that the city planners and developers must rethink before demolishing old and historical structures for modernisation. Such actions not only distort history but causes damage to the rich culture.

Jantar Mantar

'Jantar Mantar' combines two Sanskrit words, 'yantra' and 'mantra', which means 'instruments to calculate'. This observatory consists of masonry built astronomical instruments on Parliament Street, south of Connaught Circus in New Delhi. Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur (1699 – 1743AD) erected these instruments in 1724 after studying western and eastern systems followed for astronomical calculation. Maharaja Jai Singh obtained Muhammad Shah's consent, the Delhi sultanate's ruler, on the proposal to remove astronomical discrepancies related to the time and position of planets, which may influence the timing of both Hindu and Muslim holy events by erecting the structure. Jantar-Mantar is a monument of cultural integration. The structure beautifully integrates astronomical skills and cosmological concepts, an example of a ruler's love and service for its subject. Jantar Mantar is being chosen by agitators to draw attention of public, not only local but internationally also since it is a place of proud which symbolises the service of ruler for citizens without waiting for agitation. Tourists visit the monument to refresh the associated history and carry with them the purpose of agitation to spread worldwide.

Modern Era (AD 1750 – Present).

Rooh Afza: A Herbal Drink

The story reflects the history of herbal drink Rooh Afza, an Indian drink with medicinal properties strengthen the country's economy. Even after the partition, it survived with branches in Pakistan and Bangladesh besides India. Hakim Abdul Majid started the Unani dispensary in the old city of Delhi in the year 1906 to treat patients under the Unani system. He invented Rooh Afza initially as medicine but later grew as a popular drink. The drink is an incredible blend of herbal ingredients and treats illnesses like heat stroke, dehydration, and diarrhoea. Rooh Afza is a Persian name that means a beverage that enriches the spirit and elevates the soul. Though it has survived partition, but the licence raj, economic reforms, carbonated drinks and tetra pack juices have reduced its expansion as people inclined to Coca-Cola, an American product of cold drinks having no medicinal value, "the Elixir of the Soul that had survived wars and the bloody birth of three new countries, was, like most things in the world, trumped by Coca-Cola" (Roy 13). Those who advocated for partition of India ignored the strength of unity in diversity and allowed foreign powers to disintegrate

³Rana Safvi, Shair of the day, Wali Dakkani, <https://ranasafvi.wordpress.com/2011/05/08/wali-dakani/>, accessed 21 May 2022.

India's economic freedom. Once a flourishing Rooh Afza succumbed to the expansionist foreign domination and foreign drink.

The Emergency Period of India

On 25 June 1975, the Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi, declared an Emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution of India. An elected Government, by the people for the people and of the people misinterpreted the Constitution and imposed an era of atrocities by forceful suspension of Civil Rights, censorship of newspapers, forceful sterilisation of people and arrest of anybody without hearing their side by using the Maintenance of Internal Security Act 1971.⁴ On the contrary, other changes were designed to make the executive more powerful at the cost of the judiciary, resulting in the weakening of constitutional checks and balances. Hijacking of the administration by a small group to dictate the functioning of the country was dangerous. Bipan Chandra writes

Emergency centralised and concentrated unlimited state and party power in the hands of the prime minister, Mrs Gandhi, to be exercised in an authoritarian manner through a small coterie of politicians and bureaucrats around her. (Chandra 170).

'A Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic' is the Preamble of Indian constitution, whereas the subversive actions by the elected government on the mass is a threat to these constitutional commitments. During the period of emergency, the country observed people's uprising at various parts in India in the forms of strikes, shutdowns, closures of colleges and universities developed an atmosphere of anarchy. Parallely, political movement led by Jaiprakash Narayan (JP)⁵ to end the anarchy cornered the Government at centre to impose emergency all over India which continued for nearly 21 months and withdrawn with the declaration of Election, convinced to win by the ruling party.

Taking hold of freedom of people by imposing emergency is like forceful conversion of religion on the whims of the rulers. This is against the natural law and principle of democracy. Any action against the wish of the people in a democracy is going to fail. Emergency allowed authoritarian actions by those in power and brought the country to the long-term dictatorship. In democracy enough cushion is available to neutralise such authoritarian actions by goal oriented sincere movements with whole hearted citizen's participation. JP movement with undefined goal and ideological confusion could not counter it fully but able to create popular public support which reflected in election results of 1977.

The 9/11 Twin Tower Attack

The novel mentions an account of the after-effect of 9/11 twin tower attack in USA. The incident shows the rath and angry of terrorism that was developed as by product of the great games played by superpowers in the Middle East and Central Asia, primarily in Afghanistan. To win supremacy over easy access to the rich natural resources and for military supremacy they influenced the governments of these countries and dominated and terrorised the people to act as per their directives. The oppressive actions by outsiders on the citizens of Afghanistan created the atmosphere of revenge. Knowing that in direct conflict with these superpowers they will not succeed therefore, counter terrorism and jihad spread in Afghanistan and nearby countries. Actions by numerous self-declared groups, without any common leadership and knowledge of war continued fight against the aggression by superpowers. The attack on the twin tower gave an opportunity to many countries to take advantage of the situation by increasing violence and repression on its innocent citizen and by misusing subversive acts created against terrorist activities.

This historical event pointed out the increase in hatred within the citizen, instigated by politicians and opportunists. Religious fanatics got opportunity to spread hatred against their fellow citizen with vested interest weakening the social fabrics of the country. Religious coexistence got a great jolt after partition of India on religious ground that resulted in peculiar ambiguity in Kashmir's political situation increasing terrorist's activities on the behest of enemy country. To cope against terrorism in India, political leaders advocated another new antiterrorism law. The author's apprehensions are evident in the book on misuse of these laws against the targeted group for vested interest.

Today a coherent and quick administrative approach, judicious use of various anti-terrorist laws, increased myth of military power and large-scale socio-economic measures taken by the government at all levels able to reduce the gap of social and economic conditions among Indians, reducing terrorist activities in the country particularly in Kashmir.

The Gujarat Massacre 2002

The Gujarat Massacre in 2002 raised many questions about religious polarisation and the intention of governance. The book reads retaliatory actions by hooligans based on religious hatred. The death of 60 passengers in a burning train coach at Godhra sparked riots all over Gujarat with the killing of people in communal conflagrations. There was a rift among the Indian population due to long drawn Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid land title dispute and related agitation at Ayodhya. The consequence was the demolition of the Mosque on December 6, 1992, by the well-prepared crowd of religious fanatics surpassing the constitutional ethics. The administration faced many questions in handling the situation. Retaliatory actions among communities resembled 'Newton's law' of equal and opposite reactions, but it was

⁴Act 026 of 1971: Maintenance of Internal Security Act, 1971. 2nd Jul 1971, www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/11097/1/maintenance_of_internal.pdf. Accessed 20 May 2022.

⁵Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Jayaprakash Narayan". Encyclopaedia Britannica, 7 Oct. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jayaprakash-Narayan>. Accessed 20 May 2022.

one-sided action by hooligans against poor and innocent citizens of different faith. The effect of the Gujarat massacre was so intense on common people that Anjum the protagonist, changed Zainab's clothing to hide her actual identity to safeguard from a possible repetition of Gujarat like incidents in Delhi. Partition of India on religious grounds under the horror of massacre, exodus of Kashmiri Pandits and lingering decision on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid land title disputes (legal battle began in 1885) resulted in a religious rift between the two major communities. A dispute of such a high magnitude that remained unresolved for so many years became the reason for a communal burst, leading to riots, killings, and arson.

Any agitation can be good or bad depends on successful mobilisation of people by the leaders, using sentimental issues and creating fear of extinctions. Those who are unaware and not connected with the above issues or not connected with the agitation of the dispute remain the worst affected. They are being used by political and religious leaders to full their own agenda undermining the Constitution of the country. Final verdict on the title land dispute was given on 9th November 2019, by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, allowing construction of Ram Mandir at the disputed site in Ayodhya and allotting 5 acres of land for construction of mosque. Giving a judgement on this sensitive issue relieved both the warring factions from conflicts given respite to the government to volunteer attention towards development of country.

Anti-Corruption Agitation

Corruption is an organised crime, a central issue in India for a long. Material desire beyond earning capacity tempts us to gather extra money by immoral means. Paying bribes to get government services were acknowledged by a large population. Accumulation of anger among the middle class, who are largely affected, made the ground for agitation against corruption. Anna Hazare launched his first campaign against corruption in 1991 through his organisation, 'Bhrashtachar Virodhi Jan Andolan'. On 5th April 2011, he started agitation at Jantar Mantar Delhi for passing the anti-corruption Lokpal Bill (Ombudsman) in the Indian parliament empowering to bring Prime Minister, Ministers in its ambit and act above Supreme Court. Volunteers across the country garnered support for the agitation from all corners of society. His presence in the novel is "a tubby old Gandhian, former-soldier-turned-village-social-worker, who had announced a fast to the death to realise his dream of a corruption-free India" (Roy 101) and raised the doubt of its success in handling it on the whims of diverse leadership. The ambiguity among leaders in choosing to continue the agitation further or form a political party to fulfil the objective of corruption-free higher offices led the agitation to split. However, countrywide discussion and debate about transparent and accountable government continued till the Lokpal Bill was passed. It was presented in the Indian parliament eight times between 1968 to 2011 but never got passed. Finally, the parliament passed the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill in 2013 and notified vide Gazette notification dated 1st January 2014. However, it was not the same as was demanded by the agitation. This agitation focused predominantly on the political corruption putting corruption in the private sector backstage.

This historical agitation empowered citizens' protests in democratic India and exposed vested interests' role in fulfilling their agenda. The elitist bias was also the part of the agitation to play their agendas. The protest stuck to a goal with a leader and supporters but managed the same through diverse agendas is the author's apprehension.

Bharat Mata & Vande Mataram

The stage for agitation on Lokpal Bill at Jantar-Mantar in Delhi was adorned with the Mother India map (Bharat Mata) surrounded by supporters with sloganeering of 'Vande Mataram'. The author raised her concern about religious polarisation in the backdrop of the agitation. Abanindranath Tagore painted an image of Bharat Mata in 1905, during the Swadeshi movement, as a response to the partition of Bengal. The painting depicts Bharat Mata in the style of a Hindu God holding a book, sheaves of paddy, a piece of white cloth and a rosary in her four hands. These items symbolise the Indian culture and Economy. Sister Nivedita, disciple of Swami Vivekananda responded "...Nivedita saw the painting as art in the service of shaping nationhood and an uplifting abstract idea, which had been given flesh through paint" (Som 163). The image of the divine Bharat Mata with the Map of India has been used for a long to show love and solidarity with Mother India.

'Vande Mataram' is the national song of India, distinct from the national anthem. The song was composed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–1894). Originally a Bengali and Sanskrit verse personified India as a mother goddess and inspired the activists during the Indian Independence Movement. However, it is argued that singing 'Vande Mataram' gives a notion of idol worship, which may be unacceptable to some section of the society. Further, they also felt that its origin was a part of Anandamath, which had communal message. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote Anandamath in 1882 in the backdrop of the Bengal famine of 1770. In 1937, during the Independence movements, the Indian National Congress adopted the first two stanzas since they began with an unexceptionable evocation of the beauty of the motherland leaving later stanzas where the motherland is conceptualised like the Hindu goddess Durga. To this day, the national song of India consists of only these first two stanzas. The elements drawn from the vocabulary of Hinduism and national struggle together gave rise to the controversy of communal politics in the late 1930s, which still exists. People can use cultural and religious assets during agitation in a democracy, and differences in opinion may arise, however, it must be argued or opposed within the ambit of Indian Constitution. Option is always available to amend the constitution through the mechanism already given by the same constitution. Mere opposition to any issue without popular support in a democracy require support for suitable amendments to incorporate in the Constitution through debate and discussions only.

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy

Bhopal Gas Tragedy brings in front the high cost the civilisation pays for allowing unchecked business growth at the cost of the environment and life of poor people. The gas tragedy, a major industrial disaster in 1984, embedded in the flow of the story brings forth the sorrow of humans under poorly planned industrialisation and failure of governance. On 2 December 1984, the chemical Methyl Isocyanate (MIC) spilt out from Union Carbide India Ltd.'s (UCIL's) pesticide factory, turning the city of Bhopal into a colossal gas chamber, killing more than 15,000 people and affecting over 600,000 workers. It was India's first major industrial disaster. Forty-three tonnes of Methyl Isocyanate and other substances leaked from the Union Carbide factory located in the city. Bhopal gas tragedy is the world's most terrible modern catastrophe. In his book *The Bhopal Saga: Causes and Consequences of World's Largest Industrial Disaster*, Ingrid Eckerman justified the factors responsible for the mega-gas leak- (1) the design of the plant and (2) the policy of reducing the expenses on safety measures. However, the same analysis shows that negligence by the company and the authorities have critically affected the impact of the leakage on people's lives.

The innocent and downtrodden bear the burnt, becoming the victim of the government's failure to protect its citizen from the industrial expansions. This historical event of the gas tragedy taught planners and executors to focus more on human values and environment-friendly economic developments instead of only on commercial gains.

Assassination of Indira Gandhi and Sikh Riot 1984

The assassination of Indian Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi in the morning hours on October 31, 1984, was the aftermath of sending the Indian Army to drive out the Sikh extremist religious leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, and his armed followers from Golden Temple in Amritsar in June 1984. During the action the Golden Temple was heavily damaged with the loss of lives of devotees, terrorists, and Army personnel. This action and reaction brought turmoil inside the country. After the assassination, riots spread against Sikhs throughout the country. Crime by some members of the ruling political party by using their authoritative power, made a mockery of the Indian democracy. The statement made by a famous political leader on 19th November, 1985, after the incident, 'when a big tree falls, the earth shakes,' was misunderstood, and rioters got an excuse to justify their unconstitutional actions. This historical event was a turning point in Indian democracy giving a message to act before the situation run out of control. The spread of hatred against fellow citizens of different faiths, using political power, signalled the urgent need for effective and true implementation of the provisions of the Constitution. The change in Government's attitude can be seen in handling the agitation against the three Agricultural Laws (November'20 to December'21). Continuous administrative and political dialogue and negotiations between the Government and the farmer's body resulted in a complete peace withdrawal from the agitation. Allowing to grow the communal divide, riots and, politicising the agitation could be avoided.

A Brief History of Jammu & Kashmir

The novel recounts the unlikely situation of Kashmiri people crammed between the cross-border terrorism encouraged by Pakistan and Indian reactions to safeguard the Kashmir valley and its people from further aggression since partition. In the abode of God, peace-loving Kashmiris had to follow the dictates of militants and the Indian security forces. As a result, their fundamental rights were camouflaged. The continuation of uncertainty since the Partition of India gave rise to tremendous stress on the Security personnel. Out of frustration their act seems to be unconstitutional. Victim of the power games of Central and State politicians, the state remains under turmoil for long.

At the time of Independence, India had the Princely States got the option to become successor States of India or Pakistan or choose to stay independent as per the Indian Independence Act 1947. Dilemma on the part of Maharaja Hari Singh to decide, Pakistan got the chance to provoke Tribals to capture Kashmir forcefully. Sanjay Dixit imparts "used its irregulars to mount an offensive, first Poonch-Kotli-Mirpur sector, and then used the tribal raiders to enter the Valley" (Dixit 122). In fear of losing the fight against the intruders, Maharaja Hari Singh requested for Military help from New Delhi. At this juncture, New Delhi negotiated with Maharaja Hari Singh and got signed the Instrument of accession of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) to India. According to Parvez Dewan, "Dr Karan Singh recalls, 'The attack by Pakistani raisers, comprising tribals and regulars, forced my father {Maharaja Hari Singh} into signing the Instrument with India'" (Dewan 153). J&K joined the Union of India under the safeguard granted by a presidential order of protections under Articles 370 and 35A,⁶ immunising from the direct rule of Indian government except in certain specific area.

Kashmir had joined the union of India but not the law of India. Instead, it was steel governed by the Jammu and Kashmir constitution act of 1939, with Delhi's jurisdiction extending only to External Affairs, Defence and Communication. From this fulcrum, the friction began, with Delhi attempting to pull Kashmir into the spirit of Indian democracy and Srinagar zealously guarding the letter of the accession terms (Akbar 176).

Uncertainty with the future of J&K and constant provocation by outside forces, a plebiscite was proposed by India in the UN to decide the fate of the state. For geo-political reasons it was never happened. The author, through various characters, explained the dubious condition of Kashmiris as well as the personnel of the Armed forces and their

⁶Article 35A of Indian Constitution was a special provision made for restricting implementation of Indian laws in J&K in respect of benefits given to women, refugees and Scheduled Cast/Scheduled Tribes.

excessiveness. The narratives by Biplab Dasgupta and, the terror of Amrik Singh, sketched the ugly part of the governance in J&K in the novel.

The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, was passed to nullify Article 370 and to establish true democracy with the transfer of powers to the lowest level of the population. The effect of such a historical change is visible today with a reduction in militancy, increase in economic activities and transfer of power to the Panchayat level. Understanding the problem and taking quick decisions is concept of a new India, to achieve the notion of One India.

Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits

The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits was a politics of ethnic cleansing by Militants. After the death of Sheikh Abdullah in the year 1982, political instability fired up in J&K, and no Chief Minister could complete full terms of 6 years in the office. During this political turmoil, a rise in separatist activities took place. The hanging of militant leaders became the catalyst for an increase in militancy. In 1986, the Hon'ble Court opened the lock of Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid complex to enable prayers to the deity of 'Ram Lalla' placed inside the building. The oppose to this action also echoed in Kashmir and act as a catalyst for militants. Taking advantage of the situation, separatists and secessionists made series of attacks on temples and shops and properties of Kashmiri pandits. Panic spread among the pandits by circulating their hit lists and publicising messages anonymously, forcing pandits to leave the valley. All these developments lead to riots against the Kashmiri Pandits and resulting exodus. A peaceful valley of saints, scholars became the victim of political games played by internal and external forces. The coexistence of groups of different faiths created a common social fabric that is unique and existed for centuries, became the victim of invasions and oppressive actions of outside forces and politics of partition of India. Superpowers were actively involved in encashing the situation in Jammu & Kashmir for the great games of Middle East. The situation was allowed to aggravate by keeping the State in a dubious status under Article 370 & 35A of the Indian Constitution.

The environment of the Kashmir valley does not permit a society divided within itself; therefore, dignity and unique cultural agglomeration must be preserved with special care. It is a caution for all political powers from within the country and outside to treat with every Kashmiris at par with Indian citizen maintaining their unique culture, dignity, and pride. Referencing this historical error is an effort by the author to cease any further manoeuvre of the peace-loving Kashmiris.

CONCLUSION

The novel historicises the story in a broad spectrum covering geographical areas of South India, Gujarat, Delhi, and J&K. Social, political and economic issues is imprinted in the story indicating that we are still not a nation despite having the largest democracy with the largest Constitution. The author explains the relationship between governing mechanisms and people's aspirations by using historical references in the book. Every incident has a historical background. The paper brings in front the history, leading to the incidents where the people raise their voices against the violations of natural law of justice. Game-changing events forced the system to correct and reduce the gap between the downtrodden and those dictating society, distributing the resources, and keeping hold of politics of power.

Democracy opportune people to choose politicians and leaders of their choice, but the irony is that they mostly have meagre knowledge of what a country means, their rights and duties towards the nation. Despite having the world's largest written Constitution, accommodating different cultures and faiths, we are still searching for justice against atrocities, burnt of religious fanaticism, and greed to get things out of the way. Each one is fighting for their survival, guided by politics of opportunities, religious leaders, and greedy people. Belongingness to the country in a diverse culture is the need of the hour to minimise the retaliatory attitude against each other besides, the Constitution is to be followed by every citizen of India in its true sense.

To deduce, India is a secular democracy, and every community has the right to profess and practice its faith so long as it does not challenge the unity and integrity of the nation. Therefore, the coercive imposition of the beliefs of one religion over another would only result in communal disharmony. While summarising the historical events mentioned in the novel, it is to infer that the weaker sections are always at the receiving end of all the happenings instigated by opportunists and those at the higher echelon of society. Historicizing the fiction gave life to the story and showed the mirror for structural changes in people's attitude and governing system and honouring the Constitution of the country. Roy skilfully mixed the national past in the book for the evolution of one and a strong nation of truly democratic India. The novel exposes the facts mingled with fiction with an advisory for contemporary society.

Works Cited

1. Akbar, M J. Kashmir behind the Vale. Roli Books, 2002.
2. Blake, Stephen P. Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
3. Chandra, Bipan. In The Name of Democracy. Penguin Books, 2003.
4. Chenoy, Shama Mitra. Shahjahanabad A City of Delhi, 1638-1857. Munshiram Manoharal Publishers, 1998.
5. Dewan, Parvez. A History of Kashmir. Manas Publications, 2017.
6. Dixit, Sanjay. Unbreaking India Decisions on Article 370 and the CAA. Garuda Prakashan, 2020.
7. Ezekiel, Isaac A. Sarmad Martyr to Love Divine. Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 2005.

8. Hasnain, Nadeem. Tribal India. Palaka Prakashan, 2019.
9. Roy, Arundhati. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. Penguin Books, 2017.
10. Som, Reba. Margot Sister Nivedita of Vivekananda. Penguin Books, 2017.