



CIRCLE OF LIFE: GULZAR'S COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

Dr. K. TEJASWANI

Asst. Prof. in English, GITAM University, Rudraram Village, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the varied themes of a versatile personality, Gulzaar. Gulzaar is famous for his lyrics in films and direction. But there is another side also to Gulzaar. Gulzaar is a fascinating narrator. He also can write in Punjabi, Urdu, and various dialects of Hindi. He is a distinguished poet and also writes short stories. He also narrates stories for children.

Gulzaar's short stories cover a range of themes from personal friends to partition sufferings, from common man's trials to tribulations of personified objects, from lost childhood to miseries of old age, from terrorists to common people affected by terrorism etc. The short stories are a kaleidoscope of a wide range of emotions, feelings, miseries and sufferings of humanity. Through his short stories, the readers get to comprehend the circle of life.

The aim of this article is to bring out the significance of Gulzaar's narratives and introduce him to native English speakers.

Keywords: Urdu short stories, Partition stories, Urdu writers, Punjabi writers, stories of Kashmir.

Dr. K. TEJASWANI

Article Info:

Article Received:

14/08/2013

Revised on: 18/08/2013

Accepted on: 22/08/2013

INTRODUCTION TO PARTITION OF INDIA

Though India attained freedom in 1947, it was at the cost of losing a considerable part of land which ended up in dividing the country permanently and causing loss of lives and properties. The partition of India was based on religious demographics and mainly due to the clamour for separate countries by Muslim leaders like Allama Iqbal and Mohammad Ali Jinnah who felt that Muslims and issues related to them are being sidelined by the Indian National Congress Party in which Hindus were a majority. Unfortunately, both the new-born countries, India and Pakistan failed in safeguarding their citizens' life and property at the time of partition.

Many people had to leave their home lands overnight due to the conflicts. Partition made people abandon their homes, relatives and friends and start life afresh in an unknown land among total strangers. The damage caused by partition was so deep that it remains fresh in the minds of those

affected even after six decades. Leaving their homes, relatives and separated from family members left a permanent injury on the psyche of the common man. Neither the politicians nor the common men could foresee the extent of damage that partition could lead to. The violence and loss of a homeland left a deep and lasting effect on both sides that even now people on both sides view each other with suspicion [7].

India's partition unleashed unprecedented terror in both India and Pakistan. Men, women and children were killed indiscriminately and property was looted. Communal fury engulfed thousands of people belonging to both the countries. The newly formed government could not stop the human massacre that preceded the partition nor could it predict the large scale violence which caused loss of thousands of lives and material assets. The partition impacted people in such a way that even decades

after the partition, people are still hurt and carry the painful memories.

Literature reflects the period in which it is written. Moreover, literature faithfully mirrors the societal conditions, culture, traditions and concerns of that period. Writers all over the world respond to events and incidents and record their observations. Most literary works reflect the period they are written in accurately. Many Indian writers wrote and are still writing about the Partition of India and its consequences borne by normal citizens. Gulzar is one such author who has been religiously writing about the aftermath of partition in the form of short stories. Gulzar's partition stories reveal his interest in history and his concern regarding its affect on common men.

In the Foreword to *Raavi Paar and Other Stories*, Gulzar pours his heart out:

"I had witnessed the partition of India from very close quarters in 1947. It left me bruised and scarred. I cannot help but write about this excruciating period. I wrote the short stories with the background of the partition to try and get the painful experience out of my system."

The collection contains some haunting stories like the title story, *Raavi Paar*, *Khauf*, *Batwara*, and *Jamun ka Per*. Despite the fact that all the stories are the direct result of partition, they tell different stories of loss, fear, separation, hurt and painful memories. Though the readers are not directly hit by partition, Gulzar's powerful narratives manage to leave an everlasting impact on the readers' mind.

Urvashi Bhutalia was another writer who made a powerful contribution to partition literature with her novel, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag ka Dariya* translated into English as *River of Fire*, Shiv K. Kumar's *A River with Three Banks*, Ajeet Kaur's *Pebbles in a Tin Drum*, *An Epic Unwritten: Partition Stories* edited by Mohd. Umar Menon, Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan* etc. are some other memorable narratives on partition.

Common people only expected two different countries ruled by different governments as a result of the partition of India and Pakistan. But the terror that partition unleashed and the havoc it created in

the psyche of human mind were unparalleled in South Asian history. Many people from all religions, all backgrounds and all walks of life were killed indiscriminately. Millions of people were uprooted from their hometowns and forced to flee leaving their belongings and relatives. Families were separated; ancestral property, agricultural lands and homes had to be discarded. People were forced to start living from scratch in a totally unknown land among strangers.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR

Born to Makhan Singh Kalra and Sujana Kaur in Dina, Jhelum District, which became a part of Pakistan after partition, Gulzar Deenvi is the nom de plume of Sampooran Singh Kalra (18 August, 1934). Gulzar is a multifaceted personality and is famous for his lyrics and poems. He is a polyglot who has written in Punjabi, and Braj Bhasha, Khariboli, Haryanvi and Marwari which are various dialects of Hindi. He has also directed a few films.

Introduction to his works:

He published three anthologies in poetry; "Chand Pukhraaj ka", "Raat Pashminey ki" and "Pandrah Paanch Pachattar." His short story collections are *Raavi-paar*, *Dhuan* and *Half a Rupee*. He writes mainly in Urdu though the readers can also observe the inspiration of classic Bengali writers in his narratives.

Gulzar worked with several acclaimed music directors like Sachin Dev Burman, Shankar – Jaikishan, Hemant Kumar, Laxmikant – Pyarelal, Madan Mohan, Rajesh Roshan, Rahul Dev Burman, A. R. Rahman, Vishal Bhardwaj and Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy. He also dabbled in other aspects of film making like script writing, story writing and dialogue writing. He also worked for Doordarshan and worked on serials like Mirza Ghalib and Tahreer Munshi Premchand ki. He also wrote and narrated the children's audio book, Karadi Tales.

His penchant for peace between India and Pakistan is evidenced by his participation in Aman ki Aasha, a joint peace program between India and Pakistan set up by leading publishing houses of both the countries. Gulzar's anthem "Nazar mein rehte ho" was sung by singers Shankar Mahadevan from India and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan from Pakistan.

His direction career started in the early 70s and he directed *Mere Apne*, *Parichay*, *Koshish*, *Achanak*,

Aandhi, Khushboo, Mausam, Angoor, Ijaazat, Libaas, Maachis, Hu Tu Tu, etc. though not box-office hits, these movies are any day the delight of film connoisseurs. His films tell stories about ordinary people who are caught in problems created by society and politicians also play a major role in his movies. Aandhi, which was thought to be based on the life of late Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, was banned when political emergency was declared in 1975. Libaas, which was based on extra-marital relationship, was not released in India because of its bold theme. He uses flash-back technique expertly to narrate stories in films.

Referred as Gulzar Saab with great love and respect, he is cherished by music lovers throughout the world for his soul-stirring lyrics. He has won many awards in his illustrious career with 11 Filmfare awards for Best Lyricist, 4 Filmfare awards for Best Dialogue, National awards for screenplay, lyrics and direction, Sahitya Akademi Award for *Dhuan*, and also shared the Academy Award for Best Original song for "Jai Ho" with A. R. Rahman and Tanvi Shah, and was honoured with Padma Bhushan in 2004 [8].

Themes in short stories:

Some of the short stories in the latest collection, *Half a Rupee*, translated by Sunjoy Shekhar were previously translated but to give uniformity of style Sunjoy Shekhar translates all the 25 stories in the anthology anew. In his introduction to the book, Sunjoy Shekhar states a "belief that a community, a society, a nation is as strong and healthy as the stories they tell themselves" (*Half a Rupee* 2).

The collection consists of different themes like extraordinary men in Gulzar's life, ordinary men, army stories, a day in the life of terrorists, travails of elderly people etc. and each story leaves a haunting trail like the songs of Gulzar. Some of the narratives are about simple events in the full life of mature and experienced men which are made extraordinary by the rendition of Gulzar with intense prose and poetic perception. Gulzar's interpretation of mundane life has the power to bring out the beauty out of seemingly inane things in life. In the short story *Ghugu*, Ghugu, a bird falls madly in love with a kite, Jamuni thinking it to be a

bashful bird. With the same aplomb he narrates the happenings of the last day of a young girl who is a suicide bomber. The story is a precise narration of the impassionate feelings of a young girl and her adherence to her role – a do-or-get-killed situation.

There are various stories on partition and they give the viewpoint that it is not the common people living in the two countries, India and Pakistan, who wanted separate states. The partition was forced upon innocent and unsuspecting people who were living in harmony for generations. The hearts of the common people living on that side and this side of the borders beat for the land and their relatives on the other side which has become beyond their reach. The unsolicited change is incomprehensible to the people belonging to various faiths and leaves them bewildered to this day. The aftermath of partition has left an indelible scar on the psyche of the people on both sides. Even now many people have their lands and relatives on the other side and crave for a glimpse of the land or their people which has been poignantly narrated by Gulzar in short stories like *LoC*, *Over*, *The Rams*, *The Stone Age*, and *The Search*. In *Over*, the poet in Gulzar personifies the desert as well. He says, "[w]hen the desert begins to heat up it really seems as if it is getting angry at you . . . as if it is trying to say "why are you trying to step on my bed" . . . pick your feet up, go away" (*Half a Rupee* 84). In *The Rams*, Gulzar tells the readers how people get drunk by uttering or listening to the names of their native places to which they no longer have access due to the partition. Captain Shaheen finds a young boy in Suchitgarh and thinks that he has been inadvertently left by his people who might have migrated to this side of the border. So he asks an old Sikh on the other side of the border if he would take the little boy and hand him over to his people. The Sikh laughingly suggests to be exchanged with the little boy so that he can visit his village on their side, Chajra.

The old Sikh laughed, "Let the boy off. Imprison me instead. Takeme with you. My village is over on that side. A little further down from Sialkot. Chajra." He sounded ecstatic – drunk just on the name of his village. (*Half a Rupee* 93)

The consequences of unwanted partition of the country left many people on both sides embittered and scarred for life. As an introduction to the partition stories, Gulzaar pens these words:

Dreams heed no borders, the eyes
need no visas. With eyes shut I walk
across the line in time. All the time --
(Half a Rupee 69)

In the above lines, Gulzaar represents the intense grief of people on either side who are affected by partition.

Swayamwar is the story about the last day of a young suicide bomber. The story seems to be inspired by the tragic assassination of then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi who was killed by a young suicide bomber, Dhanu. Gulzaar tries to fathom the thoughts of a young girl on that fateful day.

The title story, *Half a Rupee*, not only tells us about the story of a young boy and hundreds like him who run away from home and land in Mumbai to change their destiny but also brings out the ugly nexus between the cops and the homeless. Deva, a havildar on duty, charges half a rupee per week from pavement dwellers to allow them to lie on the footpath. Deva is not educated and makes the protagonist, Chandu, write his reports. Gulzaar narrates an incident where Deva drags a dead cow for two hours from Vinayak Rao Road to Bapu Road so that it would be easier for him to mention the name of the street while reporting the incident. Life for Deva is full of earning atthannis (Half a Rupees) as every small task he takes up is defined by an atthanni or its multiples depending on the level of the task. Gulzaar also brings out the similarity between a corrupt politician and a terrorist in this short story. He aptly narrates that the result is death when confronted by these two persons only while it is an instant death by bullet in case of the terrorist, it is death, little by little and every day in the hands of a corrupt politician.

Gagi and Superman is an autobiographical story. Gagi, the daughter of Vikas Desai, Gulzaar's friend, unfortunately succumbed to cancer when she was hardly eleven years old. When a new physician enters her room, Gagi asks her mother if there is another God they can pray to as the old God, Lord Krishna, to whom they were praying has not healed her. Her mother replies that Gods are like

Superman; they can only perform in books but not in real life.

Pickpocket is a short story in which Gulzaar equates the God Almighty to a pickpocket. Sultan's wife, Zakia, conceives after a long wait and many prayers. Unfortunately, just a week before the delivery date, she goes into labour pains. Sultan calls for an auto-rickshaw and rushes out to the hospital. On reaching his destination he finds that he is robbed of his wallet. The driver of the auto-rickshaw is kind enough to waive him off. Sultan becomes inconsolable when told by the doctor that his wife delivered a stillborn baby. He turns to God and accuses him of being the "biggest pickpocket" (196) of all. Sultan charges God of stealing his unborn child from them after answering their prayers for the birth of a child.

The three short stories, *Dusk*, *Dadaji*, and *The Adjustment* are the stories of men in their twilight. In *Dusk*, Lalaji finds it difficult to adjust to his wife's new haircut and it affects him so much that it becomes a cause of rift between the couple. In spite of much cajoling by his wife, son and daughter-in-law, Lalaji could not come to terms with the fact that Maya Devi took a decision to cut her hair without discussing with him. Maya Devi's unthinking act quickens his age and makes him feel utterly useless. Finally, he leaves his home and appears at Badrinath after two months. By the time the family members reach Badrinath the ailing Lalaji passes away. Gulzaar narrates how a simple act can break a life absolutely in this short story.

Dadaji is about the changing times and development of materialistic tendencies in one's own progeny. Dadaji's son, Jaswant, finds it difficult to look after his father despite Dadaji getting a pension. He indirectly tells his father to go back to the village. Even though deeply hurt, Dadaji decides to stay back in the village. Back at the village, surprisingly he finds himself happily ensconced in his childhood memories. He is so deep in his memories that when his grandson climbs a tree, it reminds him of his childhood where he fell off the tree and ended up with a permanent limp. An anxious Dadaji ends up spanking his grandson. But the kid takes it to heart and calls his father to take him back home. The story highlights the gaps between generations.

In *The Adjustment*, an Octogenarian, Nana, even after decades of marriage, quarrels with his wife on petty issues and ends up sulking. The silence between them goes on for months and when their children interfere, the elderly Nana tells them that "it takes time to adjust to each other" (213). The story is about how Nana ends up behaving like Nani after the demise of Nani. Nana ends up with psychological problems and begins to act like his wife. Gulzaar narrates how Nana is affected by the death of his wife, Nani, a companion of more than five decades. Nana breaks down completely and tries to transform into Nani herself. He begins to talk, dress and behave like Nani.

CONCLUSION

The main themes in the anthology are the agony of separation from native land and known people, and the travails of a common man interspersed with remarkable anecdotes of Gulzaar's friends, the hassles of old age, the need for companionship at that age and some stories deal with feelings of people and also surprisingly a bird.

Gulzaar's stories deal with loss - loss of land, loss of trust, loss of values, and lost individuals. The short stories represent many stages in a person's life and many incidents that we can identify with so as to reflect a complete circle of situations men can experience in life. Gulzaar belongs to that section of creative writers who revolt against traditional storytelling, who experiment with the themes of their stories and assert that the technique of narration is also as important as the theme of the story. Through his stories the readers can catch glimpses of the wider canvas of life and its implications.

Sunjoy Shekhar has done a great job in translating and reaching out to readers who cannot read Urdu. The collection satiates the eager readers of Gulzaar's short stories and reiterates the poetic truth quoted by Hemingway in his *Old man and the Sea*, that "a man can be destroyed but not defeated." The readers can identify with the issues discussed in the short stories and yet can experience a feeling that is akin to faith in spite of the struggle to live. Gulzaar's narratives have the strength to build faith in humanity and steer towards developing a better world.

REFERENCES

1. Gulzaar. *Half a Rupee: Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2013.
2. - - -. *Raavi Paar: And Other Stories*. New Delhi: Rupa, 2006.
3. http://shodh.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/751/3/03_literature%20review.pdf, 8th May, 2013
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_India, 8th May, 2013.
5. Jason Francisco, 'In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly,' <http://www.urdustudies.com/pdf/11/22heat.pdf>, 10th May, 2013
6. Jonathan Greenberg, 'Generations of Memory: Remembering Partition in India/Pakistan and Israel/Palestine', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25 (2005): 89-110 (online)
7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_India, 3rd June, 2013.
8. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulzar>, 3rd June, 2013.

Dr. KADAVAKOLLU TEJASWANI is at present working as an Assistant Professor in English in the English Department, GITAM University, Hyderabad Campus, Andhra Pradesh, India. She completed her M. A. from Osmania University in 1999-2001. She completed her M. Phil from CIEFL under the guidance of Prof. A. V. Ashok on the topic, *Autobiographical Detection: A Study of James Ellroy's My Dark Places: An L. A. Crime Memoir* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*. She obtained her Ph. D. from HCU under the guidance of Prof. Alladi Uma on the topic, "Dreaming" Women: A Study of Immigrant Experience in Betty Smith's Novels. Her interests are in the areas of 20th Century American literature, Gender studies, Partition Literature, Rural studies and ELT in rural areas. She has published her Ph. D. dissertation with the title, *Worlds Attainable: Immigrant Experience in Betty Smith's Novels* through LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany with ISBN No. 978-3-8383-2902-4. She presented papers at several national and international conferences. She has also published several articles in renowned international journals.