



RELIGIOUS MARGINALIZATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BHAGAT'S THE THREE MISTAKES OF MY LIFE AND JAVED'S ASHES, WINE AND DUST

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ABSTRACT- The current study endeavors to reveal religious marginalization faced by minorities in Pakistan and India through comparative analysis of *Ashes, Wine and Dust* and *The Three Mistakes of My Life*. In the light of Spivak's theory of othering and Pandey's definition of identity, the research reveals the injustice, bigotry and oppression experienced by the religious minorities. The relationship between religion and nationality fostered during Partition still dictates the national policy of India and Pakistan. The aura associated with religion and the devotion towards a country taken to an extreme target those with different religious orientation. With harbingers of peace silenced by the extremist groups, minorities rarely get a chance to play a constructive role in the progress of a nation. The solution is to be tolerant and accepting as prosperity needs diversity and without the incorporation of all groups, these two countries are wasting a precious resource that will not only play a positive role but will also help in moving forward.

Keywords: Religious marginalization; religious minorities; comparative analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian subcontinent gained independence in the August of 1947. The declaration of independence brought an end to the prolonged British rule in India. The termination of one regime and emergence of two new ones was an event of momentous significance as it changed the world map forever. The post-independent world entailed new challenges as the division of land was accompanied by division among people. The binary of us and them did not end with the creation of India and Pakistan but as a result of religious nationalism it has evolved into the binary of religious and non-religious, pious and impious, right and wrong.

Nationalism can be defined as a feeling of devotion towards one's nation where an individual believes that his primary allegiance is to his nation and this sense of adherence shapes the identity of an individual. Religion is a set of beliefs and ideas that characterizes the relationship between a human being and a divine entity. Religious nationalism is a phenomenon where "political and religious are conflated and interwoven" (Omer & Springs, 2013). It is a situation where the boundary between religion and nationality is blurred and the religion of dominant groups is perceived as a component of nationality and is used to legitimize political authority of the ruling class.

The concept of nationalism became the backbone of struggle for independence. It was this sense of nationalism fused with religious righteousness that distinguished Hindus and Muslims of united India from one another. Decades after independence, religious nationalism still rules the roost. Those who do not subscribe to the notion of religious nationalism are branded as traitors and are marginalized as others. A comparative study of two novels from India and Pakistan; *the Three Mistakes of My Life* and *Ashes, Wine and Dust* reveals such an attitude.

Pakistan is a country with second largest population of Muslims after Indonesia and Islam is the official religion of the state. The population of minorities has declined from 23 to 3 percent since its creation (Ispahani, 2013). Legislature, executive and judiciary, the three pillars of government, have failed to safeguard the rights of non-Muslim population whose number is decreasing with each passing day. Forced conversions to Islam, target killing and social exclusion are few of the reasons that minorities are emigrating from Pakistan.

Religious interference in the politics cannot be ignored in India despite its status of being a secular country. The majority of population consists of Hindus. According to census of 2011 Muslim population in India is 17.22 Crores (www.census2011.co.in/religion.php, n.d.). The incident of Babri Mosque, conflict in Ayodhya, Gujrat riots, tension over cow slaughter are few of the incidents that suggest an active participation of religion in the state affairs.

Both countries have been unable to keep the political separate from the religious. The collaboration of the two institutions has not produced positive outcomes and has led to marginalization of minorities. Marginalization "is a set of process which ignores or relegates individuals or groups to the sidelines of political space, social negotiation, and economic bargaining" (Jahan, 2016). India and Pakistan not only see each other as "other" but the minorities are also "othered". "Other" is defined as "anyone who is separate from one's self" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin, 1998, p. 169). In the process of othering all the positive attributes are assigned to self, whereas all the negative tropes are associated with the other and this is what has been done by the majority groups to the minorities. The two novels selected for analysis reveal the plight of minorities in the two countries. The Muslims are victimized and marginalized in India and the same happens to the Hindus in Pakistan as nationality is defined with respect to religious preference in each of the two countries.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The study explores the how Bhagat's *the Three Mistakes of My Life* and Javed's *Ashes, Wine and Dust* are manifestations of religious othering and religious nationalism and how does it lead to marginalization of minorities.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the factors responsible for religious marginalization in the context of Bhagat's *the Three Mistakes of My Life* and Javed's *Ashes, Wine and Dust*.
2. To discuss the social consequences of religious profiling on various characters of the selected works.
3. To compare the influence of religious nationalism on the social and political environment of India and Pakistan in the context of the selected novels.

1.3 Research Questions

The study will investigate the following research questions:

1. Which factors are responsible for religious marginalization in India and Pakistan in the light of Bhagat's *the Three Mistakes of My Life* and Javed's *Ashes, Wine and Dust*?
2. What is the social consequence of religious profiling on different characters of the selected novels?
3. How can the influence of religious nationalism on social and political environment in India and Pakistan be compared with each other in the light of the selected works?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The arrival and retreat of British left indelible marks on the history of Subcontinent. The future of the two countries cannot be separated from their past because history is not a passive reservoir of data but plays an engaging role in how these two countries negotiate their present. Partition of subcontinent was accompanied by mass displacement, bloodshed, vehemence and massacre. MunmunGiri writes, "the common images of partition are that of agony, anxiety, animosity, indignity and hatred" (Giri, 2015, p. 401).

The creative minds on both sides of the border have written a lot about Partition. It is not just a historical event but "has served and continues to serve as a compelling literary theme" (Roy, 2010). Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Kamila Shamsi's *Burnt Shadows* are few of the novels that deal with issues such as religious divide, atrocities, identity crisis and displacement as a result of Partition. In *Burnt Shadows*, the year of 1947 is described as a time period of turmoil, "every day brought news of further atrocities, and relationships that had seemed to be cast in steel disintegrated under the acid question: Are you for India or Pakistan?" (Shamsi, 2009, p. 105).

The minorities in India and Pakistan have been subjected to prejudice. In Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhattia* Christian nurse faces discrimination on personal and professional levels. The plight of Christians as a down trodden and untouchable group is depicted in the novel. The book reveals the general attitude of Muslims towards Christians and asserts the fact that in Pakistan not all Christians work as sweepers, "But all sweepers are Christians"(Hanif, 2011, p. 12).

Ashes, Wine and Dust (2015) "explores the ideas of belonging, fluid definitions of home, and the cyclical nature of memory" (Ahmad, 2016). It talks about racial profiling in Pakistan and outside of it. It reveals the predicament of a Hindu family residing in the outskirts of Lahore. The reviewers have analyzed it from the angles of hybridity, displacement and post 9/11 crisis. The current study focuses on the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in the context of KanzaJaved's debut novel *Ashes, Wine and Dust*.

Chetan Bhagat is the author of five books and is a famous name in India as his works attract a wide readership. "His five novel shave adventure, romance, and expert comments on social, political, and educational systems of our country" (Kumar, 2014, p. 151). His novels present a conflict between the youth of India and the set patterns of society.

The current paper not only studies the religious conflict between two religious sects of India but also compares the ways in which this relationship is similar to the one depicted in *Ashes, Wine and Dust*. The common denominator for stratification of minorities can be traced back to the events prior to Partition. Both countries assert their identities in relation to the religion as observed in the selected texts.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a comparative analysis of two novels from subcontinent; *The Three Mistakes of My Life* written by an Indian writer and *Ashes, Wine and Dust* written by a Pakistani writer. Qualitative methods of data collection have been used in this research. Relevant quotations from the novels have been cited in addition to statements from pertinent critical articles and books related to the topic. This study investigates the notions of religious othering and national identity and explores their role in the construction of society through careful textual analysis of the mentioned novels.

The textual analysis has been conducted in the light of theory of othering given by GayatriChakravortySpivak in her essay *The Rani of Sirmur* and the concept of national identities given by Gyanendra Pandey. Postcolonial literature looks at the relationship of the colonizers and the colonized. It exposes and interprets the biases held by the colonizers and Eurocentric assumptions regarding the non-Europeans. Taking a cue from Said, Spivak expands the notion of othering of subaltern and looks at the process from three dimensions. Othering can be done on the basis of power, moral superiority and knowledge (Jensen, 2011).

Spivak presents the notion of othering by giving three examples in the essay. The master presents himself to be more powerful than his subject by constructing the binary of powerful and powerless. She says, "Europe had consolidated itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as Others" (*The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives*, 1985). In *Rani of Sirmur*, the English Captain travels around India to announce the power of Englishmen by telling the natives "who they are subject to" (1985, p. 254). He demonstrates that his countrymen hold the power over subcontinent thereby, reducing the natives to powerless subjects. Secondly, the letter of English General constructs Indians as morally inferior to their British rulers. The letter defines the natives to be "only possessing all the brutality" (1985, p. 254). The letter written by the Board of Control decides that people in India should not be given any education because "The master is the subject of science or knowledge" (1985, p. 256) and the native is too simple to learn complicated knowledge. The masters think of natives to be the opposite of themselves; they are powerless, morally inferior and ignorant.

The creation of India and Pakistan transferred the rule from British masters to the political representatives of the two countries. The roles of master and subject have been revised. Those who govern and occupy position of power have become the new colonizers. In this way, the rulers or the majority group marginalizes the public or minorities and this results in the process of othering. As majority marginalizes the minority by defining it as weak, morally inferior and ignorant so Spivak's theory can be appropriated to describe the relationship between these groups. The government emphasizes on the role of religion to divert the attention of public from real issues. Fanon says; "[The]

colonialist bourgeoisie is helped in its work of calming down the natives by the inevitable religion” (Fanon, 2004, p. 67).

In addition to the theory of othering the research also uses the concept of identity proposed by Gyanendra Pandey who states, “Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were all redefined by the process of Partition: as butchers, or as devious others; as untrustworthy and anti-national; but perhaps most fundamentally, as Sikhs and Muslims and Hindus(2001, p. 16)”. The religious identities which became the basis of Partition still define India and Pakistan and have become equivalent to national identities. This suggests that like nationalism “religion can be understood as a mode of social organization, a way of framing, channeling, and organizing social relations” (Brubaker, 2011, p. 5). If on one hand religion is a means of cohesion, then on the other hand it is also a means of division as observed in the current study.

IV. ANALYSIS

Immersed in the unyielding imperative of middle-class life of Pakistan, Kanza Javed’s debut novel *Ashes, Wine and Dust* deals with pertinent issues ranging from “the changing landscape of a city, to the relationships between couples and family members, notions of belonging, the fate of minorities in Pakistan” (Malhotra, 2015). The novel traces the life of Mariam Ameen who is on a quest to find a home in an ever evolving and unforgiving world which is defined by strict categorization of us and them.

Mariam’s love for her grandfather’s village near Lahore introduces her to Prakriti and Karan. The village with its close knit communal life, pollution free sunsets and tube wells is perceived by young Mariam as a safe sanctuary and she thinks of this place as her home. It is only after her interaction with a Hindu family, living in her village, that she is able to comprehend the hypocritical behavior of the villagers which is masked by a veneer of civility and innocence. The current study analyzes the life of Mariam’s Hindu friend and his mother and explores the reasons responsible behind religious discrimination.

Prakriti, born and raised in Delhi, accompanied her husband Dev to the newly independent state of Pakistan. At the time of Partition, Dev decided to move to Pakistan because it was the land where his grandparents were born. He considered Pakistan to be his ancestral country and did not bother about his religious preference at the time of Partition. His decision was based on his association with the land of Pakistan. He found his roots in Pakistan and defined himself as a Pakistani rather than an Indian. After his death, his family experiences religious profiling and othering. It is quite ironic that the family of a man who left everything to settle in Pakistan is a victim of religious discernment.

Prakriti represents the fate of all those Hindu women who accompanied their husbands to Pakistan, leaving their immediate family behind. These women suffered injustice after the death of their husbands as they “were left without the resources of kinship for material support within their natal families or social support for remarriage” (Fazila & Zamindar, 2010, p. 211). She is a meek and submissive woman as she never questions the authority of her Muslim neighbors. The neighbors ostracize her because they think of her as a filthy faithless woman and never think about their inconsiderate behavior towards her.

The complex social structure of Pakistani society is evident in the novel. Mariam is forbidden to play with Karan because he is a Hindu. The domestic help warns Mariam, “They are not the right sort of people” (Javed, 2015, p. 57). The utterance highlights two things. First, it shows that Karan and his mother are not marginalized because of their economic status as Hamida herself is poor but on the basis of religion. Hamida’s staunch belief that the Hindus are not a right company for Mariam shows her religious bias. Her assertion is without proof as she gives voice to the baseless claims prevalent in the society. It also indicates that Muslims consider people of other faiths to have strayed away from the right path. Such a humiliating attitude towards other religions belittles the ideology of other groups.

Secondly, the utterance unveils how religious prejudice is embedded in the minds of young children. They are trained to view non-Muslims as unholy and impious. Such social conditioning of young minds ensures the continuity of religious othering. The social divisions based on religion are implanted in children who internalize the superiority of their group and consequently the inferiority of the opposite group. This training leads to the continuity of the binary between us and them and does not give a chance to the coming generations to understand the point of view of the other side.

In this age of consumerism, religion has become a commodity. According to Tyson an object acquires a status of a commodity when people relate to it in terms of its sign value (2006, p. 62). Religion, then becomes a status symbol and followers of Islam are seen on a higher pedestal than the followers of other

religions as observed in the social context of Pakistan. Hamida tells Mariam, “Askar Ameen’s granddaughter dwelling on the rooftops with a mischievous Hindu boy...not a pretty picture, is it?” (Javed, 2015, p. 60). The emphasis on Mariam’s grandfather’s name highlights the social position he enjoys. She is forbidden to play with a Hindu boy to keep the dignity of her family intact. Askar Ameen owes his high status not only to his *haveli* but also to the faith he follows.

The Hindu family is further marginalized by Karan’s idea of earning bread. The family lacks a bread earner and in the absence of financial support from the community, Karan opts for thievery. If anyone had extended a helping hand he would not have resorted to thievery. The people judge him but do not offer any help. Karan makes efforts to be accepted by the society but his efforts go in vain and he soon realizes that he will never be considered a part of the group. He confesses to Mariam, “I will always be the filthy Hindu boy, and my mother, an untouchable widow” (Javed, 2015, p. 52). The Hindu others are not accepted by the people are looked down upon.

When the villagers catch him red handed, they act in the most barbaric manner and scatter the ashes of his father and grandfather everywhere. This act of scattering the ashes dishonors the deceased. The only reaction of Prakriti is to mourn at the loss of her only material possession. This “mindless, inhuman, destructive”(Javed, 2015, p. 63) behavior is an indicator of the hatred they feel for this Hindu family as no one consoles them or feels apologetic.

The novel can be seen as a microcosm of Pakistan as the utter disregard for the religious traditions of another culture point towards the destruction of places of worships of Hindus in Pakistan. A survey conducted by All Pakistan Hindu Rights Movement (APHRM) in 2014 “reported that of the 428 places of worship for Hindus in the country, only 20 are operational” (Dilawri, Salim, Saleem, & Ishfaq, 2014, p. 22).

Bhagat’s *The Three Mistakes of My Life* narrates the story of three friends who want to achieve their goal of becoming successful businessmen. Set in the backdrop of Gujrat riots of 2002, the novel documents the religious differences between Hindus and Muslims in the city of Ahmedabad. The deep rooted prejudice of Hindus against Muslims takes the horrific form of Gujrat riots. However, this incident of barbarity cannot be seen in isolation as it has its roots in age old religious prejudices that each religion holds against the other and mere creation of two independent states cannot undo this religious stratification.

Govind, the narrator of the novel mentions two landmarks of the city, Swamibhakti temple and Qazirestaurant which are symbolic of the two religions followed in the city. Majority of Hindus do not visit the restaurant as it serves meat. Govind remarks that the owner of the restaurant does not serve beef, “as he would not have survived in the neighborhood if he served beef” (Bhagat, 2008, p. 7). Muslim faith allows the consumption of beef but Hindus differ from Muslims in this respect. D. N. Jha states that the notion of sacred cow became a mark of identification of Hindus and differentiated them from Muslims. Jha writes, “The sacred cow has come to be considered a symbol of community identity of the Hindus whose cultural tradition is often imagined as threatened by Muslims, who are thought of as beef eaters” (2009, p. 18).

The Qazi restaurant mainly serves Muslim customers except a few Hindu ones including Govind. Similarly, Swamibhakti temple attracts hundreds of Hindu worshipers every day and this ability of the temple to pull people from all corners of the city is the main reason that the boys open up their shop in its vicinity. When the Muslims wanted to purchase something, they ask their Hindu friends to get it for them from the shop. This indicates their reluctance to be near the temple. The landscape of the city is divided between the two religious faiths; one caters to Muslims and the other to the Hindus.

If Karan is labelled as an indecent Hindu in *Ashes, Wine and Dust*, Ishaan’s brilliant student Ali is referred to as the “mullah kid” (Bhagat, 2008, p. 56). Karan and Ali both are marginalized despite being children. They did not get to choose their religion neither did they decide where to be born. Omi refuses to visit Ali’s home because being a priest’s son he fears his family. He does not harbor hatred against Muslims but refuses to befriend them because he fears his family. The pressure exerted by society makes it impossible for those individuals who want to bridge gap between the two sections by labelling them traitors.

One common feature shared by India and Pakistan is the role played by religion in the definition of nationality. This phenomenon occurs either due to religious influence on national politics or is often a result of politicization of religion. In many countries, the role of religion is not restricted to specific dogmas or ideology which guide a community but it is revered as a unifying bond which keeps a community together. This unifying role of religion contributes to the involvement of religion in politics.

Observed in this light, religion renders identity, not only to individuals but also to nations as observed in the selected novels.

The Three Mistakes of My Life captures the political scene of Ahmedabad where a Hindu nationalist party and a secular party struggle to get hold of the city. Parekh-ji, the senior leader of the Hindu party is an extremist who holds strict religious beliefs. He attracts voluminous followers who consider him too pious to question his lavish lifestyle and excessive wealth. He is symbolic of those politicians of subcontinent who implant religious prejudice in people by relating religion to nationality. Such a narrow view of nationality breeds numerous problems as those people who do not follow the religion of the majority are considered to be traitors.

Parekh-ji is perceived by Govind as “a hybrid, a poli-priest” (Bhagat, 2008, p. 41) because he cannot isolate politics from religion. He motivates his followers to wage a virtuous war against the Muslims of India because they consume the resources of India and Hindus are asked to compromise. He says, “I don’t even want to go into who this country belongs to” (Bhagat, 2008, p. 43). He insinuates that India is for Hindus and Hindus should be the rightful owners of India. He labels himself to be a servant of God and quotes lines from Gita to motivate his supporters to vote against the secular party as it consists of Muslim members. He presents Hindus as victims to promote his cause and asserts that it was never his intention to join politics and says “ But if I as a Hindu want justice, I need to get involved in how the country is run” (Bhagat, 2008, p. 43). His intention to gain sympathy votes after the incident of Ayodhya is symbolic of the tendency of politicians of subcontinent to use religion for political gains.

The Hindus of India and Muslims of Pakistan both feel that the religious others are a burden on the economy and must not be given any favors as they are not the rightful citizens. The inconsiderate behavior of villagers towards Prakriti and the political hatred of Parekh-ji towards Muslims unmasks the intolerant behavior of the majority group towards the marginalized section of society. While Hamida tags Karan as a bad influence on Mariam, Bitto mama is sure of Muslim involvement in 9/11 even before American authorities pass their verdict. This tendency of branding the other with a negative identity is because each group considers the other as an extremist. In a conversation between Mr. Naseer and Omi each wants to prove that the other is an extremist as Omi replies in anger, “Hah, don’t tell me about being extreme. We know which religion is extreme” (Bhagat, 2008, p. 69).

Bitto mama’s indignation after Ayodhya reflects the hatred of Hindus towards Muslims. He loses his son in the train attack and murders Ali’s parents who are innocent. He leads a fifty men army to kill Ali. All he can process at this point is that Muslims should be executed for daring to attack Hindus “In a Hindu country, in a Hindu state” (Bhagat, 2008, p. 221). In his anger he is determined to murder a child because of his religious orientation. He does not think twice before deciding to kill the innocent boy as he equates his fanatic attitude with heroism. He is on a mission to kill as many Muslims as he can to get rid of them.

The comprador class in both countries uses religious conflicts to gain power. Parekh-ji encourages Bitto mama and his followers to burn the residential buildings of Muslims. The general public is manipulated in the name of religion and nationality. Be it Parekh-ji’s supporters or the villagers of Mariam’s village, they feel themselves to be the defenders of their nation by inflicting violence on the intruders for whom the country has no place. They think of their cruelty against the believers of other religion as a holy service done for their religion.

In both the novels, there is hope in the form of those characters who think on humanitarian basis and are not the perpetrators of violence. Mariam Ameen is a young girl who befriends a Hindu boy because she needs a playmate. His religious orientation does not bother her. Both of them are connected by a sense of loss as both have lost their loved ones. Mariam loses her grandfather and Karan his father. They are able to relate to each other despite their religious differences.

The brotherly concern of Ishaan for Ali in *The Three Mistakes of My Life* demonstrates the possibility of a cordial relationship between Muslims and Hindus. Ishaan volunteers to coach Ali as he does not want Ali’s cricketering talent to go to waste. He provides him with sports goods and proper training free of cost. He takes Ali to Australia despite his meager income. Ishaan’s refusal to hand over Ali to Bitto mama puts his own life in danger. Without caring for his own life, he safeguards Ali.

These two affiliations show the probability of affectionate relationships between the two groups. But the novels also depict the cost of being a peacekeeper between the two. Mariam has to witness the cruel treatment of Prakriti and Karan and the barbarity of the villages breaks her connection with the village. She is never able to look at her village in the same way and moves to America. Ishaan, on the other hand,

loses his best friend Omi in the feud. The horrible night where he has to protect Ali makes him realize the futility of his mission to train a good sportsman for his country because the religious fanatics think that India can only be saved by killing Ali. Although he is able to save Ali but loses his optimism. The marginalization and religious othering affects individuals emotionally and psychologically.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis of *Ashes, Wine and Dust* and *The Three Mistakes of My Life* highlights the victimization of religious minorities. The dominant group uses religion to exercise power. Religion, in such extremist hands becomes a tool of oppression and injustice and because of people's spiritual attachment with their faith they do not question the injustice done in its name. Observed in this light, "religion is a potential threat to any political or social order because it claims an authority higher than any available in this world" (Bruce, 2003, pp. 10-11). The people on both sides of the border have not been able to let go of their prejudice that emerged during Partition. The marginalized groups continue to suffer and are barely given a chance to participate in national affairs.

The religious divide has led to vehemence and violence. Both countries need to overcome their prejudices and incorporate all citizens to work for a better future. Learning from the mistakes of past and hoping for a stable future, both need to realize the importance of political and religious reconciliation. With the exclusion of minority groups and manipulation of citizens in the name of religion and nationality both countries may be able to progress but this progress will not guarantee a peaceful future and will be hindered by conflicts.

5.1 Delimitations

The two selected works cover a variety of aspects but the current study focuses on the role of religion in the Indo-Pak social set up. Religious divide leads to identity crisis, hybridity, displacement and psychological trauma, but this paper limits the research to religious marginalization and focuses on the social implications and the reasons behind the phenomenon of religious nationality and othering in the context of the selected works.

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