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Impact of Socio-political Movements on World Literature

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Sr. No.	Article	Page No.
1	Communal Tension, Riots and Emotional Trauma in Manju Kapur's <i>Difficult Daughters</i> <i>Dr. Abdul Anees Abdul Rasheed</i>	01
2	Gender Discrimination in 'Tara' by Mahesh Dattani <i>Anand Devidasrao Joshi</i>	04
3	Intercultural and Generational Conflict in Amy Tan's <i>The Valley of Amazement</i> <i>Dr. Vivek R. Mirgane and Babasaheb R. Judhav</i>	07
4	Devanooru Mahadeva's <i>Kusuma Bale</i> -A Path Breaking Work in Kannada <i>Chinnaswamy K</i>	10
5	The Theme of Marginalization in Mulk Raj Anand's <i>Untouchable</i> <i>Dr. Deshmukh A. B.</i>	14
6	Partition: An Unresolved Ordeal <i>Dr. G. M. Patil, Dr. P. P. Sonune and Dr. R. S. Shesham</i>	18
7	The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar: A Critical Overview <i>Girish Rameshchandra Parikh</i>	21
8	Reflection of Political Perspective in Raja Rao's <i>Kanithapurra</i> <i>Dr. Haibatpure S. T.</i>	26
9	Historicizing Partition Literature: Human Dimension of The Catastrophe from A Subaltern Perspective <i>Hashif. K</i>	29
10	War, Society and Poetry: The Soldier Poets' Perspectives on The Great War <i>Mr. Hussein Ahmed Abdo Rajhy</i>	36
11	Representation of Arabs and Muslims in John Updike's <i>Terrorist</i> : A Critical Study in The Light of Said's <i>Orientalism</i> <i>Imran Abdul Latif Pathan</i>	42
12	Interrogating Postcolonialism: Theory and Practice <i>Indrajit Kundu</i>	47
13	Influence of Marxism on Indian Poetry in English <i>Jayaramaiah. N</i>	54
14	Cross Communication and Language Teaching -Cultural <i>Dr. Kamalakar Digambarrao Judhav</i>	59
15	Habit of Technology and Its Effects on Present Human Being <i>Dr. Kathale Yuvaraj Subhash</i>	62
16	A Study of Girish Karnad's <i>Tughlaq</i> <i>Kempanna Rachappa Donuvad</i>	64
17	Nandeo Dhasal: The Modern Urban Poet <i>Dr. Govind Digambar Kokane</i>	68
18	Potarajachapor: An Investigation of Matang Culture <i>Dr. Landage Ramesh and Dr. Waghmare Mahesh</i>	70

PARTITION: AN UNRESOLVED ORDEAL

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Literature, on the facade, is an outflow of extreme emotions, ideas and thoughts. It can be subjective or objective. However, content remains most vital in any sort or form of literature. Social, political, economical and cultural accounts largely influence any creative writer to craft masterpieces. Taking into consideration the changes witnessed in every walk of life, the writer minutely analyzes and records the events so as to make aware the readers of the contemporary world. Historical events like the French Revolution or the American Civil War have always inspired literature, so the Partition of India in 1947. The Partition was described by Lord Mountbatten as 'one of the greatest administrative operations in history'.

The partition of India is the most throbbing phase of Indian history that altered and affected the course of lives of billions of people who would have otherwise lived a very normal and peaceful life. The great partition resulted in mass migration of people across the newly formed borders and carried with it unimaginable brutality, ordeal and devastation. Even in the contemporary situation, the long-term consequences of partition are manifested. Moreover, such a perception is gaining ground that partition was not just an event that took place and everything was stable, rather, it brought with it numerous other problems.

H. S. Gill's *Ashes and Petals* focuses on the approach of Risaldar Santa Singh, the protagonist presents the idea of Sikh community and nationhood that is represented through the role of the protagonist Risaldar Santa Singh who overtly and sprightly discards the proposal of Ajit Singh, his grandson who intends to marry Salma. Santa Singh's refusal of Salma to accept her as his daughter-in-law shows his vindictive stance headed for the Muslims. He has developed this type of downbeat approach towards the Muslims because of the trauma of the past. However, Ajit's approval of Salma divulges the transformation in Sikhs' attitude towards the Muslims. This alteration surfaces in Ajit as Salma's brother Aslam forfeits his life in saving him. It shows Ajit is not willingly ready to accept Salma as a life partner. He does so because of Aslam's help in the past. He intends to marry her not because she is from Muslim family but because her brother truly helped him in the past. In this way, her intention to marry Salma is not purely unconditional. But it is conditional love and his desire to marry her is also conditional. Even though Ajit seems quite fundamental in his duty and tends to wed an inter-religious caste girl, his acceptance is not based on his own choice.

Furthermore, in the backdrop of brutal bloodshed, Risaldar Santa Singh had to kill his fourteen years old granddaughter Baljeet to save her from physical abuse by Muslims. Santa Singh can never reconcile with a Muslim but his grandson Ajit Singh falls in love with a Muslim girl Salma. He also makes constant attempts to convince Risaldar that if some people are brutal in this world, there are generous too, if bad exists in this world; there is goodness too. Moreover, love can not be bounded in terms of cast and religion. He is very firm in his decision to marry Salma. He stands for changing perspective of people who want the violence and hatred to be stopped at once for the peace and harmony in the society.

The present masterpiece states the defeat of kindness among the Muslims and non-Muslims. It describes the end of communal harmony in partition violence in 1947 and it also shows the quest for communal harmony as the writer shows love affair between Ajit and Salma. There was the bond of communal ties before the partition between the Muslims and non-Muslims and such bond ended in partition and the writer again tries to establish such communal harmony though the job is difficult and challenging as he describes:

In the pre-partition days...the Muslim and the Jat Sardar had toiled together and appreciated each other's ways, even though so divergent. The Muslim was the artisan, the cobbler and the potter. The Jat farmer needed all this help in his fields. The two grew up in the village, helping each other. In 1947, when partition came about, the Muslims moved away. The village ties between the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus broke and such ties cannot be restored overnight. (128)

The novel illustrates the train tragedy vibrantly and assiduously. The travelers stand in utter confusion. The actual atrocity of the Muslim attack in the train is described: On the train, all was utter confusion. The marauders came with spears, swords, bamboo lathis, rifles and muskets. When the first wave rushed on to the stricken train someone fired into the big engine loco light and after that there was no light anywhere. There were more than two hundred goondas on foot and horse-back, camels and cycles, letting off blood curdling cries of "Allah-o-Akbar", abusing their mothers and their fathers and sisters, laughing sinister laughs that rang far into the night. The sweat of fear trickled down the necks of the people in the train. (7)

The train tragedy gives a glimpse of the dangerous days of the post-independence period as well. Remembering the event of train tragedy, Sardar Santa Singh expresses surprise, bitterness and embarrassment when his tall, brave and gentle Ajit seeks his permission to marry Salma, "... what have you come down to, my grandson? Have you forgotten Baljeeto, your sister? Your poor sister. I had to shoot dead in the train? Have you forgotten the partition and the Musalmans?" (180). It shows Santa Singh never wants to compromise with the Muslims due to the deep-rooted trauma of the past but Ajit requests him to forget the past and continue the harmonious relation with the Muslims. Ajit says that basically there is no distinction between the Muslims and non-Muslims and hence should live together just like in pre-independent India. Ajit expresses his firm determination to marry Salma. He thinks that she is the best girl of his choice. He says that the contribution of her brother Aslam is not of less importance as he saves him from the attack of the Muslims. So he asks his grandfather to extend his blessings to marry Salma:

Her brother died saving me. I owe my life to him. And you say She is a Musalman. Is that a crime? After '47 aren't we all here? All sitting and eating, living and dying together. Before partition weren't we all the same? Have you forgotten Mida, Gama and Rauf, all your friends in the village in Pakistan? Are we any different, any of us? Bapu just think. You think I have forgotten Baljeeto. Or even a single moment of that bloody train. But how long will we keep on simmering and poisoning each other's minds? Out there, on the front, I have seen all the blood mingle. But never did anyone say it was Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Jat or Muslim blood... (180)

Ajit argues that Aslam and his Sister Salma should not be seen as others. If Aslam was not positive to him he would not save him even by sacrificing his own life. Praising Aslam's adventurous

and noble sacrifice Ajit Speaks: Santa Singh sees the saving figure of dead Aslam. He again remembers the bloody train. He fears his neighbours. Such thought makes him strong and he leaves the scene in tears without responding to his grandson's request. For Santa Singh, Salma is alien. Ajit's insistence makes him feel very unhappy. Salma feels hurt at Santa Singh's contempt for her community. Ajit regrets that his Dapu still lives in 1947. Ajit wants Salma to stay as his wife and he accomplishes his desire by going in for civil marriage. Salma shows her awareness of inter-caste marriages and she knows there should be no marriage between the Sikhs and the Muslim. She makes no secret of her unhappiness at Ajit's affairs. Referring to inter-caste marriages of this kind, she says:

But how many such marriages are there? You read what you like to read. Sure, I have read of the golden wedding made especially in heaven for the Sindhi marrying the Goan girl. Or the modern Bihar marrying the foreign- returned Punjabi. But never in my life have I heard of Muslim marrying a Sikh.... You seem to forget '47. Anyhow, I tell you, I am not very happy with all this. Best if the Sikhs marry Sikhs, and the Muslims, Muslims. These things just don't work out in our country, no what you say. (116)

Sardar Santa Singh's final presence at the grand ceremony where Ajit Singh is posthumously awarded The Mahabir Chakra for lying down his life gallantly for the motherland gives him great relief. He affectionately asks Salma to proceed to receive the award. His sense of relief and joy, emanating from the acceptance of Salma as his granddaughter-in-law becomes obvious. The novel asserts that the spirit of love is stronger than that of hate. Salma's bold expression of love in front of her brother Aslam shows she is ready to sacrifice for the sake of love and she seems quite radical in her mission and then intends to challenge the religious obstacles placing love in supreme position. Her bold and radical attitude can be felt in her expression as she exposes her feelings with her brother Aslam before he is killed:

You can abuse your sister and curse her. When you come back, you can drag her out of the house and throw stones at her. But Aslam, there is only one I will ever love and that is Ajit... If ever I marry, in this world or next, it will be Ajit. Aslam Bhaiya, please look after him and he is still with you. Please. (169)

Conclusion:

Focussing upon the socio-political upheavals of the time, the novel throws light upon the utter need of religious amalgamation. As Ustad Danman very aptly puts it: *We were ruined in the name of freedom and so were you. We were looted unawares for we were asleep and so were you. The red eyes reveal that we have wept and so have you.* (1956:11). Hence, it is the time for reconciliation for the betterment of society as a whole.

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