

SUFFERING AND DISILLUSIONMENT IN INTIZER HUSSAIN'S NOVEL '*BASTI*'

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Abstract:

'Basti' is a well-received novel by the Pakistani novelist Intizar Husain originally published in Urdu in 1979. It caught attention of the readers worldwide with its translation in English by Frances W. Pritchett and introduction by Asif Farrukhi in 2007. The novel 'Basti' broadly explores the recapture of past through the reminiscence of a pluralistic culture of the community before Partition. It is a sincere inquiry into the psychological and emotional approaches of the partition and its' impact on human lives. The novelist peeps into the inner self of its protagonist Jakir migrated to Pakistan from India in 1947 with broad focus on the migration of Indian Muslims to Pakistan. The reading of Basti brings forth the issues related to migration and its physical and psychological implications. These implications create vacuum and sense of loss, disillusionment and frustration in the characters bringing in permanent feeling of loss of homeland and self.

Keywords: *Suffering, Disillusionment, Intizer Hussain, Basti.*

'Basti' is a well-received novel by the Pakistani novelist Intizar Husain originally published in Urdu in 1979. It caught attention of the readers worldwide with its translation in English by Frances W. Pritchett and introduction by Asif Farrukhi in 2007. It is appreciated as the novel of serious consideration from Pakistan and for its brilliant inventive reckoning with the violent history of country during the period from 1947 to 1971; it was the period in the history of the country whose violent movements, ambitions and uncertainties increasingly caused concern to the mankind from the rest of the world.

The novel is sweeping from different dimensions; it begins with an India still under British rule before the Second World War and extends past the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971. Initial impression about the novel is that it might be the historical novel; however, it isn't standard historical fare. Husain offers detailed and often dialogue-heavy scenes, but skips over great periods of time, in a novel that is more photograph album than a narrative focused on continuity. He also raises the pertinent issue which reflects his own association with the particular society and the relationship between man and God. There is also a continued tussle between the institutions of faith and the skeptical temper. However, mainly it foregrounds the sufferings and disillusionment of the hero, Jakir, his Abba, his friends in the wake of partition of Pakistan in 1971 interrogate the very idea of the formation of Pakistan and declares it as a failed narrative.

The novel '*Basti*' broadly explores the recapture of past through the reminiscence of a pluralistic culture of the community before Partition. It is a sincere inquiry into the psychological and emotional approaches of the partition and its' impact on human lives. The novelist peeps into the inner self of its protagonist Jakir migrated to Pakistan from India in 1947 with broad focus on the migration of Indian Muslims to Pakistan. The migratory movement for the novelist does not stick only to the level of shifting from one country to another; it however, extends to the level of religion; which, the novelist infuses with a wider significance in the context of the History of Islam; for him the migration to a new country unlocked the memory of a recurring pattern of migration, the hijrat.

The migratory movements are always painful; people of Pakistan experienced it during 1947 and even in 1971. It was a religion which forced them to migrate during partition after Indian and Pakistan were

separated followed by communal riots; however, migration of 1971 brought into a new lesson that even religion cannot overcome partition as it caused partition on the basis of language. Local communities of people experienced trauma of partition of 1947; they were compelled to reorganize and reconstruct themselves. The other Partition in 1971, repeated the sense and sensibility once again disillusioning and compelling them to shift back at their past to search for the relevance of such divisions as well as their roots and origin. The novelist in the novel, oscillates between the cities of the present, of memory and of myth; the word originally means settlement; it locates the settlement of imagination and reality ranging from Lahore, Delhi, Rupnagar, Vyaspur and Shyamnagar cities. However, the novel moves from the particular to the universal; from history to myth, from memory to nightmare and from Utopia to Apocalypse.

'*Basti*' is a story of Zakir who is the chief protagonist, son of the Maulana Abba Jan of Rupnagar. The Maulana is deeply religious, a Shiite; he strongly opposes new changes. Khvajah who has two sons Salamat and Karamat is Abba Jan's close friend. Bi Amma is Zakir's paternal grandmother. Ammi Jan's sister Khalah Jan has two daughters Tahirah and Sabirah. However, the native of the novel is designed and presented from the point of view of Zakir. By profession, Zakir is a professor of history in West Pakistan, just before the 1971 war. After he has arrived Pakistan, Zakir has forgotten his past; which, he attempts to memorize. The attempt of memorization is twofold: search for his self-identity through his personal history, and to seek the cause of the decline of a city, a cultural tradition, and of humanity itself. Husain puts it: as "*the days pass and the purity of the first day wanes with the revolution of days. (Basti 83)*". Centered on the theme of suffering and disillusionment, the novelist explores Zakir's memories of his early childhood in Rupnagar; it is a village located in Uttar Pradesh. The novelist metaphorically explains the purity as when the world was new and the sky fresh and the earth not yet soiled" (*Basti 9*). He further writes: When I came here the lanes were clean and the houses spotless. Now the lanes are filthy and the houses soiled (*Basti 81*). The world has witnessed that the massive migratory movement in Pakistan and India has taken place in 1947. It was the time of partition of British India. However, the policy makers and administrators did not anticipate intensity and consequences of the political decision; but the fact is that more than ten million people experienced the scorching flames causing adverse effects on their lives. The process of dispersion takes place during migration. It is not merely physical shifting from one place to another. It is intricate process involving breaking away from the culture into which one is born and deeply rooted and in which one's sense of belonging in society was assured and replacing one in a new culture. It forcefully leads to the transfer of memories, culture, psychological implications, experience amnesia and build imaginary homelands experiencing a great loss. The novel, '*Basti*' at one level presents historiography and physical violence during the trauma of partition; however, it does not limit itself to only historiography but extends to trace the mental anguish, sufferings and disillusionment during the process. Thus, the narrative informs that the early stage of migration narrative by the novelist through protagonist points out that the migration from India to Pakistan on massive level in a cultural context of Islam as the *Hijrat* of Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Madina. The fact of the migration later twists to the apex level with the experience of post migration situation in Pakistan at social and political level. However, the experience of migration has brought in the elements of frustration, lost, nagging sense of guilt, homelessness, fade away of culture and loss of existence and so on. Overall it's a disruptive experience creating a continuous sense of insecurity, uprooting and marginalization leading to identity as a refugee. Edward Said has also identified dual effects of migration. In his work *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said stresses exile or dispersion as a both an actual and a metaphorical condition. He conceives of the exile as someone who exists "*in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another*" (Said 49). Said resonates further effects of migration movements which he states as exile as it is restless stage causing unsettlement forcing to lose stability of being at home. Similarly, Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homeland* puts

forth the fact of the identity after migration that the men in migration neither forget the past nor they accept new culture at its par; they imagine the reality building imaginary homelands.

The novelist pronounces the connotations of migration in the novel as stated by Edward Said and Salman Rushdie. Intizer Husain similarly parallels feeling of agony emerged out of dispersion and separation which is a part and parcel of migration. The protagonist suffers the migration from land of his childhood. The novelist had dramatized the psychological implications of loss of homeland and estrangement. At an insider of migratory movement, Zakir physically and psychologically suggests dislocation; experiencing rootless situation.

The protagonist, Zakir experiences migration and displacement at number of times. His first displacement begins at the occasion when he along with his Abba Jan and family members shift to Vyaspur after death of his old mother. During the process of shifting, they experience they witness rallies, procession and sounds of gun shots. From the roof of house, burning ghats are visible to them. These scenes bring disturbance brings in terrifying feeling in a day to day life. After the first migration, Zakir faces second migration and he is forced to shift Lahore with his family. The second migration takes place after partition of his country. Migration at this stage brings a lot of change in his life. Lahore city becomes his place of action; however, most of the events happen elsewhere. The narrative design and craft informs developments in other cities through friends and residents form the city at cafes, streets and family members. However, the information is received in fragmentation. During the course he experiences disturbing dreams, memories and anxieties. Although, Zakir is migrated with his family, he is not seen to be adjusted there completely. For it is natural that people are not able to adjust in the new land. At the every stage and instance of day to day life they face a lot of problem. Zakir himself, Friend Afzal and mother also wonder about the landscape and seasons of the country to which they have migrated to capture their moral and creative imagination through different entities of nature such as trees, birds, rain; which is not similar to that of they left in the old land. Feeling of lack of adjustment gives them sense that the nature is the migrated land is no longer to be richly woven to that they have witnessed in their old land. The texture of newly nature in the new migrated land fails to bring them a feeling of bliss of Nirvana, which they witnessed before. As a result, they repeated recall their own *basti* of the past of Rupanagar. For them, every object and location of Rupanagar carries aroma of meaningfulness and vitality of living. On the other hand, they experience and gather a feeling of realization that it is difficult to find similar meaning and objective of life in new home in Pakistan; the new home in Pakistan is a strange and unfamiliar land for them. The question always disturbs Zakir after migration to new land of Pakistan as to why landscapes and seasons of adopted land fail to locate and inspire his imagination in a similar way to his previous land. For him, every object over there from previous settlement, *basti* before migration has been associated with imagination and meaningfulness. His attempt to associate meaning with neem tree meets to failure. Zakir writes:

'Afzal, I [Zakir] asked casually, 'aren't there any neem trees here?'

Why not? Come on, I'll show you.'

He took me around the park. Then he brought me beneath a tree and stopped me: 'Here's your neem tree.'

I looked at it closely. 'Yar, this is a Persian lilac.'

He was embarrassed. 'Well, it doesn't matter, there's nothing wrong with the Persian lilac ...'

There's a neem tree here, I'll have to search for it.'

But we never had to search for neem trees! In the afternoons when the desert wind blew, and in the rainy July days, their greenness always proclaimed their presence (Basti 96-7).

Migration to the new land shifts status of a person as a refugee; a refugee takes shelter, solace at the

host; where he has no word of freedom or independence. The novel gives a feeling of frustration, disillusionment and suffering at the level of quest of identity. The novelist narrates difficulties faced by refugees especially focus on the migration movement on the border in 1947. The life of migrated people is a life of refugees who live in distress and misery. At one side they experience loss of homeland and feeling of homelessness. The thought of uprootedness is a mental torture for them.

The refugees told whole long epics about those whom they had left behind...They told about those whom they had left behind....They told about those who had set out with them...left on unknown roads, unshrouded and unburied...Their hearts overflowed, and their eyes filled with tears (Basti 69).

Different instances are stated in the novel where different characters remind of their ancestral lands. Zakir's father reminds of ancestral land over the burial; grandmother always insisted to take her back for the flood must have gone down her place. The characters always yearn in a hope to return to their homeland. They live in virtual hope for future dreaming about their homeland; however, disillusionment creeps in and proves to be torturing them meeting hopeless reality.

At initial stage, migratory movement is welcoming act for them, even to protagonist, Zakir; however, feeling of freshness is darkened with the feeling of disillusionment. He writes:

As he lay in the large, well-lit room, he poignantly remembered the shabby room he had left behind. The sleep that had come into his eyes vanished.....The image of his room was fixed in his brain. Then he covered his face with the sheet and wept (Basti 68).

And at later stage, (....) and for the room in which i spread out my bedding I felt no affection at all. I found myself constantly remembering the room I'd left behind (Basti 73).

The darkened and soiled new land leads to frustration and disillusionment. The further stage of suffering is observed through the vacuum created by spiritual and social levels. Dislocation at these levels is most terrifying of all tortures; as a result, Zakir is seen to be failed to be accommodated himself on moral, physical grounds where he is forced to develop new identity. Even after long span of residence over there in a new land, he does not overcome a sense of bewilderment. Thus, reading of *Basti* brings forth the issues related to migration and its physical and psychological implications. These implications create vacuum and sense of loss, disillusionment and frustration in the characters bringing in permanent feeling of loss of homeland and self.

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