



Novel Insights, An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Research Journal

ISSN: 3048-6572

Volume-I, Issue-I, August 2024, Page No.67-73

Published by Uttarsuri, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://novelinsights.in/>

DOI: 10.69655/novelinsight.vol.1.issue.01W.006

Blood in Partition Trains: An Everlasting Emblem of Communal Violence and Massacre in Railway

Sudipta sardar

Vice Principal, Rabindra Bharati Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal, India

Received: 08.04.2024; Accepted: 12.05.2024; Available online: 31.08.2024

©2024 The Author(s). Published by Uttarsuri Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract:

The Partition of India in 1947 carried a horrific account of railway massacre of the immigrants. Thousands of people were slaughtered, raped, abducted or looted inhumanly. Trains being the primary medium of transport for the immigrants coming from hundreds of kilometers away to either India or Pakistan had no option but to immigrate by the trains. Such people faced the highest amount of communal violence while crossing the borders. Trains carried the blood strains and dead bodies of hundreds of men, women and even children. The traumatic experience of the journey was such that many were afraid to take the trains later on and walked on foot to cross borders. Because at that time the only image that came upon their mind was the blood trains. It was so horrific in nature that many sufferers saw such trains in a ghostly appearance. Such blood trains of the partition carried multiple significance, they were an embodiment of the pangs of partition, a painful history of migration, horrific nature of communal violence and an emblem for the destruction of humanity as well as administrative management, be it the government or the railway management.

Keywords: Blood, Death, Violence, Railway Management, Fear and Anguish, Partition.

Introduction: Trains were the only medium of transport which was able to transport thousands of people from different parts of India and from the newly established nation of Pakistan. Many Muslims from India immigrated to Pakistan and Hindus from that region crossed borders to come to India for a safe habitation. Such mass migration was an outcome

of the rising communal violence in both the nations. Therefore, passengers or the immigrants who traveled through such railways feared and trembled in particular stations which were associated and marked for tremendous amount of communal violence. Several such anecdotes and accounts of such partition sufferers who travelled through the trains to migrate opened up many such aspects of the fatal nature of such journeys. Many travelled for days and hours without food and water because of their fear to come down from the trains only to get killed.ⁱ They had no option but to migrate because of the instances such as on August 15, where Lahore groaned under the ‘fury of fire’; about 3000 persons were massacred and more than 1600 houses were set on fire.ⁱⁱ Hundreds of people were killed, women were raped and trains were looted at that time. In a particular instance on 3 rd September 1947 an armed military attacked a train going towards Pakistan at Fatehgarh station and killed many; few survivors escaped, and reached Karachi.ⁱⁱⁱ The amount of blood and dead people the trains carried at that time was so much that the trains color changed from gray to blood red. The images of trains caught on camera or in drawings appeared ghostly with so much dead bodies, scattered clothes and limbs of human bodies. There were Partition trains coming to Pakistan with bodies in the bogies, male bodies and female bodies were kept in separate bogies with only the head and body up to the waist and no body parts attached to it.^{iv} Therefore, the other side of the partition account of for the joy of the coming trains and the departure was very horrific and blood laden. Very often trains came with only dead bodies, such bodies even had no clothes on them and the number of dead bodies was so much so that the bystanders were out of clothes and wrapped the bodies in newspaper to bury them.^v

Partition’s Impact upon Railways: Partition also led to the geographical separation of many railway lines, workshops, and facilities. The partition resulted in the division of railway networks, workshops, and staff across the two new countries. This had a significant impact on the operation and management of the railways. Many railway lines that previously ran through undivided India now crossed international borders, which complicated operations. The division of the railways led to the displacement of staff members who belonged to the “wrong” religious community according to the newly established borders. This displacement often resulted in a shortage of skilled personnel in both India and Pakistan, affecting the smooth functioning of the railways. The partition led to massive population movements and violence, causing disruptions in railway services. Trains were often targets of violence, leading to loss of life and damage to railway infrastructure.

The partition resulted in a massive refugee crisis, with millions of people migrating across the borders to be with their respective religious communities. Trains were overloaded with refugees, leading to overcrowding and difficult conditions. Both India and Pakistan had to reorganize their railway systems to suit their own administrative and operational needs. This process involved reassigning personnel, redistributing assets, and making decisions about which railway lines and facilities would be retained by each country. The division of the railways had economic implications as well. Industries that were dependent

on raw materials transported by railways were affected by the disruption in services and the division of supply chains. The division of railway infrastructure was not just about dividing existing assets but also about determining how to share common assets like tracks, stations, and workshops that were located near the newly established borders. In the years following the partition, both India and Pakistan worked on reorganizing their respective railway systems to address the challenges posed by the division. While the circumstances during the partition led to significant disruptions and challenges in the railway sector, both countries eventually managed to stabilize their railway operations and develop their own independent systems.

Massacre in Partition Trains: The partition of India in 1947 was accompanied by widespread violence and bloodshed, and the railways were not immune to these horrors. Trains became tragic symbols of the violence and displacement that occurred during this tumultuous period. Many incidents involving bloodshed and violence occurred on trains and at railway stations during the partition. One of the most infamous incidents was the “Train Massacre” that took place on August 15, 1947, in which a train carrying refugees was attacked near the town of Sheikhpura (now in Pakistan). The train was reportedly carrying both Hindu and Sikh refugees, and it is estimated that hundreds of people were killed in the attack. This tragic event highlighted the brutal violence that unfolded during the partition. Trains were often targets of violence, with communal mobs attacking passengers based on their religious identity. People were dragged off trains, women were abducted, and passengers were killed in some cases. This violence was a result of the deep communal tensions that had been exacerbated by the partition. The partition led to massive migration as people sought to move to areas where their religious community was in the majority. Trains were overloaded with refugees, leading to overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and even deaths due to disease, hunger, and exhaustion. However, the majority of the partition trains’ bloodshed occurred in the region of Pakistan, while as far as Bengal was concerned the cases of violence on trains were very few and limited to August 1946 riots.^{vi} And Punjab was the principal center of the violence.^{vii}

Representation of Partition Railway: The partition of India had been a significant theme in Indian literature and cinema, portraying both the positive and negative aspects of the era. Authors and filmmakers had explored the human emotions, tragedies, and complexities associated with the partition, depicting a wide range of experiences. There had been several such representations of partition railways which projected the positive perspective of the partition railways. The novel “Train to Pakistan” by Khushwant Singh, portrayed the challenges and tragedies of the partition, but it also emphasized the shared humanity and compassion that individuals from different communities displayed during the tumultuous times.^{viii} The story revolved around a fictional village near the border and highlights instances of people helping each other regardless of their religious identities. In the movie “Pinjar” (2003), based on the novel of the same name by Amrita Pritam, “Pinjar” told the story of a Hindu woman who was abducted by a Muslim man during the partition. The

movie explored themes of empathy, courage, and resilience amidst the chaos of the partition.

However, the negative images of the partition trains and railway had been very horrific. In the novel, “Tamas” by Bhisham Sahni, later adapted into a television series, delved into the horrors of partition, depicting the violence, chaos, and atrocities that took place. The narrative focused on the impact of partition on a diverse group of characters, highlighting the darkness and brutality of those times. Similarly in the movie “Garam Hawa” (1973): Directed by M.S. Sathyu, this film portrayed the experiences of a Muslim family in Agra as they grappled with the decision of whether to migrate to Pakistan or stay in India. The film offered a grim and realistic portrayal of the dilemmas and challenges faced by individuals and families during the partition.

However, there had been novels and cinemas which presented the partition circumstances regarding the railways in a very balanced approach. The novel “Ice-Candy Man” (also known as “Cracking India”) by Bapsi Sidhwa, captured the complexity of the partition through the eyes of a young girl from a Parsi family and projected the most damaging effect of the sub-continent.^{ix} The story presented both positive and negative aspects, highlighting friendships across religious lines as well as the brutality and suffering. The movie “1947: Earth” (1998), based on Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel, was a poignant exploration of the partition from the perspective of a young girl with polio. It portrayed the impact of partition on relationships and individuals, presenting a mix of positive and negative emotions. Writer, Saadat Hasan Manto in his writings pointed out that the creation of Pakistan as both a personal and a communal disaster.^x

Therefore, both literature and cinema had played a crucial role in helping people understand the human experiences during the partition. These stories contributed to a deeper understanding of the events, emotions, and consequences of that era, presenting a nuanced and multifaceted view of the partition and its impact on society. The railways in fact acquire the saddest, most poignant and the bloodiest representation.^{xi}

Blood and Partition Trains: The term “blood trains” was often used to refer to the trains that carried refugees and passengers during the partition of India in 1947. These trains were called “blood trains” due to the tragic and violent events that occurred on them. The partition of India was accompanied by widespread communal violence, and many of these incidents took place on trains or at railway stations. Even before months of the Partition of 1947, communal riots had already erupted in Rawalpindi district in the month of March where 2,090 people died and 1,142 were seriously injured.^{xii} The circumstances surrounding immigration through partition trains were fraught with danger and uncertainty. The violence and chaos left a tragic imprint on the memories of those who experienced it. The term “blood trains” served as a reminder of the immense human suffering that occurred during this period, as well as the urgent need for understanding, healing, and reconciliation in the aftermath of such traumatic events.

The partition trains symbolized the tragedy of the era. They represented the forced migration, separation of families, and the violence that tore apart communities during the division of India. The term “blood” had also been used metaphorically to highlight the deep emotional scars and trauma left by the events of the partition. The violence and loss of life on partition trains remained ingrained in the cultural and historical memory of the subcontinent. The events on partition trains had a profound impact on the identities of individuals and communities. The violence and bloodshed forever changed how people viewed their neighbors and their own sense of belonging. Again, the term “blood” had been serving as a stark reminder of the human suffering that occurred during the partition. It had been a somber recognition of the atrocities committed and the lives that were forever altered during that tumultuous period. The phrase “blood trains” encapsulates the tragic dimension of the partition’s impact on the railways and the people who traveled on them.

It had been estimated that several hundred thousand to over a million people lost their lives due to violence, communal clashes, and the associated disruptions during the partition. That included incidents on trains, in refugee camps, and during migration. Reports of sexual violence, rape, and abductions were tragically common during the partition. Women were abducted and sold cheap.^{xiii} Women and girls from various religious communities were targeted, and many survivors have recounted their harrowing experiences. However, due to the sensitive nature of these events, many cases went unreported or were not documented adequately. There were widespread instances of loot, arson, and destruction of property during the partition. Trains and railway stations were often targeted for looting. In a particular instance the trains while traveling to Lahore with Muslim passengers were looted and killed passengers, it was assumed that they were Hindus and Sikhs as through their dialects it was obvious.^{xiv}

Many people were forced to travel in such trains which were bound to go through such immense horror of bloodshed and possibly death, only because of their religious belief.^{xv} The reason behind such kind of traveling was forced by various reasons. Many people were forced to travel on partition trains due to the outbreak of communal violence in their regions. As violence escalated, individuals and families felt compelled to leave their homes to seek safety in areas where their religious community was in the majority. The violence and chaos of the partition created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. In some cases, families decided to send their women and children on partition trains to protect them from potential harm. Women were particularly vulnerable to violence during the partition, and families sought to ensure their safety by sending them away. In certain instances, local authorities or community leaders advised or pressured people to leave their homes and migrate to areas where their religious. Community was in the majority. This was often seen as a way to ensure safety and avoid violence.

However, many people chose not to travel by such “death trains” even after such an ambience.^{xvi} Many people chose not to travel on partition trains because of a deep emotional attachment to their homes and communities. They were reluctant to leave behind their ancestral homes and the places where they had spent their lives. Some individuals believed

that the violence would subside and that their communities would eventually be able to live peacefully together. They chose to stay in the hope of reconciliation and maintaining the diverse fabric of their neighborhoods. The journey on partition trains was perilous, with overcrowding, violence, and uncertain conditions. Some people, especially the elderly and infirm, chose not to travel due to the physical and emotional toll that the journey would take. Certain individuals were committed to the idea of inter-community coexistence. They chose not to travel as an act of resistance against the violence and a way of asserting their belief in communal harmony. Many people did not have the means to travel, either due to financial constraints or the inability to secure tickets for partition trains. They were effectively stranded in their regions, even if they wanted to leave. Hence, the decision to travel or not during the partition was shaped by a complex interplay of personal, communal, and practical factors. It's important to recognize that each individual's experience was unique, and their decisions were influenced by their specific circumstances and perspectives on the unfolding events.

Conclusion: Therefore, it was always the complexity of the circumstances which made them do so. But, for those who wanted to immigrate, faced bloodshed and some of them faced death. It was simply because of the communal violence and some of the partition mongers that resulted in the forced conversion of the “freedom trains” into “blood trains”. There had been several records and lived experience narratives of the partition sufferers and those who had travelled in such partition trains specifically introduced to transport immigrants from India to Pakistan and vice-versa, in such narratives we had found that they went through a traumatic experience of their journey at that time. Both the Hindus and the Muslims were perhaps equally responsible for killing people.^{xviii} People not only feared about their whereabouts and relocation but also feared of losing the lives of their loved ones and themselves. Those of the family members and relatives of such immigrants were constantly in fear that they were to see them again or not. Such was the uncertainty of traveling in such partition trains. Not only that even in several stations, such trains had to delay for a longer duration of time because of the uprooting of tracks and destroying of the tracks. In such times, those people met utmost misery of their lives. That's why the projection of the partition trains had been primarily seen as blood trains. There was very few and perhaps none, who felt peace and travelled in comfort in their journey. Therefore, the anxiety, restlessness, uncertainty, brutality of the communal violence, violation on women's chastity, abduction, and loot and so on resulted in picturing such trains as horror trains, ghost trains, blood trains and so on.

References:

- i. S. Ratnaprasad Kolli, Gomatam Mohana Charyulu, “Trauma of Partition: A Study on Khushwant Singh's ‘Train to Pakistan’”, *AIJRELPLS*, Vol.6, Issue.4, 2021, p.3

-
- ii. Sukhdev Singh Sohal, “Pangs of Partition: Lahore in 1947”, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress , 2003, Vol. 64 (2003), p.1069
 - iii. Kanwaljit Kaur, Communal Violence in Princely States During Partition (1947), Proceedings of the Indian History Congress , 2011, Vol. 72, PART-I , 2011, p.933
 - iv. Tania Qureshi, “Untold Scenes Witnessed at Lahore’s Railway Station in 1947”, Daily Times, August 13, 2018, p. 2
 - v. Ibid, p.3
 - vi. Debarshi Basu, ”Changing Tracks and Charting New Territories : The ‘Train’ Motif in Bengal Partition Stories of 1947”, Journal of Department of English, Vidyasagar University, Vol.10, 2012-2013, p.47
 - vii. William Dalrymple, The Great Divide: The Violent Legacy of Indian Partition, The New Yorker, June 22, 2015
 - viii. Rama Islam, Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, “Harmony, Violence and Humanity: Reminiscing Partition 1947 in Light of Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan”, p.46
 - ix. K.D. Jadeja, The Partition of India and Its Reflections in Kushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan and Bapsi Sidhwa’s Ice Candy Man: A Comparative Study, Holos, Vol.3, 2015, p.416
 - x. William Dalrymple, “The Great Divide: The Violent Legacy of Indian Partition”, The New Yorker, June 22, 2015
 - xi. Spectrum, The Tribune, August 5, 2007, p.1
 - xii. Ravinder Kaur, The Last Journey: Exploring Social Class in the 1947 Partition Migration, Economic and Political Weekly, Jun. 3-9, 2006, Vol. 41, No. 22, June 2006,p. 2222
 - xiii. S. Ratnaprasad Kolli, Gomatam Mohana Charyulu, “Trauma of Partition: A Study on Khushwant Singh’s ‘Train to Pakistan’”, AIJRELPLS, Vol.6, Issue.4, 2021, p.3
 - xiv. Tania Qureshi, “Untold Scenes Witnessed at Lahore’s Railway Station in 1947”, Daily Times, August 13, 2018, p.1
 - xv. Rama Islam, Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, “Harmony, Violence and Humanity: Reminiscing Partition 1947 in Light of Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan”, p.45
 - xvi. Vinita Belani, “A 1947 Partition Tale - Thwarting the Ghost Train”, Kasoval 1947, p.2
 - xvii.S.S.RatnaprasadKolli,GomatamMohanaCharyulu,”TraumaofPartition:ASTudyonKhuswant Singh’s ‘Traint To Pakistan’,AIJRELPLS,Vol.6,Issue.4, 2021, p.2