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Ram Chandra Guha's *India After Gandhi* as a Historical Novel

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Abstract Ram Chandra Guha's *India After Gandhi* is a historical novel which minutely describes the major and minor incidents after partition. The novelist seemed to be an observer who observed all what happened on national stage after partition. He has dealt with a wide array of topics like integration of princely states to linguistic issues, from wars with China to liberation of Bangladesh, from Nehru's non-alignment to Indira's emergency, from Mandal commission to Babri Masjid demolition, from Kashmir troubles to Naga insurgency, from Khalistan to river disputes, from Kashmir dispute to LTTE troubles, from refugee issues to Operation Blue star, from party politics to regional leaders and from refugee problems to corrupt Congress leaders among many others. The novel is a commentary on the post-independent India. It highlights the issues a postcolonial nation usually faces as an aftermath of colonial policies in the colonized countries.

Keywords: Historical narrative, Post-colonial, post-independence, war.

Ram Chandra Guha's *India After Gandhi* is a record of post-independence post-partition history. He has attempted to throw light on almost all the major incidents since Gandhi departed from this world. The non-fiction deals with the historical facts. Everything that happened after independence and partition is well recorded in the novel. He has dealt with a wide array of topics like integration of princely states to linguistic issues, from wars with China to liberation of Bangladesh, from Nehru's non-alignment to Indira's emergency, from Mandal commission to Babri Masjid demolition, from Kashmir troubles to Naga insurgency, from Khalistan to river disputes, from Kashmir dispute to LTTE troubles, from



refugee issues to Operation Blue star, from party politics to regional leaders and from refugee problems to corrupt Congress leaders among many others.

The novel seems to be a commentary on the history of India. The novelist has cited several examples quoting foreign newspapers like Daily herald, representatives like Strachey and leaders like Nixon. It helps in determining the idea of India through other nations that time.

The novel deals with the major historical incidents like the integration of princely states in to India and the newly created state Pakistan. The novel provides a commentary on all the incidents whether major or minor dealing with the integration of princely states. Guha states an incident when Pakistan refused to obey by the referendum related to Junagarh. Jinnah preferred to the decision of the ruler to join any of the states while India preferred to a democratic way and emphasized more on the will of the public of the concerned states as Guha states:

Pakistan now suggested the withdrawal of all armed forces in the state, and the holding of a plebiscite under an 'impartial interim administration.' Ironically, Pakistan had rejected the idea of a plebiscite in the case of Junagadh. Jinnah's position then was that the will of the ruler would decide which dominion a princely state would join. India instead referred the matter to the will of the people. Having done this in Junagadh, they could not now so easily duck the question in Kashmir. However, the Indian government insisted a plebiscite could be conducted under a National Conference administration whose leader, Sheikh Abdullah, was the 'most popular political leader in the state. (Guha 67-68)

Guha has also described India's war with China. It describes the defeat not only of India but also of Nehru as Prime Minister.

Apart from the several thousand Indian soldiers dead or injured, the casualties of the China war included the chief of army staff, General P. N. Thapar (who resigned, citing ill health), the failed strategic thinker Lieutenant General B. M. Kaul (who was



retired prematurely) and the defense minister, V. K. Krishna Menon (who was sacked). A greater casualty still was the reputation of Jawaharlal Nehru. The border war was Nehru's most consequential failure in fifteen years as prime minister. (Guha 249)

The novel criticizes Nehru for not being able to anticipate the border issue with China that subsequently resulted into war with China. Isaac Chotiner states:

Some years later, India found itself unprepared for a border war with China that had long been percolating. Guha argues persuasively that Nehru, the old ant colonialist, ignored China's sensitivity about the border, which the Chinese saw as an illegitimate boundary drawn by the British. (The New York Times)

Guha has described how the defeat of India with China resulted into defame of Nehru. It had a negative impact of Nehru on his party:

The China war had weakened Nehru's position not just in India or the world, but within the Congress Party itself. The focus of decision-making had now shifted from the prime minister's home to the Congress Parliamentary Party. Unlike in the past, Nehru could no longer get the party to always do his bidding in matters big and small. For instance, he had not welcomed the Kamaraj plan, on the grounds that it would deplete his government of experience and talent. (Guha 254)

The novel describes how despite all the oppositions in the party, Nehru continued his reforms in the country. Despite all the obstructions, Nehru kept on working for the advancement of women, minorities and untouchables. He continued his never tiring attempts to work for the downtrodden people. He constitutionalized all these reforms with great efforts as Isaac Chotiner states:

Despite enormous obstacles within his own Congress Party, Nehru set out to ensure more rights for women and the downtrodden. Guha expertly traces Nehru's leadership in the writing of India's Constitution, where legislators overcame



potentially fatal disagreements over issues like what language the document would appear in. The finished product, which Guha refers to as a liberal, humanist credo, not only protected numerous basic rights but also provided reservations for “untouchables.” (The New York Times)

Guha has also described the state of emergency in his novel. He describes how Indira Gandhi implemented the emergency in the country and civil rights were suspended because of emergency. Guha mentions the emergency in his novel:

Once the decision was taken, it was executed with remarkable swiftness. On the 25th, S. S. Ray helped draft an ordinance declaring a state of internal emergency, which a pliant president, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad, signed as soon as it was put in front of him. That night the power supply to all of Delhi’s newspaper offices was switched off, so that there were no editions on the 26th. Police swooped down on the opposition leaders, taking JP, Morarji Desai and many others off to jail. The next day the public of Delhi, and of India as a whole, was told by state-controlled radio that an emergency had been declared, and all civil liberties suspended. (Guha 353)

As Guha has taken into account all the major political incidents after Gandhi, he has also described the historical incidents of Blue star and demand of Khalistan as he states in these words:

Brar was briefed by two lieutenant generals, Sundarji and Dayal. The government, he was told, believed that the situation in the Punjab had passed out of control of the civil administration. The centre’s attempts to arrive at a settlement with Akalis had run aground. The Akalis had failed to convince Bhindranwale to dismantle the fortifications and leave the temple and they were themselves getting more militant. The Akali leader Sant Longowal had announced that on 3 June he would lead a movement to stop the passage of grain from the state. A siege was considered, and rejected, because of the fear of a rebellion in the countryside. The prime minister had thus decided, ‘after much reluctance’, that the militants had to be flushed out. Brar was asked to plan and lead what was being called ‘Operation Bluestar’, with the



mandate that it should be finished in forty-eight hours if possible, with no damage to the Golden Temple itself and with minimum loss of life. (Guha 405)

In the prologue, the author remarks that India is an unnatural nation that has several divisions based on caste, language, religion and class. There are more dividing than uniting factors in India. Because of these inevitable divisions, India seems to be a failed democracy as people vote in the name of caste and creed which necessarily does not serve the purpose of a true democracy in world's largest democratic country.

Guha has described the Kashmir issue in a lofty manner. Some complete chapters have been dedicated to the problems in Kashmir. He has called the 1951 elections as 'The Biggest Gamble in History' and has described it in a beautiful manner. Guha also describes the meeting of Security Council between India and Pakistan. He very frankly admits the defeat of India at Security Council. Guha comments on the incident in these words:

Through January and February, the Security Council held several sittings on Kashmir. Pakistan, represented by the superbly gifted orator Sir Zafrullah Khan, was able to present a far better case than India. Khan convinced the delegates that the invasion was a consequence of the tragic riots across northern India in 1946–7; it was a 'natural' reaction of Muslims to the sufferings of their fellows. He accused the Indians of perpetrating 'genocide' in East Punjab, forcing 6 million Muslims to flee to Pakistan. The Kashmir problem was recast as part of the unfinished business of Partition. India suffered a significant symbolic defeat when the Security Council altered the agenda item from the 'Jammu and Kashmir Question' to the 'India-Pakistan Question'. (Guha 67)

Guha has described how Nehru took this defeat seriously and felt regretted going to United Nations as Guha states here:

By now, Nehru bitterly regretted going to the United Nations. He was shocked, he told Mountbatten, to find that 'power politics and not ethics were ruling organization which 'was being completely run by the Americans', who, like the British, 'had made no bones of [their] sympathy for the Pakistan case'. Within the



Cabinet, pressure grew for the renewal of hostilities, for the throwing out of the invaders from northern Kashmir. (Guha 68)

Guha also describes the war of 1948 between India and Pakistan. It describes how India recaptured Kargil that paved way for saving Leh and Ladakh as Guha states here:

The two armies battled on through the later months of 1948. In November both Dras and Kargil were recaptured by the Indians, making Leh and Ladakh safe for the moment. In the same month, the hills around Poonch were also cleared. However, the northern and western parts of Kashmir were still in the control of Pakistan. Some Indian commanders wanted to move on, and asked for the redeployment of three brigades from the plains. Their request was not granted. For one thing, winter was about to set in. (Guha 68-69)

The novel describes how Abdullah spoke at a mosque in order to win the favor of the Muslim on Kashmir issue. Abdullah's emotional speech at the mosque won the hearts of the Muslims and they resolved to be with India as Guha states:

In Srinagar Korbela went to hear Abdullah speak at a mosque. The audience of 4,000 listened 'with rapt attention, their faith and loyalty quite obvious in their faces. Nor could we notice any police, so often used to induce such loyalty.' The Commission then visited Pakistan, where they found that it would not consider any solution, which gave the fate of Kashmir, with its Muslim majority, to India. (Guha 69-70)

Guha's *India After Gandhi* is an account of the major historical incidents of India. It describes in details everything that happened to India after Gandhi passed away. The novel is truly a historical novel as it is a commentary on all the major and minor incidents which happened after partition.



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