

BOOK REVIEW



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JOHN MASTERS' BHOWANI JUNCTION. NEW DELHI: PENGUIN BOOKS, 2007

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The book can be considered to be a part of history and John Masters might have dedicated the novel to the Anglo-Indian communities of India and Pakistan. *Bhowani Junction* is set amidst the turbulence of the British withdrawal from India during the period of transfer of power. It deals with Britain's exodus and the Partition of India. The book is inscribed with respect and admiration to NUMBER 1 DOWN MAIL. The novel is divided into four books and each book is again subdivided into forty chapters. Each book begins with a short description of the major characters in the novel. Book One begins with a description of Patrick Taylor-male, thirty six, Eurasian, unmarried, a non-gazetted officer in the Traffic Department of the Delhi Deccan Railway. Book Two introduces a female protagonist named Victoria Jones-female, twenty eight, Eurasian, unmarried, daughter of Thomas Jones, driver, Delhi Deccan Railway. Book Three introduces Rodney Savage-male, thirty four, English, unmarried; lieutenant colonel commanding 1st Battalion 13th Gurkha Rifles, Indian Army and Book Four takes the readers back to the Anglo-Indian, Patrick Taylor. But the interesting fact is that the readers see Patrick Taylor as a non-gazetted officer in Book one whereas in Book Four Patrick is seen as a person who is under notice of dismissal from the service of the Delhi Deccan Railway.

In this novel, Masters depicts an interesting portrayal of the Anglo Indian community who are closely involved with the Indian Railway system. It is a novel of an Anglo-Indian's search for her identity. It is a wonderful piece of prose that creates a vivid picture of the Raj and Indian society. Because of his incisive eye for detail, Masters brings the Raj alive from the eyes of an Anglo-Indian and beautifully blends love and romance and history. The history is fictionalized and the love ends in a happy note.

Bhowani Junction, a gripping tale of history and romance, is set in a fictitious place called Bhowani Junction. Most of the characters in the novel are engaged in different railway related works. Masters excellently interweaves the dichotomy of the caste system, the political agitation and the communist terrorist activities. The novel begins with a piece of news that a goods train has been derailed and it is

not just a mere derailment but a result of extreme terrorist activities. The story revolves around three characters.

The story revolves around three characters - Patrick Taylor, Victoria Jones and Colonel Savage. The frantic search for Victoria's identity is the chief concern of the novel. Victoria's pathetic plight and predicament represents the predicament of the entire Anglo-Indian community. The tensions, conflicts and challenges faced by the Eurasian community is clearly revealed through Victoria Jones. Victoria knows that when British leaves India, the Anglo-Indians have no existence. They are in a stand still. They are neither a part of Britain nor a part of India. There is no room for them other than to accept India and to adopt the Indian culture. She tries to assimilate Indian culture, beliefs and practices but it ends in failure as her mind has been trained since childhood to imbibe the British ideas, beliefs, practices and culture. The novel also informs the tendency of British officers towards young Eurasian ladies and treats them as sexual objects. When Graham Macaulay, Adjutant of Colonel Savage, tries to rape Victoria on two occasions, it clearly testifies the attitude of the British officers.

The other characters of the novel like Govindaswamy, Collector of the Bhowani Junction; Surabhai, head of Local Congress unit; Sirdarini, mother of Ranjit Singh Kasel, an officer working under Patrick Taylor in Delhi Deccan Railway enliven the narrative of the novel to its full bloom. Sirdarini plays a pivotal role in making Victoria conscious of her identity in the society. She renders whole hearted support to Victoria to identify her place in the Anglo-Indian scenario. To Sirdarini, the Indians are underlings in the hands of the British and she raises her voice against the British and encourages the Indians to stand on their own.

Another great thread in the story is the love triangle between Colonel Savage, Victoria Jones and Patrick Taylor. During Victoria's search for her cultural identity she falls in love with three persons-Savage, an English man; Taylor, an Anglo-Indian and Ranjit Singh Kasel, an Indian. We understand that the heroine is really in between two worlds and the identity politics of the Eurasian community is excellently probed and presented by Masters. Victoria realizes that though she sways for love from one person to another, she gets true love only from an Anglo-Indian, neither from the British nor from the Indian. This is a moment of revelation not to Victoria alone but to the readers as a whole. Through the heroine, Masters tries to express that a Eurasian-descent of mixed blood-can establish his space not as a part of one country or the other but as himself.

Bhowani Junction, a blend of history and romance, is the outcome of John Masters , the Colonel's first hand experiences in the British Indian Army and deep knowledge of the tactics of the military personnel. He has been successful in giving picturesque details of the situation prevailing in India during the British Raj period. By truly depicting the life and predicament of the Anglo-Indian community, Masters gives a piece of advice to the Eurasian-not to be inferior to the English, but be the creator of his own fate. The concluding part of the novel is woven skillfully with the end of Anglo-Indian's dilemma, the gain of India's independence and the end of the wavered search of Victoria for true love and identity. *Bhowani Junction*, an interesting book to read, with its romantic and thrilling experiences, creates a nostalgic feeling for the Raj.