

RELIGIOUS FANATICISM IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S “TRAIN TO PAKISTAN”

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Abstract: *Khushwant Singh through religious fanaticism highlights the trauma of Nooran, the daughter of a blind Muslim weaver who had an affair with Jugga a Hindu boy. Their affair paradoxically keeps the village at peace, because the local Sikhs are terrified of him, and the girl he loves is the daughter of the local Muslim leader for whom, at any rate, they have a good deal of sympathy. Their potentially dangerous relationship function to keep Mano Majra at peace until the outside world interviews and Nooran is forced to leave Mano Majra. The situation only gets out of control by an unscheduled train which stops at the station and is full of dead people. Mano Majra, the peaceful village known for its serenity and brotherhood among Hindus and Muslims becomes a battlefield. When a train arrives carrying the bodies of the dead Sikhs, tension prevails, neither the magistrate nor the police are able to stem the rising tide of violence.*

Key Words-Trauma, Bloodshed ,religious Fanaticism

Full Length

Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* was published in 1956. This novel is set at the time of partition and it presents the realistic picture of the pre-partition era, the communal riots, the freedom struggle and the exploitation of women.

Through this novel Khushwant Singh wants to reveal how a small peaceful town Mano Majra turns into a battle field due to racial fanaticism. It also tells us about the arrival of the "Ghost Train" which breaks the harmony of the town and brings bloodshed everywhere. It brings forth a picture of bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border region during the partition days of August 1947. The leaders had sowed the seeds of communal suspicion which resulted in the partition. The mad act of partition was uprooting masses of humanity, mangling them and throwing them across the border in heap after heap. The riots had become rout. Khushwant Singh writes: "By the summer of 1947...ten million people- Muslims and Hindu and Sikhs- were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead and all of northern India was in arms, in terror or in hiding" (3).

The tragedy of Partition encounter, moreover, lies in the experiences of hundreds of thousands of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Who were slain in the midst of communal violence, which at the same time displaced 15 million into refugee status. Ironically the split between India and Pakistan only served to heighten each other hostilities.

The extreme religious forces have manipulated and used religion to promote their respective political and economic interests. This has resulted in havoc and bloodshed. In face of this onslaught, the governments have either been afraid to take stringent action or have convinced with the culprits in order to promote and protect their own personal political and protect their own economic interests. It is perhaps this lack of political will on part of governments to control religious violence that has given credence to the notion of the "clash of cultures" debate which divided the world along religious lines.

It was religious fanaticism which was the main cause of suffering of Nooran. Love which was blooming in the hearts of Jugga and Nooran is crushed under the name of religion. It shows the victimization of women in love because of religion. As Khushwant Singh says "Zar, Zoru and Zameen" (Wealth, woman and land) (Preface, *Train to Pakistan*), all three so beloved to man were brutally violated.

"Fanaticism" has been defined as "emotions being filled with excessive, uncritical zeal particularly for an extreme religious or political cause or with an obsessive enthusiasm for a past time or hobby"(Medical Dictionary). According to Philosopher George Santayam: "Fanaticism consists in redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim" (*Life of Reason*, 13). In the book *Holy War, Just War* Lloyd Steffen says:

Religious Fanaticism.....invokes the idea of intimacy, and its presence in religious life is undeniable." He goes on to say, Religious fanatics are persons, who attach to some object an ultimate valuation and then attend to that overvalued object with what is recognizable as a kind of religious devotion. (81)

Some consider religious fanaticism as the extreme form of religious fundamentalism, followers of religion and not the religion itself. The person who is obedient to his religion is often seen as a fanatic.

Khushwant Singh through religious fanaticism highlights the trauma of Nooran, the daughter of a blind Muslim weaver who had an affair with Jugga a Hindu boy. Their affair paradoxically keeps the village at peace, because the local Sikhs are terrified of him, and the girl he loves is the daughter of the local Muslim leader for whom, at any rate, they have a good deal of sympathy. Their potentially dangerous relationship function to keep Mano Majra at peace until the outside world interviews and Nooran is forced to leave Mano Majra. The situation only gets out of control by an unscheduled train which stops at the station and is full of dead people. Mano Majra, the peaceful village known for its serenity and brotherhood among Hindus and Muslims becomes a battlefield. When a train arrives carrying the bodies of the dead Sikhs, tension prevails, neither the magistrate nor the police are able to stem the rising tide of violence. The partition caused untold miseries to people of both communities-the Hindus and the Muslims. It was a complete loss of their identity and personality, their very existence and survival. Unfortunately people in both the countries were helpless. As the time passes, they loose hope and find no other way but to accept a hard reality- an acceptance that leaves them torn and mutilated both in body and spirit.

Ultimately, the Muslims were forced out of villages and towns by the ferocity of attacks on them, creating enough terror to banish any doubt or possibility of reconciliation. The forced departure from one place to another is a journey from known to an unknown destination. Migration varied in size and composition as well as in mode of transit. Some people moved in stages, first from small hamlets to larger communities, and thence to local transit camps; others traveled directly from the big cities by rail or air to the other side of the border. Families left together in batches, depending on how permanent they thought the move was going to be. Many simply locked up their houses, entrusted their neighbours with the keys, and left with the assurance of returning. Others knew there would be no going back; as the violence increased, however, the migrations took on an urgent and treacherous character: convoys were ambushed, families separated, orphaned, women kidnapped- and whole trainloads massacred. Khushwant Singh, in the book, reflects all this through his characters like Iqbal and Nooran. He shows the importance of caste by the community itself. "In a country which had accepted caste distinctions for many centuries, inequality had become an inborn mental concept. If caste was abolished by legislation, it came up in other forms of class distinctions" (96). Nooran suffered because of her inter-religious love affair and pre-marital sex which forced her to move. During violence man women underwent a similar fate; they were sold bought a number of times by the men of their own communities or other. Ultimately, after partition when Government tried to retrieve the missing women they were displaced the second time, losing everything love, izzat, identity and nation. In the end to sum up for the character Nooran we can say that there are many other things important in life than love .As it is said:

Love may be very important and it is loves that makes sex beautiful but there are other important things in life also and for love they cannot be ignored;

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