

TRAIN TO PAKISTAN AS A PARTITION NOVEL OF KHUSHWANT SINGH

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ABSTRACT

*The partition of the Indian subcontinent was an event of such a great magnitude that had a very profound and a far reaching effect not only on a common man but also on creative arts and artists too. Works like *The Heart Divided* by Mumtaz Navaz, *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidva, *Clear Light of Day* by Anitha Desai, *Shadow of Time* by Nigar Masroor, *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal, and *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgokar and *Train to Pakistan* by Kushwant Singh are the outcome of the same influence. For the fiction provides a vast canvass to the creative genius to deal with the very complex theme like partition and this genre has attracted writers of all Indian languages. Khushwant Singh is known as one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation, besides, being a significant post-colonial writer in English language. In the six decades since then, he has donned many hats – that of diplomat, eminent journalist/columnist, reputed historian, distinguished publishing editor, and one of India's most respected (and controversial) public figures. He was honored with the "honest man of the year Award by the Sulabh International Social Service organization for his courage and honesty in his brilliant incisive writing at the award ceremony. And authorized as a "humorous writer and incorrigible believer in human goodness with a devil may-care attitude and a courageous mind" by the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. *Train to Pakistan* is a brilliant and realistic story of political hatred, violence, and of mass passions during those turbulent and fateful days that preceded and followed the Partition of the British India. 'Train to Pakistan' is praised for its uniqueness even by Salman Rushdie a popular partition writer himself as 'the only good book on the theme [of Partition]' while Amitav Gosh has acknowledged it as 'a classic'.*

Key Words: Humorous, Turbulent, Uniqueness, Distinguished, Incisive.

Introduction

The partition of the Indian subcontinent was an event of such a great magnitude that had a very profound and a far reaching effect not only on a common man but also on creative arts and artists too. Works like *The Heart Divided* by Mumtaz Navaz, *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidva, *Clear Light of Day* by Anitha Desai, *Shadow of Time* by Nigar Masroor, *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal, and *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgokar and *Train to Pakistan* by Kushwant Singh are the outcome of the same influence. The fiction provides a vast canvass to the creative genius to deal with the very complex theme like partition and this genre has attracted writers of all Indian languages. Khushwant Singh is known as one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation, besides, being a significant post-colonial writer in English language. In the six decades since then, he has donned many hats – that of diplomat, eminent journalist/columnist, reputed historian, distinguished publishing editor, and one of India's most respected (and controversial) public figures. He was honored with the "honest man of the year Award by the Sulabh International Social Service organization for his courage and honesty in his brilliant incisive writing at the award ceremony. And authorized as a "humorous writer and incorrigible believer in human goodness with a devil may-care attitude and a courageous mind" by the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. *Train to Pakistan* is a brilliant and realistic story of political hatred, violence, and of mass passions during those turbulent and fateful days that preceded and followed the Partition of the British India. 'Train to Pakistan' is praised for its uniqueness even by Salman Rushdie a popular partition writer himself as 'the only good book on the theme [of Partition]' while Amitav Gosh has acknowledged it as 'a classic'.

Though the country won freedom from the clutches of British Empire but was it really free? The independence when received became a boon but later on turned into a bane. As the divisions of country were finally announced the whole country turned into a battlefield where everyone was thirsty for the blood of his brother be it Sikh, Hindu or Muslim. While the India achieved the independence world got the chance to watch the rarest event in the history of nation, the birth of twins India and Pakistan. It was a birth accompanied by strife and suffering. Zar, Zoru and Zameen (wealth, woman and land), all three so beloved to man were brutally violated. There were riots in cities like Calcutta. People were forced to leave their homes in order to save their life and those who refused were killed brutally. Muslims travelled on foots, some on bullock carts The refugees travelled on foot, in bullock carts, trains and collided with swarms of Muslims fleeing to Pakistan for safety, which was for them is their promised land. Both the sides held each other responsible for their conditions. It was not only the people who were affected by the partition but Singh as well for the inner agony and conflict which was going inside Singh was brought to light by Suja Alexander in her work *Personal Concerns Go Public In Train To Pakistan*:

The beliefs that Singh had cherished all his life were shattered. He had believed in innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country. . . . He had believed that Indians were peace loving and non-violent. . . . After the experience of the autumn of 1947, he could no longer subscribe to these views. . . . (Alexander, 44).

Thematic Study

The story revolves around a tiny village Mano Manjra which lies on the border of India and Pakistan where the inhabitants live in peace and harmony unaffected by the term partition or the bloodshed which is taking place all over the country. There are only seventy families in the village of Manu Majhra and Ram Lal is the only Hindu resident living there. It has equal number of Sikhs and the Muslims .They are living there since their ancestors time and are in a close knit relationship of brotherhood .The peaceful and harmonious nature of the village is described in the following lines:

...there is one object that all Mano Manjrans even Lala Ram Lal-- venerate. This is a three foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keeker tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the deo to which all the villagers--Hindu, Sikh, Muslims or pseudo-Christian-repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing. (Singh, 10)

Where on one hand there were riots murder bloodshed chaos and confusion going in the country but in spite of all that the residents of the Mano Manjra were residing in harmony and peace with each other. But on coming to know of the communal riots going on in Bengal and Punjab there arouse an atmosphere of tension among the people of Mano Manjra. Singh has shows in these lines the attitude of people at that time towards each other:

Muslims said that Hindus had planned and started the killing. On the other hand, the Hindus, put the blame on the Muslims. The fact is that both sides killed. People belonging to both sides were shot and stabbed, speared and clubbed, tortured raped (9).

The riots that started in Calcutta spread to north, east and west engulfing a vast segment of population. In East Bengal, Muslims massacred Hindus and in Bihar, Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs were reported to have roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. The Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the North west Frontier were made to abandon their homes and flee towards the protection of Sikh and Hindu communities in the east. They had to travel on foot, in bullock carts, cram into lorries, cling to the sides and roofs of trains. Life of the people of the Mano Majra centered around the trains:

“All this has made Mano Majra very conscious of trains. Before daybreak, the mail train rushes through on its way to Lahore, and as it approaches the bridge the driver invariably blows two long blasts of whistle. In an instant, all Mano Majra comes awake. Crows begin to caw. The Mullah at the mosque knows that it is time for the Morning Prayer. By the time the 10.30 morning passenger train from Delhi comes in, life in Mano Manjra has settled down to its dull daily routine. Men are in the fields... as the mid day express goes by, Mano Majra stops to rest... when the evening passenger from Lahore comes in everyone gets to work again.”

Dacoity the first part shows how an insignificant incident can have a huge impact on the lives of the people. Ram Lal is killed brutally by Mallu and on his return back to home he throws bangles at the house of Jaggat Singh in order to mock at his enemy. Juggat Singh who is popularly known as badmash number ten is suspected by the police and is asked not to leave the house after sunset. At the time when murder was taking place Jaggat Singh was with Nooran and everyone in the village is aware of their affair. Hukum Singh on the other hand holds an important place in the village as well as in the novel. He is a typical representative of beurocracy in a British governed India. Next morning when police comes to Mano Majhra to enquire of the murder of Ram Lal and the same train also brings Iqbal Singh who is send by people's party in order to establish peace in the village. Iqbal and Juggat Singh both are arrested for Juggat was not found at his home during murder and he fails to explain his innocence to the police. When people enquire Iqbal Singh of his motives during one conversation with Bhai Meet Singh Iqbal tells :

I am a social worker, Bhaiji. There is much to be done in our villages. Now with this Partition there is so much bloodshed going on someone must do something to stop it. My party has sent me here, since this place is a vital point for refugee movements. Trouble here would be disastrous. (48)

Iqbal has come in the village with a motive as how can Indians make a good use of the material prosperity they have gained by independence but all his dreams are shattered as soon as he comes to know of Ram Lal's murder "Was it communal? Is it all right for me to be here? I do not suppose I can do much if the village is all excited about a murder." (51)

His speeches, moral views and his motives he has come with aren't of any use to the people of Mano Majhra because they have never aspired for anything great. They want to know what is India or Pakistan. What is freedom because freedom is of no use to them? Lambardar who is the voice of all people says: "Freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes." (62) Since people of Mano Manjra cannot welcome freedom at the cost of their lives since it can be enjoyed only by murderer, thieves, and robbers. Iqbal fails to answer Lambardar what could he—one little man—do in this enormous impersonal land of four hundred million? Could he stop the killing? Obviously not. Everyone—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Congressite

Leaguer, Akali, or Communist—was deep in it. It was famous to suggest that thebourageois revolution. Could be turned into a proletarian one. (64-65)

Iqbal fails to satisfy the people of Mano Majhra and his failure accuses him of being a member of Muslim league and all his exhortations to them are of no avail; they fail to see his reason. His opinions on politics and the political situation of the country are confined to his monologues. This prompts Prempati to assert:

...in fact, that the weakest link in the structure of Train to Pakistan is Iqbal ...Iqbal represents Khushwant Singh's extra-literary dimension, and to the extent he remained adventitious to the text he was no better than a dispensable commodity, an interpolation dictated by non-textual considerations. (Prempati, 113).

It is now in the novel that the feeling communalism penetrate. Jaggat Singh narrates the incidences of barbarity of Baluch soldiers on their way from Lahore to Amritsar Reaching near the Pakistani border, these soldiers :

"...began to stick bayonets into Sikhs going along the road. The driver would slow down near a cyclist or a pedestrian, the soldiers on the footboard would stab him in the back and then the driver would accelerate away fast. They killed many people like this and were feeling happier and happier as they got nearer Pakistan." (83)

Bhola, the tonga driver, stresses the madness of the blood hungry people and remarked:

"...when the mobs attack they do not wait to find out who you are. Hindu or Muslims; they kill..." (84) Perhaps to balance the brutality done by the Muslims on the Sikhs, he narrates the story of the four Sikh sardars, who went on rampage rending in a jeep alongside, a mile-long column of Muslim refugees walking on the road: *"...Without warning they opened fire with their stein guns. Four stein guns! God alone knows*

how many they killed...” (85) Juggga also tells how lots of women are abducted and sold cheaply in the market.

Earlier the trains which were considered as an important element in the life of the people of Mano Majra became a most disturbing element in their lives. Trains lost their punctuality and goods train didn't come. But what came was utterly thought provoking. A ghost train arrives from Pakistan carrying a dead body of Hindu and Sikhs and this incident becomes a turning point not only in the life of the people but also in their hormonal relation of brotherhood. No one asked anyone what has happened as they knew that the trains came from Pakistan.

“The village was stilled in a deathly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odor was. They all know. They had known it all the time. The answer was implicit in the fact that the train had come from Pakistan.” (100)

While on the other hand Hukum Chand is horrified and the horror is too strong to be taken with a philosophical belief in the inevitability of death. He is bewildered and frightened by its violence and magnitude:

Fifteen hundred innocent people! What else is Kalyug? There is darkness over the land. This is only one spot on the frontier. I suppose similar things are happening at other places. And now I believe our people are doing the same. What about the Muslims in these villages? (115)

An atmosphere of fear and distrust arouse in people when they came to know that the dead bodies of Hindus were sent by Pakistan a heavy brooding silence arouse on the people of Mano Manjhra:

“People barricaded their doors and many stayed up all night talking in whispers. Everyone felt his neighbor's hand against him, and thought of finding friends and allies.”⁶⁵

There is an atmosphere of tension all around the village for the refugees coming from Pakistan are bringing back with them the stories of rape, murder, abduction and torture. For the safety of Muslims and the maintenance of law and order people want the Muslim to leave Mano Manjra. It offers to provide them all facilities to reach Chundunnuger safely from where a train is to go to Pakistan. Thus the administration plays the final game to cleave it into two halves for easy evacuation of the Muslims. The visit of the head constable “...had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter.” (141).

While on the other hand Muslims are scared they recall the atrocities inflicted on them by the Sikhs in some parts of the country. Of their women's being stripped off and paraded naked in the street. Now to them every Sikh has become a stranger the same Sikhs with whom they have been living in harmony from so many years. But now there were suspicions in their mind regarding them. Sikhs were also reminded of the same treatment meted out to them, to their people in Pakistan. How could they forget the words of their own guru who taught them to never trust a Muslim for they are not loyal to anyone. History is a proof to the fact that how Hindus and Sikhs have been treated at the hands of their Muslim brothers. But this thing doesn't surprise them especially to women

“...Sikh refugees had told them of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims. Those who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered.” (142)

The evacuation of the Muslims from the village is an important event not only in the novel but also in the life of the people. A vast change has come not only in the appearance of the village but also in the life of people:

...a heavy brooding silence descended on the village. People barricaded their doors and many stayed up all night talking in whispers.” No one slept that night they talked to each crying and swearing each other, giving cows of friendship. The next morning Muslims have to be transported to Chandannagar in refugee camps and from there to Pakistan. The women sat on the floors hugging each other and crying. It was as if in every home there had been a death”. (113)

Imam Baksh goes to the Sikh assembly in a hope to get some solution to his problem but returns empty handed. One more thing which comes into light is that even though the Sikhs and the Hindus are now very well aware of the treatment meted out to their Sikh and Hindu brothers and still they have love and sympathy in their hearts for their Muslim brothers. For when Imam Baksh who is heartbroken says “what have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers”. (110) The Sikh Lambardar answers instantly:

Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like. If anyone speaks rudely to you, your wives or your children, it will be us first and our wives and children before a single hair of your heads is touched... (147)

But even if he is ready to help out the Muslims of Mano Majhra he continues, “But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands who will be responsible for that they do”. (147)

Imam Baksh accepts his destiny and is ready to migrate with all his other Muslim brothers to Chandannagar but his daughter Nooran refuses. Nooran is the beloved of Juggut Singh and is pregnant with his baby. Nooran believes that if Jaggat comes they won't have to leave the Mano Manjra . While on the other hand the Muslims are ordered by the Muslim officers to vacate the land as soon as possible. Thus the administration plays the final game to cleave it into two halves for easy evacuation of the Muslims and the visit of the head constable “...had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter.” (141)

But they won't be allowed to take their cattle's and belongings with them Lambardar is appointed as the caretaker of their belongings but Lambardar having refused to do so Sikh officer appoints Malli as the caretaker of the belongings of the Muslims. Muslims think that they are being sent to Chundernuggar for few days and but they are misunderstood because from their they will be send to Pakistan. They can only carry what they have in their hands. Hukum Chand, the Deputy Commissioner tries to avoid getting involved in the “...winds of destruction which are blowing across the land.” (69) In spite of his affection for Haseena a teenager prostitute, he knows that he cannot protect the train of Muslim refugees from Hindu fanatics who are hell bent on butchering its Muslim passengers. It seems interesting enough to hear from Hukum Chand his views of Partition and its impact. He wants Muslims to go Pakistan peacefully, if possible. He is against killing or destruction of property. Bloodshed would not benefit anyone. He knows that during the riots, bad characters would get all the loot and the government is blamed. The seeds of communalism has been sown by the government and Partition was the result, “...like a whirlwind the mad act of Partition was uprooting masses of humanity mangling them, and throwing them across the border in heap after heap” (Iyenger, 489). We even find that the government herself is helpless here. And in his helpless to sought out the communal tension he express cries at the government:

--Where was the power? What were the people in Delhi doing? Making fine speeches in the assembly? Loudspeakers magnifying their egos; lovely-looking foreign women in the visitor's galleries in breathless admiration. He is great man, this Mr.Nehru of yours. I do think he is the greatest man in the world today. And how handsome! Wasn't that a wonderful thing to say? Long ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially. Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, you made your tryst. So did many on the 15th August Independence Day---(176)

We also find Singh's personal sentiments interfering in the novel for the deep impact for he says “Hukum Chand, a hypocritical oddity and a vestige of the British Raj, has no identity and existence of his own”. (Nicholson, 105)

The tempo of death continues to increase in Manu Majhra. Viewing Sutlej is another horrible with corpses of men , women and children . The Lambardar “...had never known the Sutlej to rise so high in so short a time”. (121) In the night, the river's looking like a sheet of paper, symbolized the bleak deeds of violence. It seemed as if the human voices are calling for help from water. The corpses floating on the water made the scene more horrible. The ghastly murder of these innocent people----men, women and children---told the tale of woe caused by the Partition. Singh gives a pathetic portrayal of this ghastly scene:

There were also men and women with their clothes clinging to their bodies; little children sleeping on their bellies with their arms clutching the water and their satiny buttocks dipping in and out. The sky was soon

full of kites and vultures. They flew down and landed on the floating carcasses. They pecked till the corpses themselves rolled over and shooed them off with hands. (143)

The same scene which has taken place earlier is once again repeated in the novel .Again the villagers encounter a train full of dead bodies from Pakistan to be buried in the village . But the difference between the two scenes is that earlier the policemen asked for fuel and woods for the cremation of the dead but since due to rain the woods are no longer available even if they are there it's is all wet due to rain. The dead bodies have to be dug by the bulldozer. In the words of Giridhari,

Their roots losing their grip over the native soil, men, women and children on the move in search of a new home, a new harbor, a new identity, is a pathetic process of disintegration of human lives segregated by the decisions not their own. (Giridhari, 84-85).

Though there is communal tension in the whole country but still there is an atmosphere of peace and harmony in the village of Manu Manjra. But the same is treated as a sign of cowardliness by the youth who comes to visit the gurudwara at night. As it's these youngsters who try to provoke the fire of communalism among the people of Manu Manjra:

Do you know how many trainloads of dead Sikhs and Hindus have come over? Do you know of the massacres in Rawalpindi and Multan, Gujranwala and Sheikhpura? What are you doing about it? You just eat and sleep and call yourselves Sikhs ---the brave Sikhs! The martial class! (148).

The speech basically is an attempt on their part to bring into light the true face of the Muslims .The same Muslims whom the Sikhs and the Hindus of Manu Manjra consider as their friends . He continues in these lines:

Do the Musslman in Pakistan apply for permission from their government when they rape your sisters? Do they apply for permission when they stop trains and kill everyone, old, young, women and children? You want the government to do something! That is great! Shabash! Bravo! (171)

He is trying to incite a feeling of hatred in the minds of the people by diverting their thoughts. As he says "For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussalmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two...For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across." (171)

Both Iqbal and Meet Singh try to suppress the communal fire being incited in the minds of the mob . Meet Singh make several efforts on his part but all his attempts go in vain . But Meet Singh fails to understand the fact that why the innocent Muslims of India should be penalized for the sins of their brothers in Pakistan. But he is subdued by a fanatic Hindu who believes:

What had the Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan done that they were butchered? Weren't they innocent? Had the women committed crimes for which they were ravished? Had he children committed murder for which they were spiked in front of their parents? (171-72)

A plan is made by the youth that the train which is going to Pakistan the very next day will carry the dead bodies of the Muslims and he searches for the volunteers to accomplish the same. While on the other hand Meet Singh is worried for the Muslims of Manu Manjra and thinks of saving their life. Earlier they planned to stretch a rope across the first span of the bridge. But now they decided to kill them with swords and spears and to fire indiscriminately at the windows of the train so that the train carries only the dead to Pakistan. The news is shocking to Hukum Chand as well for the train would also be carrying his beloved Haseena a teenage prostitute and he desperately wants to save her life. But nothing is in his hands for the Muslims who will be there in the train their life is also at stake and those residing in camps might also be killed by the bloodthirsty villagers . Hukum Chand is quite aware of Nooran and Jugga's affair and he knows this very well that Jugga would do anything to save Nooran's life and won't let the train go to Pakistan at any cost. He signs a paper in favor of Jugga and Iqbal and Iqbal and asks for his instant release. He also ensures that the news of Muslims leaving for Pakistan is hammered into his head. Jugga goes to the gurudwara to know what is happening. Meet Singh's reply is an excellent comment upon the current happenings in Manu Majhra.

What has been happening? Ask me what has not been happening. Trainloads of dead people came to Mano Majra. We burned one lot and buried another. The river was flooded with corpse. Muslims were evacuated and in their place, refugees have come from Pakistan. What more do you want to know? (145)

Jugga, on the other hand, is concerned mainly with the welfare of Nooran. For danger to the train means danger to her life. The man climbing on the steel span is not noticed at first. With the approach of train, however, the villagers and soldiers see a man stretched on the rope. But even amid this universal madness and communal frenzy, a sense of humanity or to quote Dr. Iyengar's words, "...the simple uncalculating love of a man for a woman asserts itself" (Iyengar, 502) and averts the catastrophe. Jugga---a self-confessed 'local ruffian, realizing that the revenge might mean danger to his Muslim beloved, Nooran, manages to slash at the rope with his kirpan and gives a safe passage to the train:

He (Juggat Singh) pulled himself up, caught the rope under his left armpit, and again started hacking with his right hand. The rope had been cut in shreds. Only a thin tough strand remained. He went at it with him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan. (207)

This heroic act of Juggat Singh the 'badmash number ten' in the beginning of the novel a 'ruffian' a 'murderer' later on turns into a hero is praiseworthy. A real hero who not only saves the life of his beloved but of all the Muslims going to Pakistan. This brave act of Juggat Singh is commendable and appreciable by numerous critics as well. For Harish Raizada observes,

"The heroic spirit of man is revealed in the novel not by men who are considered religious and respectable in the public and supposed to have innate goodness but by a man like Jugga who is treated as a confirmed ruffian". (Raizada,20)

It is at this moment that we find Singh praising jugga for his actions. In describing Jugga's in dubious moral stature, Khushwant Singh writes,

I thought it was time I exploded this myth of the innate goodness in man. There is innate evil in man. And so I just wrote about it, and I did create one character that I stuffed with the so called innate goodness of man, and he is the only character which is entirely fiction. (From the transcript of Indian Accent by John Thompson)

Though Jugga was a mere tool in the hands of Hukum Chand who wished to save his beloved's life and took maximum advantage of Jugga's feelings for Nooran. But this heroic act of Jugga "...brings back order and humanity to a village swept away by the flood of fratricidal violence sweeping over the Punjab" (Kaul,15) .

CONCLUSION

Hence one can conclude that *Train to Pakistan* is a valuable, social and political piece of document prepared and presented forth by Singh. And is credited for its success in the words of Arthur Lal in an introduction to this book, It's intrinsic qualities as a fine novel grip the reader. Throughout, the action sweeps on along. The characters are vivid and highly credible, and Khushwant Sigh keeps them going magnificently on two levels: in their quotidian matrix compounded of their passions of their love and revenge, their tremendous sense of belonging to a village community and their insolence and heroism; and then again n the wide stage by the Tornado that brakes on their lives in the shape of the cataclysmic events of the partition of India in 1947."