



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Misappropriation Of Powers By Bureaucrats In Khushwant Singh's *Train To Pakistan*

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### Abstract

The system of bureaucracy is as old as the world itself. Its existence is prima facie in every society which is constituted with social organizations like a family, club, association, community and business enterprise. In this system, bureaucrats are assigned certain roles, duties and responsibilities to perform and meet the services of the public. At the time of partition of colonial India into India and Pakistan in 1947, the people of the country had gone through horrible experiences of communal riots, brutal bloodshed and mass exploitation. Common folk were ransacked, women assault and many such traumatic experiences faced. During such devastating time, this paper focuses, how the bureaucratic system or bureaucrats tangled in the affairs of general public as well as in the governance. By utilizing the powers and positions, bureaucracy has largely become corrupt and being too assertive or dysfunctional. Hence, this present paper examines the role of bureaucrats and their misappropriation of powers during the partition of India in Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan*.

**Key words:** Bureaucracy, partition, misappropriation of powers, corruption, exploitation.

### Introduction

The system of bureaucracy or civil services was originated during the British period in colonial India. With the introduction of Government of India Act, 1858, the British had gained a strong hold of powers on the government of India. In the due course of time, the British had established a proficient administrative system. This bureaucratic body might be very well described as the sine qua non of British rule in India. Nevertheless, the bureaucracy continues to provide autonomy in governance to India and have remained unshaken during the periods of political instability and crisis at the national as well as state levels. Partition of India is one such grievous situation befallen on India in 1947. At this juncture, bureaucracy became crucial in stabilizing the law and order in the society.

Due to the partition of India, the devastating conditions were circumscribed throughout India and Pakistan. Partition of colonial India is nothing but separation of country into two nations as India and Pakistan on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> august 1947 respectively. Because of this division process of India, many people lost their lives in riots, happened brutal assassination, ransacked and women exploitation in the borders of India and Pakistan. Millions of people were migrated from India to Pakistan and vice-versa. Even the communal conflicts took place among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. In such ravaging times, the government played a vital role in controlling the situations as well as to restore the harmonious conditions in the country. Among all wings of government, the bureaucracy played a prominent part in establishing the public order and controlling the riots and looting of the people. Despite of all this, some of the higher officials of bureaucracy made best out of such ruined conditions and resorted to malicious acts for their self-gains.

### **Definition of Bureaucracy**

The term bureaucracy refers to a body of non-elected governing officials as well as to an administrative policy making group. A bureaucrat means someone who is a member of a bureaucracy. A bureaucrat can be a government official or someone in a position of power. Bureaucrats are the main agents who establish direct connection with the public. They act as the linkers between the people and government. On one hand they communicate all the decisions of government to the people and on the other hand they communicate the needs, interests and views of the people to the government. Therefore, bureaucracy plays vigorously active role in the functioning of the government. The need for maintaining active and full public relations is a vital necessity for bureaucrats.

### **Characteristics of Bureaucracy**

Max Weber, renowned German Sociologist, was the first to popularize and study about the term bureaucracy. In his article *Bureaucracy*, Weber gave a clear description about his ideal-typical bureaucracy and its characteristics as below:

- Hierarchical organization.
- Formal lines of authority.
- A fixed area of activity.
- Rigid division of labour.
- Regular and continuous execution of assigned tasks.
- All decisions and powers specified and restricted by regulations.
- Officials with expert training in their fields.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureaucracy>)

Bureaucracy is a type of formal administration with the features of division of labour, rules and regulations, hierarchy of authority, impersonality of social relationships and technical competence etc. The essence of bureaucracy is to coordinate the organisational activities for effective, efficient and economical provision of services to public.

Some of the common criticism of dysfunctionality of bureaucrats associated with the following:

- Conflict of interest of bureaucrats.
- Corruption and other forms of exploitations.
- Appropriations of positions and resources.
- Bureaucratic insensitivity.
- Misuse of administrative power and discretion.
- Political in-fighting.
- Lack of concern for customers plights.
- Intentional delays in service delivery under the cloak of compliance with existing rules and procedures.
- Over-centralisation of strategic public functions in one or a few officials.

### **Analysis of the novel**

Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* is all set in a small village called Mano Majra, which is located at the bank of Sutlej River in Punjab. Geographically, the village Mano Majra is also situated on the borders of India and Pakistan. People of different religions such as Hindu, Sikh and Muslim live in harmony and peace and maintaining strong bond of fraternity. In spite of all the chaos and horror conditions prevailed in the rest of the country, the dwellers of Mano Majra were not affected in their associated living. Nonetheless, when the people came to know about the communal clashes of Bengal and Punjab then the tensions aroused among the people of Mano Majra. Until the summers of 1947, the life of Mano Majra's was quiet still and harmonious. After the dacoity and murder of Ram Lal, the intervention of bureaucrats and other disorderly incidents take place in Mano Majra.

### **Misuse of Powers by Bureaucrats for their Personal Comforts**

Hukum Chand, the magistrate and deputy commissioner of the district, is one of the most prominent characters of the novel. He is a typical representative of bureaucracy in British governed India. Besides him, we also come across police personnel as representatives of bureaucracy. The sub-inspector of police and other two constables make the arrangements for the arrival of Hukum Chand. Along with them, the two orderlies in white uniform and several villagers are also anticipated for magistrate's arrival. At that moment, the reverence towards the bureaucrats explained here as:

*“An hour later a large grey American car rolled in. An orderly stepped out of the front seat and opened the rear door for his master. The sub-inspector and the police men came to attention and saluted. The villagers moved away to a respectful distance. The bearer opened the wire-gauze door leading to the main bed-sitting room.” (Singh, 19)*

This narration clearly shows how the lower rank officials and general public show the respect towards bureaucrats and their commanding position in the society. The subordinate rank officers and the common folk should act as per their commands. In this manner, the higher officials of bureaucracy are always considered as highly respectful persons in the social circles. Such command of respect on bureaucrats is also observed in the following description:

*“One of the orderlies undid the magistrate’s shoes and took off his socks and began to rub his feet. Hukum Chand opened the cigarette tin and held it out to the sub-inspector. The sub-inspector lit the magistrate’s cigarette and then his own.” (Singh, 20)*

Because of Hukum Chand’s position and magistrate’s rank, his subordinates even attend and do personal works. Involving them in undoing the shoes and socks exhibits the ill-treatment of bureaucrats meted out towards their orderlies. This signifies that bureaucrats command huge respect from the lower rank officers as well as misuse of their higher position and powers in order to subjugate the lower cadre people to accomplish their personal comforts. When Hukum Chand enquires about the communal troubles in Mano Majra, the sub-inspector shows his obedient character towards his higher authority as:

*‘Well, Inspector Sahib, how are things?’*

*The sub-inspector joined his hands. ‘God is merciful. We only pray for your kindness.’ (Singh, 20)*

By these remarks of sub-inspector, one can get the point that the lower cadre officials should be docile in their behaviour towards their high bureaucrats. If such compliance is not displayed in character, then they have to face many hurdles in their career. Later, in the novel, this submissive behaviour of the sub-inspector is also noticed when the magistrate insists him to join in alcohol drinking. The magistrate says:

*‘You will have to join me. It is an order. Bearer, fill the inspector sahib’s glass and lay out lunch for him’. The sub-inspector held out his glass for the bearer to fill. ‘If you order me to, I cannot disobey.’ (Singh, 23)*

In this context, the sub-inspector also behaves as an obedient to magistrate. As one of the famous saying states Be a Roman, when you are in Rome, in a similar fashion, the sub-inspector also smart enough to grab situation to please his boss as well as himself in indulging alcoholic drinking. Nevertheless, due to the bureaucratic privileges, the sub-inspector and magistrate Hukum Chand, both indulge in drinking alcohol and smoking and spending leisurely during duty time. Even unrighteous attitude of Hukum Chand can be understood from the line:

*'Well,' said the magistrate hesitantly, 'have you made any arrangements for the evening?'* (Singh, 25)

To this question of Hukum Chand, the sub-inspector gives response as follow:

*'Is it possible for me to have overlooked that? If she does not, please you, you can have me dismissed from service. I will tell the driver where to go and collect the party.'* (Singh, 25)

This response of the sub-inspector clearly explains the wicked thoughts of bureaucrats in involving unlawful activities. The thinking of sub-inspector manifests that the government authorities are very much concern about their pleasures and comforts rather than safe guarding the common folk in such critical crisis. In the later part of the novel, even, the writer describes the contemporary situations, during partition in 1947, about the roles and responsibilities of bureaucrats and the political leaders like:

*Hukum Chand was also uneasy about his own role. Was it enough to get others to do the work for him? Magistrate were responsible for maintenance of law and order. But they maintained order with power behind them; not opposing them. 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 visitors' galleries in breathless admiration.* (Singh, 185)

Through the above description, the writer comments on the contemporary scenario of political and bureaucratic system. Here, the writer has exposed the neglecting nature of political leaders and bureaucrats in fulfilling their responsibilities towards the people. Whereas, on the other hand, they have given prominence to indulge in unlawful activities. All such actions of political rulers and bureaucrats expose the exploitation of powers and position for their own benefits.

In such manner, the misdeeds of bureaucrats are raising strong question of criticism on the whole system in the society. The display of such unethical behaviour by some bureaucrats degrades the status and professionalism of bureaucracy. This sort of tendency exhibits the violation of code of conduct in bureaucracy. Through such unprofessional acts, even in calamity, the bureaucrats reaffirm that they use their profession and powers for their personal benefits and to lead their life lavishly.

### **Exploitation of Women by Bureaucrats**

Exploitation of women has become a common phenomenon in the society. In our socio-political context women exploitation by bureaucrats is also frequently occurring across the world. In many situations, the top positioned bureaucrats exercise their power for their carnal desires. Even some of the lower rank officers aid their superiors in making such arrangements on their demands for their service securities along with other personal gains.

Here in the novel, such incidents take place when the singing party came to magistrate's house. The two musicians' salaams Hukum Chand by bowing their heads low. The old toothless woman starts a singsong of praise:

*'May your fame and honour increase. May your pen write figures of thousands and hundreds of thousands.'*  
(Singh, 27)

These words of the old woman put forth the status and respect of bureaucrat, Hukum Chand, behold in the view of general public. It is all because of their influential position and power, the bureaucrats able to command such huge respect from common people.

By utilizing the position and powers, Hukum Chand engages in women exploitation. In the due course, the sub-inspector of police arranges a virgin girl named Haseena for satiating lecherous desires of magistrate Hukum Chand. On the other hand, the girl is innocent and afraid of Hukum Chand's lustful actions and try to avoid him. At that situation the old woman says as following:

*'Go to the Government', pleaded the old woman. The girl turned round obediently and went to the magistrate. Hukum Chand put his arm round her waist.*

*'You sing well'.*

*The girl gaped wide-eyed at her companions.*

*'The Government is talking to you. Why don't you answer him? Scolded the old woman. 'Government, the girl is young and very shy. She will learn', she exclaimed.*

*Hukum Chand put a glass of whisky to the girl's lips. 'Drink a little. Just a sip for my sake', he pleaded. The girl stood impassively without opening her mouth. The old woman spoke again.*

*'Government, she knows nothing about drink. She is hardly sixteen and completely innocent. She has never been near a man before. I have reared her for your honour's pleasure.'* (Singh, 31)

In this manner the old woman forced the girl to offer herself to please Hukum Chand. Due to these actions, later, in the novel, Haseena turns into a concubine for the magistrate. In the above scene, magistrate Hukum Chand is venerated as embodiment of Government. Although, he is a representative of the government but the old woman considered him as Government itself. In this way bureaucrats have become the synonymous to government in the society. By addressing him as Government, common people have given their utmost regard to Hukum Chand. The old woman and the girl showed their obedience towards him. The girl also puts up with all the mischievous actions and cravings of Hukum Chand because of his power and position. The following lines of exposes the sexual assault on the girl by Hukum Chand:

*'The girl did not answer. She allowed herself to be dragged onto the table amongst plates covered with stale meatballs and cigarette ash. Hukum Chand swept them off the table with his hand and went on with his love-making. The girl suffered his pawing without a protest.'* (Singh, 33)

Hukum Chand, as a bureaucrat, misappropriates his bureaucratic powers and resorts to exploitation of a girl for his carnal pleasures. Later, in the concluding chapter, the writer sarcastically brings out Hukum Chand's misdeeds and partaking in amorous acts with a young girl as:

*It was bad enough for a married man in his fifties to go picking up women. To get emotionally involved with a girl young enough to be his daughter and a Muslim prostitute at that! That was too ludicrous. He must be losing his grip on things. He was getting senile and stupid. (Singh, 184)*

With their wrong deeds, bureaucrats lose their character as well as respect in the society. Being a magistrate, Hukum Chand has used his powers for indulging in lustful activities and getting personal satisfaction. Because of such inappropriate actions he has lost command over his subordinate officers. Simultaneously, he is not able to perform well in his duty and is considered as a foolish man. Similar to Hukum Chand, there are many bureaucrats in the present generation who use their bureaucratic position and powers for fulfilling personal pleasures. In the novel, Hukum Chand is presented as an obstinate magistrate who thinks more of self-pleasures rather than his responsibilities and welfare of people in his jurisdiction.

In the view of common people, such immoral acts of bureaucrats made them to look-down in the society. In this way, many, like Hukum Chand, incongruous bureaucrats are misusing their authoritative positions and powers for their selfish needs in the society. Due to such inappropriate actions of some higher officials in bureaucracy, people are losing faith and confidence in the bureaucratic system in the society.

### **Corrupt Practices in Bureaucracy**

The practice of corruption and bribe is, another severe alleged activity, widely discussed in bureaucracy. Many bureaucrats are prone to corrupt practices in their professional life for fulfilling their personal targets. In the novel, Hukum Chand as well as the sub-inspector and other police personnel are indulged in corrupt practices. One such discussion takes place between Hukum Chand and the sub-inspector about bribery. The magistrate says:

*“I don't mind your taking whatever you do take, within reason of course – everyone does that – only, be careful. This new government is talking very loudly of stamping out all this”. (Singh, 21)*

Being a magistrate, instead of rebuking, Hukum Chand encourages the sub-inspector to take bribe within the limits. This sort of actions displays the corrupted minds of bureaucrats for their self-growth. In another instance, Iqbal Singh, another important character in the novel, expressed his displeasure and dissatisfaction over the police system as below:

*“There is the police system which, instead of safeguarding the citizen, maltreats him and lives on corruption and bribery. You know all about that, I am sure.” (Singh, 40)*

He further continues sharing his views on bribery of police men as follow:

*‘A party of police men with an inspector came over on the same train with me. They will no doubt eat up all the chickens, the inspector will make a little money in bribes, and they will move on to the next village. One would think they had nothing else to do but fleece people.’ (Singh, 40)*

Through this opinion of Iqbal Singh, the writer exposed the bureaucratic exploitation of common people through corruption and bribery in the society during catastrophic times of the partition of India in 1947.

Corruption is the means for gaining professional growth in the bureaucracy of government. It is obvious that sometimes the lower cadre officials make an intimate relationship with the higher authorities by making use of corruption for professional development in their respective department. For their personal attainments and accomplishments, they involve in all sorts of illegal acts and offer bribes in many ways to fulfil the pleasures of higher officials. Such things also brought out in the novel by the writer through the words of Meet Singh as follow:

*It's Hukum Chand. He is staying at the dak bungalow north of the bridge. Now Hukum Chand is a nar admi. He started as a foot-constable and see where he is now! He always kept the Sahibs pleased and they gave him one promotion after another. The last one gave him his own place and made him Deputy. Yes, Iqbal Singhji, Hukum Chand is a nar admi – and clever. He is true to his friends and always gets things done for them. He has had dozens of relatives given good jobs. He is one of a hundred. Nothing counterfeit about Hukum Chand. (Singh, 45)*

Although the career of Hukum Chand has started as a foot-constable, but he has reached to a magistrate level professionally in the short span of service because of his bribery and amenable character towards his higher authorities. Not only that he has got benefitted from such corrupted activities but also his friends and close relatives too fulfilled their personal needs. After becoming a Deputy, Hukum Chand utilized his powers and position to provide good jobs to his relatives in the government. These sorts of incidents show the power misappropriations of bureaucrats for their personal and professional accomplishments at the same time to fulfil the desires of their close associates. Such corrupt practices are obvious in the present bureaucratic functions too.

Even the bureaucratic dominance and their significance in the society is also noticed in the following words of Meet Singh:

*I am a humble bhai of the gurdwara and he is an emperor. He is the government and we are his subjects. (Singh, 46)*

This thought of Meet Singh undoubtedly brings out the prominence of bureaucrats in the society. The people of Mano Majra consider the magistrate Hukum Chand as an emperor and they are his subjects. As per the view of Meet Singh the government is personified as Hukum Chand and his supremacy is obeyed by everyone in the village. In another situation in the novel, Iqbal Singh expresses his mistrust over the police system in conversation with Meet Singh in the following manner:

*Bhaiji, I have put all my things in the holdall. I hope it will not be too much trouble looking after them. I would rather trust you than the police in this free country of ours. (Singh, 57)*



The feelings of Iqbal are the representation of the general opinion of common folk in the society. Because of their indulgence in corrupt practices, the police men are not gaining the confidence of common people. Their immoral actions in delivering the services to general public made them to lose respect as well as demean the whole bureaucratic system in the society. Similarly, the magistrate Hukum Chand also expressed his displeasure over the irresponsible behaviour and faults of the sub-inspector and other police constables in performing their roles properly. The irritated Hukum Chand comments with the sub-inspector as follow:

*Nice fellows, you and your policemen! You go and arrest people without finding out their names, parentage or caste. You make me sign blank warrants of arrest. Some day you will arrest the Governor and say Hukum Chand ordered you to do so. You will have me dismissed. (Singh, 67)*

This comment of Hukum Chand clearly delineates the irresponsible attitude of policemen in doing their duty. All such attitudes one can be noticed in bureaucracy because of the lenience of the higher authorities. This lenience behaviour is the result of involving in mutual corrupt practices for their own benefits. Therefore, the practice of corruption and misappropriation of powers by the bureaucrats are deeply rooted in the system and making them feeble in the society. Nevertheless, the corrupt bureaucrats don't consider their immoral acts as an offence. In fact, sometime, they defend their wicked actions. The writer brings out unethical actions of Hukum Chand in the following description:

*He did so with a clear conscience. Although he accepted gifts and obliged friends when they got into trouble, he was not corrupt. He occasionally joined in parties, arranged for singing and dancing – and sometimes sex – but he was not immoral. What did it really matter in the end? That was the core of Hukum Chand's philosophy of life, and he lived well. (Singh, 92)*

Here, to lead a lavish life, Hukum Chand involved in all sorts of unlawful activities by using his position and powers. Whatever sinful activities he does only for his personal pleasures and leading comfortable life.

Because of such corrupted activities, people are demeaning and disregarding the bureaucrats in the society. Even the significance of bureaucracy system is deteriorating in the society. The bureaucratic actions and their treatment towards common public will have longstanding effects on their lives. In such disaster time, instead of protecting the rights of common folk, the bureaucrats involved in malicious activities. Through such malpractices all the wings of bureaucracy system have become trivial in the society.

## **Conclusion**

During the partition of India in 1947 people witnessed and experienced horrific and traumatic conditions. In such an emergency period the role of the government and its functionaries is crucial in creating stable conditions and restoring peace and harmony in the society. However, bureaucracy has gained a derisory status by associating itself with corrupt practices, discriminatory attitude, indulging in amorous acts, and their derogatory attitude towards the lower rank officials as well as with general public. The corrupt bureaucrats, like Hukum Chand in the novel, work with their own standardized rules and regulation, acting against norms in its structure for their selfish motives. But in fact, it is the bureaucrat's responsibility to ensure the protection

of the fundamental rights of common people in any chaotic situations. Even they have to work for the welfare of the nation by curtailing all sorts of malpractices in the system. Thus, this analysis uncovers that bureaucracy system has become extremely malleable and deceptive at the time of partition. Their efficiency is belittled due to their selfish motives and politicization.

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