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## Partition And Devastation: A Study Of Khushwant Singh's *Train To Pakistan*

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### Abstract

This paper highlights the repercussions of partition of India along with the myriads of human sentiments which arise in critical times and portrays how nothing is definite in life. It also reflects that how seeds of abhorrence sown due to colonization which led only to devastation and violence. *Train to Pakistan* is a book about the terrors of civil war and how a small village finally becomes an area of religious hostility and communal destruction. Khushwant Singh states with this book that there is no categorical discrimination of a person as good or bad and that even the best of relationships, which are made upon the merits of friendship and empathy, *Train to Pakistan* is a story of human tolerance and struggle through a mass movement. Independence brought us our own government, our own flag, our own nation, but for a commoner he lost his own home, his own relatives, and his own complete individuality. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* reveals the futility of blaming one another for the unfortunate and horrible event.

**Keywords:** Devastation, abhorrence, Tolerance, Colonization, discrimination and empathy

Khushwant Singh was a renowned novelist, short story writer, essayist, journalist, columnist, historian and editor. His major topics were the traditions, ethical problems, and sociopolitical predicaments of typical Indian life. He was a great social realist. He was a sentimental artist who has used realism so as to reveal his humanistic vision of life. Khushwant Singh's name needs no introduction in Indian literary history as one of the finest novelists, a political commentator, and a remarkable observer and social critic. His vast and sound knowledge and understanding of India's history, political systems, and literary heritage is reflected truly. He was very much interested to explore the harsh realities of life. Acquainted with Western culture as well as Punjabi, Singh penned down almost exclusively in English. He had a sensitive understanding of the critical situations of concurrent Indian society and culture. His deep knowledge of traditional and modern Indian life is an outcome of his minute observation of life. Khushwant Singh, like other Indian novelists, explored social, political realities of Indian life. He had established himself as an eminent writer of social realism with the publication of his maiden novel, *Train to Pakistan*. The term social realism means the description in literature of social reality in its true sense.

Realism is the most eminent characteristic of Indian English novel in which Indian sensibility is expressed through a foreign language. Realism shows real life, facts in a true way. It omits nothing that painful and idealizes nothing. The term 'realism' truly means a theory of writing in which the familiar ordinary aspects of life are presented in a matter of fact, straight forward manner designed to reveal life as it is in a way that presents descriptions of everyday life, often the lives of so-called middle class. Realism which signifies to the content and art of literary creation has been evident in literature from its beginning. The theme of the novel is as simple and common as possible – a small peaceful village, regular corrupted officers, ordinary villains and gentle people.

The partition of India and Pakistan is a highly disputable and arguable incident. At the time of division there was no systematic strategy to effectively shift people from the places where they had lived their complete lives and to establish them in foreign place. They were not provided enough time to make preparations for the journey they had to manage. There were no arrangements and facilities to maintain law and order in a highly sensitive atmosphere of religious tension. Vandals looted the masses and murdered people belonging to different religions. Women were raped and killed brutally. There was chaos and total disorder all over and everybody was struggling to get life of peace. Humanity seemed to be vanished or almost dead. But amidst this atmosphere, there were some people who did not lose their human values and did not take part in killing or vandalism. They went up and raise their voice against their own community in saving the lives of people belonging to other religion. The paper deals with one such character named Juggut Singh in the novel *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh who put his life on stake in an attempt to protect the lives of migrating Muslims. Unlike other partition novels, the main focus of the novel is not the killings and vandalism. It is the feelings love and compassion that we see on the pages of *Train to Pakistan*. Khushwant Singh by his wonderful narration transforms “the horrendous raw theme into a fine fiction that is steeped in human compassion and love” (Kumar 38-39).

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* reveals the futility of blaming one another for the unfortunate and horrible event. The novel is the most effective works on partition. The author has quite objectively treated the event, without blaming a community or religious minority for it. He has tried to stay away from the blame. “Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame” (Singh 1).

According to him, “The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped” (Singh 1). Though there is no. of book written on partition but *Train to Pakistan* stands out as it does not display the usual themes of indiscriminate killings of people. The violence is undoubtedly a part of it but not the central theme. His focus shifts to the other related themes at the time of partition. Bhatnagar says:

Khushwant Singh was the first Indian novelist in English to write about the horror and holocaust of partition with great artistic concern in *Train to Pakistan*. It is not partition but what it gets associated with and what it becomes symbolic of that attracts the attention of the writer (Bhatnagar 152).

The most sentimental passage in the book is when the government makes the decision to uproot all the Muslim families from Mano Majra to Pakistan. The poverty-stricken villagers were not able to react. The Muslims leave with their minimum belongings within ten minutes and the Non-Muslim neighbors do not get a chance to say Goodbye. The scene is full of agony at many levels; particularly the poverty in which those people lived, the destiny, they were thrown into. *Train to Pakistan* is Khushwant Singh's classic achievement. It is one of the realistic novels of Post-world war II Indo Anglian fiction. It has a well structure, plot, an absorbing narrative and wonderfully portrayed characters. It has many features – symbolic framework, meaningful atmosphere and a powerful way of expression and style. Khushwant Singh has correctly depicted the true picture of the partition and the sufferings that people were bound to tolerate. He paints a vivid picture of the separation between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the summer of 1947. The novel in short clearly shows the issues of Independence and partition using as the larger picture of the devastation and bloody birth of nations. It majorly highlights on the consequences of division, avoiding the graphic presentation of the terrific events. Roy says:

... the violence that erupted at the time of the partition is represented in a very unusual way. There is no detailed description in the novel of the train journey undertaken by the refugees-in terms of neither the practical difficulties faced nor the dangers involved. More importantly, we are also not shown the violence happening: for there is not even a reported description of the incidents in the novel. We are just informed about the end result of the violence: the trainloads of corpses that arrive at Mano Majra. (Roy 36).

The novel presents the terrifying description of accounts of the haunting scenes of train load of butchered Hindus arriving from Pakistan with their molested women and stabbed children. This novel entirely depicts the dark, naked, barbaric, bitter, brutal and dirty truth of Indian Independence, which we call PARTITION and no one got what they wanted. The venomous effect of partition has been realistically expressed in scathing attack in Train to Pakistan. The novel portrays with bold and the brutal story of political hatred during the turbulent days that preceded and followed the division of British India when air of communal frenzy and emotional zeal for self – expression was fumbling with the masses. It is true that partition touched the whole country and Singh attempt in the novel is to observe events deeply.

The partition of Indian was the process of separating the sub-continent along sectarian lines, which occurred in 1947 as India got its independence from British Empire. The northern part majorly Muslim, became Pakistan and the southern predominantly Hindu became the republic of India, the division however wrecked both India and Pakistan as the process claimed many lives in violence, riots, rapes, murders. The two countries initiated their freedom with destroyed economies and lands without an established, experienced government, not only this but also around 14 million people were shifted from their homes. The division of India was a significant event not only in the history of the India but in the world history. Its main cause was the communal attitude of both Hindus and Muslims; but the circumstances under which it took place, made it one of the worst events of the history of India. The fanatic political persons of both communities played an eminent role in blazing the fire of communalism. The partition was exceptionally violent and unleashed misery and devastation of lives and property as millions of refugees fled either India or Pakistan.

The novel opens in the imaginary village Mano Majra and depicts how the entire village gets engrossed in the carnage during the division. The bloodshed could not be stopped in spite of the repeated peacemaking efforts by many people in the village. The novel describes how everything changed and made people react in unusual way. Commenting upon the theme of the novel, Rao and Rani say:

It is the touching tale of a village, Mano Majra, struck down by the hate and the violence that came with the division of the subcontinent when a train-load of massacred men, women and children arrive in the village. It reveals with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border during the days of 1947. The predominant features of the novel are its stark realism, its absolute fidelity to the truth, and above all, its trenchant exposure of the partition horrors (Rao & Rani 32-33).

In the novel we see that the general atmosphere was peaceful and people did not as such mind the presence of people belonging to different religions. Mano Majra remains uninfluenced as the sub-inspector of police says: “No communal trouble in the area?’... ‘We have escaped it so far, sir’” (Singh 20).

They never neglect the fact that they had been living together for donkey’s years and a momentary determination should not be strong enough to break those bonds. Even after the communal annoyance envelops most of the regions, Mano Majra controls to maintain the peace and tolerance in spite of the heterogeneity of the village:

The riots had become a rout. By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people-Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs were in fight. 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. The only remaining cases of peace were a scatter of villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villages was Mano Majra (Singh 1).

In *Train to Pakistan* Jugga is a thug, defame for his bad character. He is in love with a Muslim weaver's daughter with whom he often rendezvoused in the night. One night, when he is out of the village and the local money lender gets killed by someone, he is blamed for the murder and arrested. The next morning, a "Mona Sardar" and social worker, Iqbal, reached in the village to stop any riots in the area. But as soon as he finds rest, he is arrested for the murder of the moneylender too. The novel recounts when the disturbance starts in Mano Majra, Juggut was in police custody and another character was Iqbal, educated in England and an expert in giving sermons on Hindu-Muslim unity. Police set them free from the custody expecting that both of them will assist in preventing the villagers from killing the Muslims who were leaving to Pakistan through train. While Juggat loses his life and make a sacrifice, Iqbal, a political worker, an idealist and nationalist has worldly wise approach and keeps him away from the trouble.

Juggat's passionate love for Nooran appears for him to be more valuable than anything. His self sacrifice is inspired by his love for Nooran. When he came to know from his mother that Nooran met her before going to the refugee camp and she carries his (Jugga's) child in her womb, he cannot tolerate the separation from his beloved. When the lunatics prepare to attack the train when it passes through Mano Majra railway bridge, Juggut Singh went on the bridge and cuts the rope stretched to sweep off the people sitting on the roof when the train passes through the bridge. The leader of the gang fires shots at him and he fell down:

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 to Pakistan (Singh190).

We see that Juggat does not hesitate to sacrifice his life for Nooran and other Muslims. He never, like Iqbal, indulges in the confusion of morality, and leaves it to Guru (God) to differentiate between the right and the wrong or good and bad acts and reward them accordingly. Juggat Singh comprehends the philosophy of "Granth Sahib" in true sense, which says:

For God is True and dispenseth Truth.  
There the elect his court adorn,  
And God Himself their actions honors (Singh 183).

In the novel, Juggut Singh explains:

If you are going to do something good, the Guru will help you; if you are going to do something bad, the Guru will stand in your way. If you persist in doing it, he will punish you till you repent, and then forgive you (Singh 183) .

Juggut seeks strength from God to assist himself in his noble work which seems to be the novelist's plea too. Violence and hatred cannot be conquered by brutality and it is only love and compassion that can calm the hatred in human beings. Love has the true power to transform a criminal like Juggut Singh into a good human being and courageous man who sacrifices his life for the welfare of other people irrespective of their class, caste and religion.

In the beginning, the story of the novel is little bit slow but soon come on track gradually as the events unfold. The end is the best part of the book as when readers will finish reading they will be having tears as it will leave on them melancholy. The simplicity of the plot and the characters is the book's another feature in addition to the heart-moving end. The beautiful description of life in a village is also worth a mention, it narrates a similar tale of courage and nerve in times of great human suffering. It is about the sacrifice of one man to protect lives of other people while insanity prevails everywhere. It is the story of one man wrestling with his thinking and debating with himself whether it is right to stand in front of 50 armed men waiting to kill hundreds of their own species, to stop because what they are going to do is unethical.

The emotional conversation of Iqbal that he has with himself during the end of story is great to read. The protagonist talks about religion and the limited and constipated perception that it has in India. He revealed about the irony of proving one's Sikhism to stay alive in an insane asylum that India had become in that period. He expressed about the uselessness of talking about logics and morals in front of people who have become bloodthirsty. They will rather attack with a sword on your stomach and proceed and call you a traitor rather than listen or understand to the morality you are talking about.



Iqbal is the only person who put his life in danger to save a train full of Muslims who are refugees in their own motherland and are going to Pakistan while an army of crazy men armed with all kinds of modern and traditional weapons waiting to kill and rape and abduct those innocent Muslims going to Pakistan, a land where they will be called 'Muhajir' (refugees) and will be seen with an eye of contempt because they came from India, and will again become refugees in a country that was made for them. The inhabitants of Mano Majra, both Hindus and Muslims, become victims of the circumstances they think of one another not as individuals but mere religious beings; a serious threat to their own protection and religion. Khushwant Singh has used the character of Juggut Singh to show the importance of love in saving philanthropy and compassion.

The novelist has nicely divided the novel into four parts and the fourth part named 'Karma', emphasizes the philosophy of 'Karma', that is an action, as depicted in *The Bhagavad Gita*. Here the story reached to its catastrophic dramatic end with Juggut Singh sacrificing his life to protect the lives of his beloved Nooran and other Muslim refugees. When Nooran comes to know about her father's resolution to leave the country, she gets nonplussed at it as she was in love with Juggut Singh. Juggut was in police custody at that time. She did not wish to leave him but couldn't do anything in view of the existing circumstances. She tells her that she is pregnant with his child and does not want to leave him, but all in vain.

The end of the story reflects that how people make a strategy to attack the train taking the Muslims including those of Mano Majra to Pakistan. The Sikhs of Mano Majra who, just one day before, were ready to lay down their lives for their Muslim brothers, now at once become fully prepared to kill them. They determined this at the suggestion of the Sikh boy who excites their religious passions to revenge to the brutality of the Muslims. But when Juggut Singh comes to know about his beloved Nooran and the people's plan about the train, he did the act of self-sacrifice to save the lives of people. Though there were other people also who knew about the plot and wanted to curb their plan but they were not able to check the plot against the fleeing Muslims. His characters enliven the contemporary Indian life. Khushwant Singh's fictional world depicts the depth of his apprehension of reality; he deals with different aspects of social reality. He has seen all the incidents of partition as belong to that age and time; he is the witness of pre-partition national movement, post-partition, Freedom, and the modern complicated world. He is interested in human relations; his East-West education and modern-traditional life assist his fictional world to record contemporary socio-political annoyance.

Khushwant Singh wonderfully performed the true role of a writer as well as historian. He has an intrinsic quality and capability to observe the things beyond his time. He is the most responsive person to the call of equality, liberty and human rights. The writings of Khushwant Singh make the common people socially, politically and culturally conscious. He penned down the novels to provide awareness about the period of history to the common people. Khushwant Singh reacted to this occurrence with a sense of horror and a large number of novels were written on Independence movement and on the story of partition. The novelists record the dominance of violence, hatred and the complete destruction of ethics. In the novel *Train to Pakistan* Violence is another fundamental aspect. But the final aim of Khushwant Singh is not only to highlight communal violence, death, disaster, hate, disorder and but also to highlight the path of humanism. His objection against violence, bloodshed and hatred is not only a physical phenomenon but a long process of humanity.

If readers of the novel are examined on a closer level then the picture is full of contempt as Government officials were corrupt, manipulative of villagers, and arrest anyone they chose for any cause, for their own benefit. The law was completely at the whim of the local government, truly means that in practice, there was no law. Number of educated people was less and they were trying to instill in people democratic, communist, or other western ideologies, though the people or villagers were turned off and in dilemma by their unorthodoxy. When one educated man was talking to a villager about liberty, the villager explained:

"Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians—or the Pakistanis" (48).

Khushwant Singh had the capacity to write passionately about Society, Religion and Politics because he had been personally engrossed with the subject matter. His childhood memories are those of his grandmother reciting holy words from the Granth Sahib and the Sukhmani. Later he was a spectator to the terror unleashed by the division. He was also a witness to the unexpected horrible tragedy of the anti-Sikh riots. Singh wrote about every subject that has moved him. His friends and family, and his identity as a Sikh; all get a place in his

fiction. Train to Pakistan, with its numberless gruesome and explicit accounts of Violence, Death, Torture, and Rape for the public to read and understand.

In the nutshell, the division has left many scars in the hearts of Indians and those tragic days still torment us and the memories of that unforgettable tragedy still makes people palpitate and quiver, are brought lively through a great historic novel by Khushwant Singh. The dreadful and atrocious memories of the annihilation are still fresh in minds of everyone. The novel by Khushwant Singh even being a work of fiction is very near to realism in terms of the scenes and plot that are created and portrayed. The novel Train to Pakistan has an expression that is quite heart-rending and touches the core of the heart dolefully. This novel is must essentially be read by all, those who want to get a brief look of what had occurred as consequence of one of the most depressing and disheartening episodes of not just in the history of India.

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