

Train To Pakistan: A Realistic Picture of Partition Period

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Abstract

Train To Pakistan represents a realistic picture of the Partition time in the history of India. The novelist does not suffer from any inhibitions when he throws light on the great human catastrophe of this period and the inhuman events that followed. Because of religious fanaticism millions of people pulled out their roots of the places where their forefathers had lived for centuries. In 1947, when the new country Pakistan was formally announced, about ten millions people – Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs were shifting their places of living. They collided with each other and there started communal riots which led to the killing of a large number of innocent people of both the sides. In fact, the virus of partition had become active in the entire part of the country. The situation became worse when a train loaded with the dead from the Pakistan had arrived at Mano Majra. The study of the novel shows that by focusing on micro level, i.e., the village Mano Majra, Khushwant Singh depicts what was happening at macro-level, i.e. in the whole country.

Keywords: Represent, Partition, Inhibition, Catastrophe, Religious Fanaticism, Mano Majra, Depict.

Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan is one of the finest realistic novels of Post-World-War II Indo Anglian Fiction as it represents a moving tragic tale of the partition period

in the history of India. Partition being a political issue became the cause of great sufferings, tortures, miseries and misfortunes for the people of diverse communities and cultures particularly for the Sikhs, the Hindus and the Muslims. Sujata Patel rightly observes, "The post-independence India experienced varied identity formation as a consequence of the process of industrialization, urbanization, globalization and expansion of the information technology. The identities that are emerged were based on discrete received categories such as religion, Caste (Jati), Class (Varna), gender and sex."¹ Suja Alexander in her famous essay personal Concerns go Public in Train To Paskistan also brings into light the inner agony and conflict which was going inside Singh. Mark : "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'...."² In case one takes a plunge into the deep bottom of the novel, one finds that it has a

well thought out structure, a well woven plot, an absorbing narrative and beautifully portrayal of characters. Besides it, the novel has some others notable features also i.e., a symbolic framework, meaningful atmosphere and a powerful way of expression and style. In the background of the novel there is great human catastrophe of the partition between India and Pakistan, and the inhuman events that followed. Mark: "We often romanticize trains, but during the partition, the trains had become a medium—either to death or life, it was a bait that everyone was forced to take."³ (web)

Khushwant Singh's novel Train To Pakistan was originally entitled as Mano Majra, a place which is the centre of action in the sequence of events leading to the final catastrophe. The novelist deliberately changed the title of the novel—from the static to the dynamic. In

other words, Mano Majra being the name of a village, is a fixed point in the space whereas the train is a symbol of movement. The other symbolic significance may be multitudes of the people who are heading for various destinations. During the partition period, a large number of the people from other side of the dividing boundary were on the way, seeking refuge and security. William C-Doughlas, the famous Judge of the Supreme Court of America writes, "When portion between India and Pakistan was decreed, hundreds of thousands of people pulled up their roots and changed their residences.... driven by the fear of religious fanaticism."⁴

In fact, millions of Hindus from Pakistan longed for a passage to India as a land for their hope and peace. On the other side, millions of Muslims from India sought the road to Pakistan for the same reason. In this way, the train represents the movements of vast communities uprooted from their traditional area of growth to a new place of dwelling. It also stands for the harrowing processes of this particular change, the awful and ghastly experience of human beings engaged in a historical impersonal and dehumanized process. Mark : "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."⁵

Mano Majra, a small village in the Punjab is situated at the border between India and Pakistan and also at a distance of half a mile from the river Sutlej. The bloodshed and communal riots left no effect upon the peaceful life in Mano Majra. In fact, there is harmony, trust, respect and mutual understanding amongst Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Khushwant Singh writes, "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 crow. 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 Majra has

settled down to its dull daily routine. Men are in the fields... as the midday express goes by, Mano Majra stops to rest... when the evening passenger from Lahore comes in everyone gets to work again."⁶

It is worth nothing that till now the virus of partition has not infected Mano Majra, and life here is regulated by the trains with their arrival and departure. The villagers here remain unaware of the distressing external world even in the midst of traumatic incidents. The novelist says, "No one in Mano Majra even knows that the British have left and the country is divided into Hindustan and Pakistan."⁷

It is said that communal riots first broke out in Calcutta as a consequence of the reports of the proposed division of the country into Hindustan and Pakistan. A large number of innocent people lost their lives in the riots. Both Hindus and Muslims blamed on each other for the great massacre. Mark : "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."⁸

From Calcutta the riots spread all around the country. As a result, millions of Hindus and Sikhs who had been living for centuries on the North-west Frontier abandoned their homes for the safety of their beloved ones to settle in the east. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims too left their homes from the east for their security and safety to seek new lodging in the west. Twinkle B. Manavar in his essay rightly observes, "Communal riots precipitated by reports of the proposed division of the country into a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan."⁹ People of all communities were travelling on foot, in bullock carts, crammed into lorries, clinging to the sides and roofs of trains. In 1947 when the new country Pakistan was formally announced, about ten millions people—Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were shifting their place of living. They collided with each other and there started communal riots which led to the killing of thousands of innocent people of both the sides. Due to this tragic incident, Hukum

Chand is so much horrified that he exclaimed with sorrow, "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."¹⁰

In spite of so much bloodshed and rioting in the frontier area, life in Mano Majra was running peacefully. This peacefully life came to a jolt when on an August night the village money lender's house raided by a dacoit Malli. Malli and his follow dacoits dropped bangles at the house of JuggutSingh who was arrested as the suspect of the murder and dacoity. People's Party of India sent its representative IqbalSingh to work there for peace as those were communal disturbances there. Mark; "I am a social worker, Bhaji. 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."¹¹

The situation at Mano Majra aggravated further as a commotion was created with the arrival of the ghost train from Pakistan. In fact, it was a very horrible sight to see the train loaded with the dead from Pakistan had arrived at Mano Majra. Harish Raizada writes, "Khushwant Singh's treatment of brutal atrocities committed on either side of the border is characterized by artistic objectivity and detachment. He exaggerates nothing, he leaves nothing."¹² This was a great massacre as at the railway line thousands of dead bodies were committed to the earth and a heavy machine was used to bury the dead. This great tragic incident engulfed Mano Majra and as a result madness took over the people of different communities. Khushwant Singh writes "... 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 Chundunnagar in refugee camp and from there to Pakistan."¹³

Now people at Mano Majra had lost the good feelings of brotherhood and harmony and the dark clouds of suspicion and fear had taken birth among them especially among the Sikhs and Muslims. Through the characters of Imam Baksh and Lambardar, the novelist presents this real situation of the partition period. In fact, Partition affected Mano Majra at both the levels— at the community level and the individual level. When Imam Bakhs asked Lambardar about Muslim's staying at Mano Majra, he said, "This is your village as much as ours." But after some time he changed his words. "It is very hard for me to say, but seeing the sort of time we live in, I would advise you to go to the refugee camp while this trouble is on. You lock your houses with your belongings. We will look after your cattle till you come back."¹⁴ At the community level the partition had affected the people so much that a group of Sikhs fanatics arrived there to invite the people for burning the train of refugees going to Pakistan.

At the individual level the partition had its ill-effects upon the true love between the Sikh boy Juggut Singh and the Muslim girl Nooran. Juggut Singh becomes sentimental when he comes to know about Nooran's visit to his house and also about his child in her womb. He decides to save his beloved and other refugees also. It is worth noting that Juggut Singh died a very tragic death while saving the refugees. Mark : "The rope had been cut in shreds. Only a thin tough strand remained. He went at it with the knife, and then with his teeth. The engine was almost on him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell."¹⁵

The study of the novel shows that by focusing on micro level, i.e., the village Mano Majra, the novelist depicts what was happening at macro-level, i.e. throughout the country during the crucial period of partition. The novelist does not suffer from any inhibitions while talking about senseless killing, looting, burning, stabbing and raping at the macro level. In fact, Khushwant Singh presents a vivid description from all the facets of time when partition was taking place in India.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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