

Partition and Trauma : A Study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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Abstract. India got its independence from British rule on 15th August, 1947. This independence however came through the most fearful incident which is named as 'Partition'. This partition is one of the most painful incidents in Post-Independence Indian history. Partition divided the nation into two parts – one is named as India and the other is named as Pakistan. In 1947, during the partition, the trauma aroused from the partition in North West was inflicted upon the people of Punjab. Some prominent works like *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai, *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal and *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh are the reflection of the same experience. Khushwant Singh is one of the pre-independent writers who lived through the trauma of partition and grew up amidst the torment, suffering and terror and horror of partition. Singh's inner experience is reflected in his 1956 novel *Train to Pakistan*. In the novel we can see how the people of Mano Majra were living happily; they didn't recognise themselves as Hindu or Muslim; rather they called themselves as brethren. Partition divided those people into two religious communities. *Train to Pakistan* represents the way partition gives people trauma and makes them feel traumatic which perhaps would never be cured. It would always remain in the heart of the people and the psyche of the people during their whole life. There is a close relationship between Partition and Trauma. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* clearly depicts how in the name of 'Freedom', the partition played a dirty trick with people. The intention of this paper is to explore Singh's representation of and his version of the relationship between partition and trauma.

Keywords : Partition; freedom; trauma; religious communities.

Khushwant Singh is one of the most celebrated authors in the tradition of Indian English novels. He has immensely contributed to the enrichment of Indian English literary tradition. His works are noted for their vivid representations on Indian society, effects of religion on human beings, and sometimes Partition's fearful experiences. His notable works are *Train to Pakistan*, *Delhi*, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, *The Company of Women*, and *The Sikhs*. His literary style is characterized by his simple

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and lucid language, use of irony and humor. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974 but he returned it in 1984. Later in 2007, he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan. Independence of India is one of the scariest, sorrowful events in the history of India. In 1947 India became independent. But the people of the nation were dominated, afflicted, displaced, exiled, looted. They were forced to go to an unknown place. Hindu and

Sikhs forced Muslims to go to Pakistan and vice versa. They had to go for the sake of their life, for if they refused to do so they were brutally killed. Millions of people were killed, slaughtered and became homeless in the process. Women were objectified, during the partition they lost their dignity, they were raped and killed. The whole incident made people psychologically vulnerable, they became hopeless with the uncertainty of their life. This paper tries to throw light on the psychological impact of the partition, the trauma, which recurrently haunts them throughout their life and often gives birth to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. From generation to generation they have carried this psychological strain for decades. It affects their psyche which perhaps would never be cured.

Literature Review

I have read some articles like *Train to Pakistan* as a Partition novel of Khushwant Singh, "The Traumatic Effect of the Partition of India: A Study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*", "Treatment of Trauma in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*". Although these articles have examined the pain of partition, people's suffering during partition, and how partition creates trauma on people, there is a lack of research on how vividly trauma has been evoked in the novel. Therefore, this paper intends to explore this aspect of the novel and show that Khushwant wants us to feel that for some people of India the taste of freedom was not unmingled with that of trauma.

Methodology

Throughout this paper the analytical and interpretive methods have been adopted. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is taken as the primary text.

Defining Trauma

A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory gives the following definition: An interdisciplinary theoretical body that draws from

psychoanalytic, feminist, and poststructuralist discourses and focuses on the study of both personal trauma (e.g. abuse, mental illness) and collective experiences of trauma (e.g. the Holocaust, slavery, genocide). “The theory offers a framework for understanding experiences that – by definition – overwhelm the coping mechanisms of individuals, and involves inquiry into the relationship between memory and truth and the ways that testimony can aid the recovery process”. (Cuddon, 736) Trauma is a prevalent problem that is present in all parts of something. It is caused by a sudden incident or series of events. And comes back again and again which breaks people’s mental peace and continues to haunt them. Trauma can be aroused from physical, sexual, emotional abuse, sudden unexplained separation from a loved one, racism, discrimination, oppression, violence in the community, war or terrorist activity.”There is nothing that war has ever achieved that we could not better achieve without it.”(Havelock Ellis) Post - Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a type of trauma that only occurs when an individual has experienced a horrible, fearful or stressful incident. The symptoms of PTSD may manifest immediately or after some days, weeks, or even months. If it is left untreated it can be the cause of some major psychological distress.

The traumatic experiences associated with war can be a major cause of PTSD. Because of it millions of soldiers, their family, children and community suffer from PTSD. Sometimes the nation can also suffer from PTSD. Great wars like World War I, World War II and Vietnam War lead to PTSD in millions of soldiers, their family and community and even the nation. After returning from the devastating wars the soldiers faced a lot of challenges. Because of the cognitive changes in their brain, they were unable to adjust themselves in civilian life. During the WWI soldiers experienced various new types of warfare like the use of poisonous gas, new forms of artillery. Living in this condition of psychological strain associated with these types of things brought a major change in the soldiers. This led to the condition which is called “shell shock”. Shell shock refers to the physical, emotional, mental or psychological symptoms that soldiers experienced after a traumatic combat. They often suffered from nightmares, anxiety, flashbacks, and memory loss. Sometimes the soldiers were given electric shock in order to recover from the traumatic situation. After WWI another terrible war WWII was fought when Nazi Germany, under Adolf Hitler, invaded Poland. WWII also had a horrible impact on people’s minds, most of the

people were suffering from the effects of traumatic events. Due to the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki people still are suffering from various physical and mental health issues, even seven decades after the event.

Unlike the previous wars like WWI and WWII, Vietnam veterans were not welcomed with open arms by their family and country. They faced rejection in their own country. After returning from a devastating war, this ungraceful situation extended their trauma. Most of them suffered from PTSD. Various symptoms like nightmares, loss of concentration, feelings of guilt, irritability and, in some cases, major depression were seen in millions of soldiers. Even after the 10 years of the war many weren't able to leave the war behind.

Partition and Trauma : A Study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* : Representation of Trauma in Literature

Partition and trauma are two interconnected themes, which many authors, writers have depicted in literature for decades. In 1947 India was divided into two parts which is referred to as Partition. Partition resulted in migration, oppression, violence, rape, massacre and later on trauma for millions of people. Writers have been using literature as a tool for many years to represent the emotional, psychological impact of trauma and the social and political factors which led to the partition. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is an early depiction of such an experience. Works like *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal , *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai, *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* also clearly depict the trauma of partition in various different ways.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* depicts the turmoil of the people of Lahore which they have gone through during the partition. Here, Sidhwa depicts the partition picture through a Parsi girl, Lenny. This novel shows the sense of loss and migration, how people were forced to leave their homes, families and friends. It also depicts how the British caused violence to the nation by polarizing the very people who once had been neighbors and friends.

Anita Desai is also one of the writers who depicts the pain of partition through her novel *Clear Light of Day*. Desai introduces trauma by not showing violence, massacre or slaughter of people. Desai depicts the aftermath of the partition by showing how broken families and

relationships can cause trauma for people. She shows how Bimla feels traumatic after Raja's departure. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* depicts the trauma of India's journey towards independence from colonial rule. Although there are episodes of political and communal tension, the major conflict is the psychological impact of the struggle for independence. The story of *Azadi* is set around a Hindu family from Sialkot. After partition Sialkot came under Pakistan. But Lala Kanshi Ram refused to go to India. He lost his daughter Madhu, who was killed by the mob. Kanshi Ram lost everything including his daughter. Here in this novel we can see how partition makes people alienated, displaced and traumatic.

In *Delhi* by Kushwant Singh the author portrays the events that lead to the partition, effects of partition and aftermath of the traumatic event on the lives of people. In this novel Bhagmati is the protagonist. Here one can also find how partition causes displacement. Singh shows how Bhagmati becomes a refugee in her own city, suffers from disease, and cries for food. This helpless situation makes her feel traumatic.

Khushwant Singh's perceptive recreation of psychological trauma is reflected in his *The Sunset Club*. Through the life of three old men who now finds many things are still undone in life Khushwant Singh here shows how aging can be traumatic as it brings the feelings of loneliness, regret and helplessness.

Relation between Trauma and Partition

Partition and Trauma are two themes that are intrinsically involved. We observed wherever partition came later on trauma followed. Because of partition a large number of displacements happen. People are forced to migrate from their own homes, from their own country and to go to a place which they never knew. They are uprooted from the place they had been living for centuries. This situation of uprooting creates a sense of trauma in their psyche. While people are migrating from India to Pakistan and Pakistan to India; people of other parts slaughtered millions of people, women were brutally raped and killed by men, children were killed in front of their parents. This sense of loss, uncertainty, loss of their own home, own nation, own possession, loss of their loved one in front of their own eyes cause a deep psychological impact on individuals.

The psychological impact of trauma of partition continues from generation to generation. The stories told by their grandmother and

grandfather to their grandchildren keep the terrible sense alive even now. The traumatic experiences caused by the partition still continue to shape the political relationships and the cultural division between two parts of the nation India and Pakistan. We got our freedom from British rule but whenever a cricket match is played between India and Pakistan and India and England; we feel more excited about the former rather than the later one, this is how partition plays with us even after seven decades of independence.

Trauma in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

Khushwant Singh's 1956 novel *Train to Pakistan* is a poignant portrayal of trauma caused by partition. His novel depicts the turmoil, violence, massacre, rape, displacement, slaughter experienced by people during the partition. Singh's Mano Majra, the village near the borderland between India and Pakistan, was a peaceful village. All the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikhs used to live there without any kind of discrimination. Majority of people were Sikhs and many Muslims lived in rented houses of Sikhs. They often refer to themselves as 'brothers':

Here we are on the border within Muslims living Sikh villages as if nothing had happened. Every morning and evening the muezzin calls for prayer in the heart of village like Mano Majra. You ask the Sikhs why they allow it and they answer that the Muslims are their brothers (21).

It was on a night of August that Malli and his gang killed Lala Ram Lal. Lala's family was the only Hindu family in the village. When Lala is killed all the villagers and police think that it is Juggut Singh who killed Lala. Police arrest Jugga and Iqbal, a refugee, social reformer who lives in the gurdwara. Police think that Iqbal is a Muslim and want to avoid riot. But Mano Majra's people were not aware about partition until then the 'ghost train' comes into the station and changes the situation and the people :

At first glance, it had the look of the trains in the days of peace. No one sat on the roof. No one clung between the bogies. No one was balanced on the

footboards. But somehow it was different. There was something uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality (82).

All the villagers start discussing the train. They ask if anybody knows anything. Imam Baksh, Meet Singh and other villagers in the gurdwara make speculations. No one from the village is allowed to go near the station. Everyone was expecting something to happen. Suddenly they see twilight sparking in the sky, "A soft breeze began to blow towards the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene, then of wood. And then – a faint acrid smell of searing flesh"(88).

They can now relate what the train was for and they understand that the train was full of dead bodies, "That evening, for the first time in the memory of Mano Majra, Imam Baksh's sonorous cry did not rise to the heavens to proclaim the glory of God" (89).

The scene of burning thousand people recurrently comes to mind of Hukum Chand. That night he feels so traumatic that he is not able to have his dinner. He feels so devastated that he keeps his hands on his face to avoid the sight but the sight comes again and again. The inside view of the train shakes Hukum Chand badly, he becomes speechless by the cruel sight. When a cold body of an old man had fallen on Hukum Chand's feet he was shocked, he wanted to shout out but was unable to do so. He only moans, no noise comes from his throat:

... There were bodies crammed against the far end wall of the compartment, looking in terror at the empty windows through which must have come shots, spears and spikes. There were lavatories, jammed with corpses of young men who had muscled their way to comparative safety (90).

At last the long awaited rain comes. All welcome the rain. But as the rain continues to go on it gives birth to earthworms, ladybirds and tiny frogs. Here we can see similarities between the long awaited freedom and long awaited rain. As the taste of freedom had gone with the terrible events of partition, to the hope associated with rain also disappears.

When all decide that Muslims have to leave Mano Majra, we can see Imam Baksh's struggle to fight with his emotion associated with

his loved Mano Majra, where he has been living for years. The trauma of homelessness makes Imam Baksh's eyes full of tears, "What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So we're our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers. Imam Baksh broke down" (133).

We also see Nooran's helplessness towards the situation. While Nooran is two months pregnant with Jugga's child, it is very much traumatic for her to leave her village and to go to Pakistan. She is very much scared to think that if people of Pakistan come to know that she is pregnant with a Sikh's child they will surely kill her. This way Jugga also loses his love. This is how the author portrays the sacrifices of love and breaking of relationships during the partition.

There is a village river, Sutlej near the railway station. During the rainy season the river starts to rise further. Lambardara and some villagers see the river carrying carts with the bloated carcasses of bulls, horses, and also bodies of some men, women and children. The lambardar thinks that they were flooded. Suddenly they see more dead bodies coming, then they understand that they have been murdered, not drowned. Seeing the brutal sight the lambardar and other villagers cover up their faces with the end of their turbans and they pray for mercy:

There were many others coming down the river like logs hewn on the mountains and cast into streams to be carried down to the plains. A few passed through the middle of the arches and sped onward faster. Others bumped into the piers and turned over to show their wounds till the current turned them over again. Some were without limbs, some had their bellies torn open, many women's breasts were slashed. They floated down the sunlit river, bobbing up and down. Overhead hung the kites and vultures.

(151)

Another train from Pakistan comes. All the villagers' eyes are fixed on the railway station. They are so traumatized by the previous incident that they think again some policemen would come and ask for oil and wood. But they see something else. This time, a bulldozer arrives and it digs the ground and fills it with dead bodies. By this horrible sight

they become so psychologically traumatic, it raises fear in their mind, they can't stay alone anymore. Even they feel haunted while they pass along Muslims dwellings. They start visiting gurdwara to overcome their fear:

Attendance at prayers had been steadily going up since the murder of the moneylender; people did not want to be alone. Since the Muslims had gone, their deserted houses with doors swinging wide open had acquired an eerie, haunted look. Villagers walked past them quickly without turning their heads (153).

Iqbal came to the village Mano Majra after Lala's death. He is a social worker by profession, for whom religion doesn't matter. When Meet Singh asks his name he only replies as Iqbal, without any surname. The police arrest him on suspicion of the murder and after the incident he feels that he is robbed of his dignity. But when he gets released from the jail he is so traumatized by the situation, he now wants to convince the people that he is a Sikh. In spite of his guiltlessness he gets arrested, this incident creates trauma inside Iqbal. Iqbal came to Mano Majra for social work but after being released from jail he has no will left. He just wants to stay alive:

There would be no one to see this supreme act of sacrifice. They would kill him just as they would kill the others. He was not neutral in their eyes. They would just strip him and see. Circumcised, therefore Muslim. It would be an utter waste of life. (178)

In the text, we also see Sundari, a newly married woman with a hope for a happy married life. The author depicts how partition snatches her hope and she is gang raped in front of her husband. She is deeply traumatized when the mob cut her husband's penis and give it to her. Sundari represents all the women who lose their husbands, their hope for happy life and get raped and killed:

They held him by the arms and legs and one man cut off his penis and gave it to

her. The mob made love to her. She did not have to take off any of her bangles. They were all smashed as she lay in the road, being taken by one man and another and another (187).

Apart from victims of rape, murder and slaughter, there are other victims too who suffered the pain of partition in a different way. Sunder Singh's family is one such ill-fated family whose members suffer excruciating anguish. Sunder Singh is a brave Sikh, who while fleeing from Sindh to India, finds his train halted for four days. There was no food and no water. His children began to cry for food and water. Sunder Singh gave them his urine to drink. Singh could not tolerate their suffering, so he shot them.

Jugga is a professional dacoit. Even though he didn't murder Ram Lal, he had to go to jail. He silently suffers the pain and the disaster that befall him. Jugga foils the conspiracy of communalist rioters and helps the refugee train to cross the border and to go to Pakistan. Jugga and Nooran's love may not become fulfilled but by Jugga's humanity his beloved stays with his child in her womb alive. Thus, India becomes alive in the heart of Pakistan, "The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan" (190). With what trauma his love Nooran will live the rest of her life in a foreign land is beyond the scope of the narrative but it is there like a scar in the mind of all sensitive readers.

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