

Train to Pakistan: A Partition Novel

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Abstract. Khushwant Singh holds a distinguished place in Indo-Anglian fiction. He is a prolific writer. He is product of 20th century. He was born before India was separated from Pakistan. Therefore, he has observed what happened in 1947 during partition. At the time of partition the holocaust began and thousands and thousands of people were killed. The children became shelter-less. They lost their parents. They suffered from starvation. Khushwant Singh has seen these incidents through his own eyes and he has attempted to present the real picture of this holocaust through his writings.

Keywords : Indo-Anglian; partition; holocaust; starvation.

“A great writer, in writing of himself, writes his time” (Eliot, 137). This statement holds good with all the authors whether they are poets, dramatists or novelists. Each writer is product of his age. He is born in the society; He grows in the society; he lives in the society; and he gathers his experience in the society. Later on, he expresses his experiences in the form of writing and this writing takes the form of literature. Through it he attempts to present the real picture of the society. As we know the world literature is divided into two different eras- B.C. and A.D. By ‘B.C.’ I mean ‘Before Christ’ and ‘A.D.’ means ‘Anno Domini’. Likewise, Indian history is also divided into two phases - B.P. (Before Partition) and PP (Post-Partition). India had been ruled over by the Britishers for a long time. Numberless persons sacrificed their life for the sake of their country, and ultimately, India became independent on the 15th of August 1947. In the same year, the partition occurred between Pakistan and Hindustan. Regarding this Khushwant Singh writes :

Partition was inevitable. It had to take place. Pointing fingers at anyone or the whole bunch of political figures serves no purpose because nobody could have stopped it. The build-up, that fury, the communally charged atmosphere was difficult to control. The only thing is that Partition could have taken place without so much bloodshed and violence. It was the bloodiest exchange.
(Batra, 10)

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Manohar Malgonkar also throws light on partition by giving his views which get a vivid expression in the following lines :

It was one of the bloodiest upheavals of history; twelve million of people had to flee, leaving their homes; nearly half a million were killed; over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, mutilated (10)

In this way, the partition between Indian and Pakistan has a far-reaching impact on the different writers of different languages such as Yashpal, Bhisham Sahni, Manohar Malgonkar, Nayantara Sahgal, Chaman Nahal, Bapsi Sidhwa, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh. So far as Khushwant Singh as a writer is concerned he has written many novels and short stories. Among them one is *Train to Pakistan* which deals with the narratives of partition. Therefore, the present paper aims at throwing light on *Train to Pakistan* as a partition novel.

Khushwant Singh occupies a unique place in Indian writing in English. He is called a prolific writer. He has written books on Delhi, nature and current affairs. People read them with great interest all over the world. Throughout his life he has been provocative, profoundly deep, and compelling. He has remained the eye witness of the major event which has taken place in the modern India. These events are Indian freedom movement, Independence and Partition and Emergency. Khushwant Singh has tried his best to present a critical analysis of these events before us through his writings. The novel, *Train to Pakistan*, is based on the theme of partition of India and Pakistan. The story moves around a fictional village known as Mano Majra. It is a small village situated on the boarder of Pakistan and Hindustan. It is a village of seventy families. Among them there is only one Hindu family and it is the family of Lala Ram Lal who is a money-lender. He lends money to the poor villagers on interest. The Sikhs and the Muslims are equal in number. The Sikhs have their own land and the Muslims are their tenants. A few families of sweepers also live in the village, but their religion is unknown. The idea regarding this village is reflected in the following lines:

Mano Majra is a tiny village. It has only three brick buildings, one of which is the home of the money lender Lala Ram Lal. The other two are the Sikha temple and the Mosque. The three brick

buildings enclose a triangular common with a large peepul tree in the middle. The rest of the village is a cluster of flat-roofed mud huts and low walled courtyards which front on narrow lanes that radiate from the centre. (*Train to Pakistan*, 10)

In Mano Majra there is a three foot slab of sand stone which is taken to be deity of the village. It has been set up on the bank of the pond for a long time and all the villagers worship her whether they are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians. They have a great respect for this deity. She works as a uniting force in the village. The villagers are quite simple. Their life is plain. Therefore, Mano Majra is completely untouched of the questions of castes, creeds, and religions. It is also cut off from the neighbouring cities. It is half a mile away from the river Sutlej. There is no clock in this village. Therefore, the routine begins with the arrival and departure of the train. People get up in the morning when the morning mail train comes to Mano Majra station. The train at 10:30 a.m. makes people busy in their fields. The mid day express train sends them to their houses for having lunch. The passenger train comes from Lahore in the evening and it announces the time for dinner. The goods train arrives at ManoMajra station at night, and then, people bid good bye to each other and go to their beds for sleeping. Thus, the life of the Mano Majrans is regulated with the arrival and departure of the trains.

One day the incident of dacoity takes place in the house of Lala Ram Lal who is a money lender of the village. The Mano Majrans have hatred for him. Even the dacoits kill him to make the village free from evils. On the charge of dacoity, Jugga Singh, a local badmash, has been arrested by the police though this heinous work has been done by Malli and his gang. Jugga is sent to jail and the police want to know the names of dacoits from him. On the day of dacoity, Iqbal, who is a communist leader, comes to Mano Majra. He reaches Gurudwara where he meets Bhai Meet Singh and Lambardar. He makes people aware of communist ideology and communal riots. He tells the villagers that he has been sent by his party to take preventive action against the carnage which is likely to take place with the arrival of the refugees. But before doing anything, he is arrested in suspicion that he is a Muslim though he is a Sikh. At last, he is also sent to prison. Iqbal raises a question against judiciary. This idea has been expressed in the following lines, "Does anyone ever bother to find out why people steal and rob and kill?"(55)

He says that the courts never try to know why a man becomes a thief or robber. When he does not get any opportunity to earn his livelihood through honest and honourable means, he has no option other than stealing. A thief is sent to jail, but the court knows full well that he will commit the same crime when he comes out of the prison. A convicted thief has no place in the society. He has no opportunity of living a life of a gentleman. This view gets reflected in the following lines:

If the fear of the gallows or the cell
stopped people from killing or stealing,
there would be no murdering or
stealing. They hang a man everyday in
this province yet ten get murdered every
twenty four hours.(55)

Iqbal again says, "No Bhajji, criminals are not born. They are made by hunger, want and injustice"(55). Khuswant Singh has also tried his best to present a brief account of the Muslims' cruelty meted out to the innocent Hindus and Sikhs. Baluch soldiers are going to Lahore from Amritsar. During this period, they thrust their bayonets into the Sikhs, walking on the roads. This idea has been portrayed in the following lines:

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)

Here the novelist has exposed the malafide intention of the Muslims. The Muslim soldiers get a lot of pleasures when they kill the innocent people passing by. Just opposite to this, the Sikhs living in Mano Majra give a good treatment to the Muslims. They take them to be their own brothers. Bhai Meet Singh protests a youth who wants to kill the Muslims in the village, Mano Majra. He asks the youth not to touch the local Muslims and they have not done any harms to them. Thus, the Sikhs and the Hindus have a great respect for the innocent Muslims.

Later on, the information is circulated among the Mano Majrans that the train fully packed with thousands of dead bodies has come to Mano Majra station. The villagers are asked to provide fuel and kerosene though they do not know why. But they are curious to know the reason.

Therefore, they stand on the roof of their houses and want to see what is happening at the station. They see nothing, but through the smell of the burning oil, fuel and flesh they understand that the dead bodies are being burnt to ashes. Hukumchand is the Deputy commissioner of Mano Majra. He also supervises the cremation work. He is surprised and shocked to see the horrible scene. This idea gets a vivid expression in the following lines, "Hukumchand began to moan and then with a final effort broke out of the nightmare with an agonised shriek. He sat up with a look of terrors in his eyes" (102). Hukumchand makes a rough calculation and comes to conclusion that the train must have fifteen thousand dead bodies. He also realises that the real Kalyug has come to this world where the innocent persons are being put to death.

Khushwant Singh also talks of harmony and peace prevalent in Mano Majra. Both the Hindus and the Muslims live in the village. The relation between them is harmonious. The news of breaking out the riots around Mano Majra has spread among the Mano Majras. They come into the mood of taking revenge upon the local Muslims. A meeting is held in the Gurudwara. The discussion starts. There are some youths who want to kill the Muslims. But their will of killing is suspended by Bhai Meet Singh and the Lambardar, a Tax Collector. After a long discussion the villagers decide that the Muslims of Mano Majra must take shelter in the refugee camp of the village for some time. They should leave their property in the care of the Sikhs. Their property will be returned to them when they come back to the village. Here the novelist has shown the pious attitude of the Sikhs and the Hindus.

At the end of the novel, Jugga Singh and Iqbal are released from the prison. On the other hand, the Sikh youths make plan to kill the Muslims who are going to Pakistan by train. They tie rope over the bridge so that people sitting on the roof of the train will dash against the rope. They will fall down on the ground and they will be run over by the train. Thus they will lose their life. But this plan fails on account of Jugga Singh. Jugga comes to know that his lady-love, Nooran, is to come by this train. Therefore, he wants to save her life. For this he climbs on the pillar and cuts the rope with his Kripan. Nobody is hurt on the train. The train passes safely and Jugga loses his life. In this way, the novel ends with the message that a dacoit has sacrificed his life for the sake of his beloved. He dies but his love wins.

To sum up, we may say that *Train to Pakistan* is a partition novel as it presents the real picture of the holocaust that has occurred in

1947 during partition. Several people have been killed in this incident. The Hindus blame the Muslims and the Muslims blame the Hindus. But both are responsible at their own places. Thousands and thousands of persons became homeless and shelter-less. A lot of damages were given to the society. Innocent children became orphan. They suffered from starvation. we must always remember that war never brings happiness, rather riots always lead to devastation. We are the descendents of the same Father. Therefore, we should have love for each other. Coleridge says that the best way of praying to God is to love all the creatures whether they are birds, beasts or human beings. Love always brings peace and harmony in the society. Therefore, it is an essential part of human life.

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