

RAJNI DEVI

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN ENGLISH(CONTRACT)

KURUKSHETRA UNIVERSITY KURUKSHETRA

THE IMPACT OF PARTITION: KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN*

Abstract

Khushwant Singh, in *Train To Pakistan*, narrates the history of partition as the backdrop of a fictional village's experience during the summer of 1947. He explores the struggle and violence in a fictional village, Mano Majra. In this village, Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindu family have lived peacefully. However, after two trains pass into the Mano Majra village station full of dead bodies, fear holds entire village. The gloomy and frightening events of those days had shaken the faith of the people. It has driven them into a state of shock over what man has done for man. *Train To Pakistan* sets in a period of great disillusionment and the crisis of values uncover a distressing and disintegrating period of partition. Mob ruled over the villages, looting, burning, abduction, and massacre, even animals sacred to other community, stabbed brutally. Independence brought in its wake one of the bloodiest carnages in the history of India. The situation of the country intensified miserable in the wake of the partition. Thus, this research paper explores the elements of terror or impact of partition in *Train To Pakistan*.

Keywords: partition, train, terror, India, Pakistan, Mano Majra

Introduction

Khushwant Singh was born on 2 February 1915, in West Punjab. *Train To Pakistan* was published in 1956 and received an award of the Grove India Fiction Prize. As a novelist, Khushwant Singh is famous for *Train To Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale*. After the publication of *Train To Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh became one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation. He is a

novelist, short story writer, historian, essayist, journalist and editor. These achievements establish him as a **versatile writer** in Indian Writing in English.

Train To Pakistan is a magnificent novel in which Khushwant Singh describes the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events will be remembered as one of the **blackest chapters of human history**. He has designed the novel to explore the brutal and hypocritical image of man. The novel is set in fictional village—Mano Majra, a small village in which Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs have loved each other as brothers and lived together in peace.

The novel is divided into four sections— the first is “Dacoity”, the second is “Kalyug”, the third is “Mano Majra” and the fourth is “Karma”. Khushwant Singh clearly builds the turbulent days of partition in these four sections. In the first section, the murder of Ram Lal by a gang of dacoits from a neighbouring village sets the main theme of tragedy to the event. **Dacoity has caused mutilation and has made some innocent persons victims for the action**. Police arrests Juggut Singh and Iqbal suspecting them for the murder. Thus, the sleepy village awakens to life and slowly joins the tragic storm outside. **The sudden activity in the village brings history in motion and the peace of the village slowly disappears.**

The second section, “Kalyug” describes that the novel has **cosmic vision. All the dead bodies carried by train from Pakistan to be cremated at Mano Majra advocates a sign that the old world has died.** The incident of mass cremation completely destroys the piece of the Mano Majrans. Everybody in the village takes the train as a prognostication of evil times. Even Meet Singh said to Imam Baksh, “This is kalyug, **the dark age**”(84). This was the first evening ever in Mano Majra’s history when there was, “Imam Baksh’s sonorous cry did not rise to the heavens to proclaim the glory of God”(89). Because he is a religious man and does prayer every day. All these intricacies in the piece of Mano Majra’s life suggest that the **end has come.**

The third section, “Mano Majra” is revolved around a **changed Mano Majra**. With the arrival of ghost train stuffed with corpses, Mano Majra loses its **ideal isolation and gets involved in the national demolition.** The Head-constable divides the villagers into two groups—Sikh and Muslim. The Sikh refugees shared their cruelty meted out to the Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan. The chaos prevails in Mano Majra as Khushwant Singh

describes, “There was complete confusion. People ran hither and thither shouting at the tops of their voices”(144). In spite of that, villagers still pledge to protect their Muslim brethren. The Lambarder assures Imam Baksh, “This is your village as much as ours” (133). Another younger men said, “If anyone raises his eyebrows at you, we will rape his mother” (133). Imam Baksh is overwhelmed by the expression of affection when he says, ““What have to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers””(133). But the fire of hatred blew its extreme. All are afraid of the angry and aggrieved refugees from Pakistan. The irony of fate is revealed when forces beyond the control of the Mano Majra take over and warmth of the relationship between Sikh and Muslims for generation is blown out. The state of mental agony and conflict of Hindu and Muslim is thus unveiled. The houses of Muslims are robbed.

The fourth section is, “Karma” that describes the novel a metaphysical dimension. In this section, the story reaches its devastating dramatic end with Juggut Singh sacrificing his life to save the lives of other Muslim as well as his girl friend Nooran. The novel closes with an ironic reversal of the order of things in which the dacoit Mali becomes a custodian of Muslims property and Juggut Singh sacrifices his life. In this section ‘Karma’ takes hold of the man, but man by virtue of his free will fight against his fate and tries to retrieve his last soul.

At the time of independence, India was partitioned with a great disturbance in the whole continent. Independence brought in its wake one of the bloodiest carnages in the history of India. During this period, the people of the Mano Majra village pass from the state of happiness and stability to that of bitterness and disturbance.

Train to Pakistan describes the troubled relationship between the Muslims and the Sikhs. The situation of the country intensified miserable in the wake of the partition. The effect of this was that twelve million people had to flee leaving their home; over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, assassinated. Thus, thousands fled from both sides of border seeking security and refugee. The sinister and venomous impact of partition and the indignation provoked in Singh has been realistically expressed in a devastating irony in *Train To Pakistan*.

The violence that started in Calcutta rushed the country and severed people. In the first part of the novel, “Dacoity”, Khushwant Singh, describes the cataclysmic scene:

The summer before, communal riots precipitated by reports of the proposed division of the country into a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan, had broken out in Calcutta, and within a few months the death toll had mounted to several thousand. Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed... both tortured. Both raped. From Calcutta, the riots spread north and east and west to Noakhali in East-Bengal, where Muslims massacred Hindus, to Bihar where Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. Hundreds of Thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier abandoned their homes and fields towards the protection of the predominantly Sikh and Hindu communities in the east... 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 flight. 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 oases of peace were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villages was Mano Majra. (1)

The novelist blames equally both the Hindu and the Muslims. At the beginning of the novel, the novelist has identified that even after the tragic storm throughout the Punjab; Mano Majra remained unaffected from communal stress and tension. It appeared in fact like a small oasis in the vast desert of communal violence and weird blood bath, in fact, forms the essence of the novel. The novelistic vision gets more and more complex as we move from one to another section. Manohar Malgonkar points out, **“Every citizen was caught up in the Holocaust. No one remains aloof... the administration, the police even the armed forces, were caught up in the blaze of hatred”** (341).

The main cause of the partition was the communal suspicion sown by the leaders. The sub-inspector was furious at the ignorance of the leaders in Delhi. They were the chief persons behind the brutal acts in Punjab happened in the wake of partition. The sub-

inspector narrates the tragic scene of the horrible killings in Pakistan and regretted the complete ignorance of the leaders proclaiming non-violence. He said to the Hukum Chand (deputy commissioner):

What is happening on the other side in Pakistan does not matter to them. They have not lost their homes and belongings; they haven't had their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters raped and murdered in the streets. Did your honour hear what the Muslim mobs did to Hindu and Sikh refugees in the marketplaces at Sheikhpura and Gujranwala? Pakistan police and the army took part in killings. Not a soul was left alive.(22)

The discussion between the sub-inspector and the commissioner shows how even the protectors were busy in the game of rape, abduction and killing. Women's jumping into the well, swelling the corpses, in order to save themselves in those days of brutality.

In the village Mano Majra, life is regulated by the passing of trains across the Sutlej Bridge nearby. The train acts as an alarm for villagers, they awake when the train rushes through the bridge before sunrise. At the daybreak, many trains crossed the Mano Majra's bridge about three to four times in a day. Thus, the arrival and departure of a train made an impact on the life of Mano Majra's people. So, the train becomes a crucial symbol for Mano Majrans. But soon things began to change. Partition began to take its toll in this tiny village.

Just after the announcement of partition, the trains were filled with Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan and with Muslim refugees from India. One day in the early September, a ghost train came from Pakistan to Mano Majra. It was filled with corpses. The train appeared as:

There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just then become voiceless. Some of them did not have a scratch on their bodies. 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)

Thus the train appeared as a ghost. The scene was very horrible, as Shahane points out:

The train implies the movement of vast communities, torn from their links of nativity, from their places of birth and upbringing and areas of traditional growth in search of a new Jerusalem. It indicates the harrowing process of this change, the awful and ghastly experiences of human beings involved in a historical, objective and almost dehumanised process.(21)

The dead bodies are removed from the train and thrown one above another. Hukam Chand began to moan and, “he sat up with a look of terror in his eyes” (90). In the same time, a police officer ordered the people, “Everyone get all the wood there is in his house and all the kerosene oil he can spare and bring these to motor trucks on the station side”(86). It was for the mass cremation was to be done. The novelist describes the scene in which those corpses were burned, “Red tongue of flame leaped into the black 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. The village was stilled in a deathly silence (88).

All the villagers became shocked and disappointed after this incident. All the places of borderline, along with Mano Majra are stuffed with this type of massacre. S.P.Swain observes, “Everywhere there is mass madness and Mano Majra too reels under the opprobrious and ghastly scene of communal frenzy (85). The train thus appeared with full of refugees from Pakistan to India and India to Pakistan. The most vulnerable and horrific scene of violence, however, was the train.

To conclude we can say that through his characters, Khushwant Singh, help us to understand the tragic story of partition, the most important event of the freedom struggle of India. Partition was the age of darkness, at this time darkness was everywhere— in India or in Pakistan. Millions of refugees were uprooted from their homes. They feel anxious, restless, rootless and helpless. Partition was, in fact, a traumatic experience in our recent history. It brought to an abrupt, long and communal shared history and cultural heritage. The train played a significant role because it brings the news of partition and finally, the dead bodies crossing the border from each side. Thus *Train To Pakistan* portrayed the picture of ghostly horrors sanctioned on the border regions during the horrible days of the partition.