

# Train to Pakistan Themes

## Morality

The characters of *Train to Pakistan* grapple with questions of morality throughout the novel. Early in the novel, Meet Singh argues that because Europeans don't care much for religion, they have no morals. Clearly, he sees a direct link between religion and morality, but ironically he would have no qualms lying on Jugga's behalf if Jugga murdered someone from another village. This is just one example of morality's shaky status in the novel. In Mano Majra, being moral means being loyal "to one's salt, to one's friends, and fellow villagers" (Singh 63). This takes precedence over truth, honor, and financial integrity. Though this code of morals is baffling to outsiders like Iqbal, it makes perfect sense to villagers like Meet Singh and Jugga. This code is one of the reasons why it's Jugga, not Iqbal, who sacrifices himself to save Mano Majra's Muslims, even though Iqbal seems morally superior to Jugga for most of the novel.

Hukum Chand is another key character when considering morality in *Train to Pakistan*. At every turn, he seems to wrestle internally with the decisions he makes. For example, after Haseena spends the night at his house, he wakes up and feels "old and unclean" (Singh 133). He compares her to his daughter, and feels remorseful about his actions, but realizes once he drinks again his remorse will fade away. When Chand releases Jugga and Iqbal, hoping that they will save the train of Muslims from the mob, the morality of his decision haunts him again. He is effectively sending two civilian men of questionable intentions to save a group of refugees from certain death, and it's a mission that should have been his responsibility as magistrate of Mano Majra. Chand knows this and feels uneasy about his choice, but does nothing to fix it. Instead he sits, cries, and prays, turning to religion in his hour of moral ineptitude.

## Religious Persecution

Religious persecution is one of the driving forces in *Train to Pakistan*, and in the Partition of India as a whole. The Partition of India was the division of Muslim Pakistan from Sikh India. With this division, approximately 10 million people were suddenly in the "wrong" country, and people who had lived together for generations in the same villages became enemies overnight. Muslims fleeing India met rape, pillaging, and death, and Sikhs fleeing Pakistan faced the same adversities. Though the differences between the religions are mentioned briefly in the novel, most of the strife between the two groups stems from acts of violence, both past and present, each side commits against the other.

Singh never discusses in the novel what caused the political climate and violence between Sikhs and Muslims, or even what precipitated a need for the partition in the first place. All we know are the various prejudices various characters harbor against members of the opposite religion. For example, a young Sikh man from Mano Majra accuses Mano Majra's Muslims of "stealing their salt" for generations. These words suggest that some Sikhs view Muslims as intruders and as freeloaders. Meanwhile, some Muslims view Sikhs as "barbarous infidels with ill intent" because of their long hair, beards, and kirpans. Here, we can see that the basis of the religious animosity isn't the religions themselves but the characteristics of the people who practice each religion. Though Sikhs and Muslims have been able to bear with these characteristics for generations, by the start of *Train to Pakistan* this is no longer true.

## Mob Rule

During the Partition of India a power vacuum occurred as the newly created Indian and Pakistani governments struggled to establish and maintain control. In this vacuum Sikh and Muslim villages are pillaged and looted, and people from both religions are attacked, raped, and murdered. As a result, a type of vigilante justice is established whereby an "eye for an eye" is the primary mantra. For example, in retaliation for a train of dead Sikhs being sent from Pakistan, the leader of a Sikh mob devises a plot to send a train of dead Muslims back. Though the Sikhs of Mano Majra love their Muslim neighbors, the mob leader's propaganda compels them to abandon their own morals and join the murderous plot. According to the mob leader, the purpose of pillaging and killing Muslims is to "teach" the other side and stop the violence altogether.

Clearly, he doesn't believe in the government's ability to regain control and establish peace, and thinks the people must take matters into their own hands. This is just one example of the instances of mob rule that gripped India and Pakistan during the partition.

## Corruption

For a portion of *Train to Pakistan*, corrupt government officials and policemen are the main villains of the story. Iqbal is the first one to mention corrupt police, when he discusses with Meet Singh "the police system which, instead of safeguarding the citizen, maltreats him and lives on corruption and bribery" (Singh 58). Iqbal's harsh review of India's police seems to foreshadow his own future dealings with them. For it's the next day that the head constable arrests him for Lala Ram Lal's murder, although he knows it's impossible for Iqbal to have committed the crime. Once the sub-inspector and Hukum Chand find out about Iqbal's erroneous arrest, they keep him imprisoned for their own nefarious plans, rather than freeing the innocent man. Even Jugga, who is also a victim of the police corruption, acknowledges they will let him off or keep him imprisoned based on their own whim. The police use a combination of intimidation, falsified documents, and torture to keep Iqbal and Jugga under their thumb.

The corruption continues when the major villain of the novel shifts to the mob who wants to kill the train of Muslims en route to Pakistan. Hukum Chand and the sub-inspector know of the plot, and as government officials it's their responsibility to stop it. However, their own fear of the mob of violent Sikhs prevents them from intervening. Instead, they turn to Jugga and Iqbal, the two men they kept falsely imprisoned for the murder of a Muslim man, to save the train full of Muslim men and women. Furthermore, they speculate that if Jugga and Iqbal fail, they can simply burn or bury the dead Muslims like they did the train of dead Sikhs from Lahore, effectively burying the truth. In the face of such corruption, the disillusion of the Indian people with their government becomes easier to understand.

## National Identity

At the heart of the 1947 Partition of India are questions of national identity. What does it mean to be Indian, and what does it mean to be Pakistani? For many Muslims, forced to leave India for Pakistan because of their religion, these questions are particularly pressing. As Imam Baksh points out, Muslims have lived in India for generations, setting roots and building lives. Their religion may be Pakistani, but their culture until now has been Indian. Not only are they being forced to relocate to a country they know nothing about, but they are experiencing violence and death along the way.

## Community

From the opening movements of *Train to Pakistan* to its last turn, community plays a central role in the novel's plot. When Jugga is framed for Lala Ram Lal's murder, there is disbelief, not because Jugga is a model citizen, but because the idea he would perform a dacoity in his own village is shocking. Mano Majra, like many other Indian towns, has a strict code of ethics when it comes to community and one's neighbors. The problem with the notion that Jugga murdered Lala Ram Lal isn't the act of the murder itself, but the person Jugga supposedly murdered. Had Jugga murdered someone from another village, the priest of Mano Majra himself would have gladly sworn on the Sikh holy book that Jugga had been praying in the gurdwara at the time of the murder. But because Lal was a member of the community, Jugga is condemned.

But it is Jugga who proves his sense of community and devotion to his neighbors at the novel's denouement. At first, it seems all members of Mano Majra live by their community creed. When the head constable announces that the Mano Majra's Muslims need to leave, the Sikh villagers protest, saying "we could never say anything like that to our tenants, any more than we could tell our sons to get out of our homes" (Singh 174). Though there are religious differences, loyalty to a fellow villager is supposed to take precedence. However, despite this early posturing of Mano Majra's Sikhs, when their Muslim neighbors are targeted by a violent mob, it is only Jugga who gives his life to save them.

## Displacement

Central to the Partition of India is the displacement of 10 million Indians and Pakistanis in the year 1947. Singh paints a grim picture of this movement and subsequent displacement in the opening pages of *Train to Pakistan*. He describes the situation throughout the four corners of India and Pakistan, but then asserts that Mano Majra was one of the few remaining “oases of peace” (Singh 11). Immediately, the reader wonders for how much longer Mano Majra will be safe from the chaos rampant in the rest of the country. Even the government officials wonder about Mano Majra’s fate, and how much longer its villagers will remain ignorant of the events in the outside world. The answer is not long, when a train of dead Sikhs, murdered as they tried to escape from Pakistan, rolls into town. Tragically, as the train and the stories of mass rape, looting, and violence can attest, the displacement of Sikhs and Muslims during the partition was far from peaceful.

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