



## Representation of Women in 'Train to Pakistan' by Khushwant Singh

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### Abstract

'Train to Pakistan' is a prominent novel by Khushwant Singh presents the pre- and post-partition situations in Mano Majra. It is a small village situated near to border in Punjab. Sikh is a religion of majority in this village. Muslim, Hindu and Pseudo-Christian are other religions. All they maintain their brotherhood and lives happily. Partition makes communal violence and horror.

The present study is focused on representation of women in this novel with a feministic approach. Patriarchy is solid base of family and social structure in Mano Majra. The man-woman relations are unequal. The women are passive, work for unpaid labour, dependant and therefore submissive and obedient. Women give their body to men in barter of external nominal things like bangles, ear-rings, bracelets, etc. Virginity is noble and glorious symbol used to propagate communal violence after partition. Khushwant Singh meagrely tries to the union of both (Muslim and Sikh) religions through love of Nooran and sacrifice of Juggut Singh. He portrays Iqbal Singh to nullify male dominance and women discrimination to some extent.

**Keywords:** novel, women, partition, violence, patriarchy, pseudo-barter, revenge, passive, exploitation.

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### 1. Introduction

Mano Majra is a small village presented in 'Train to Pakistan' by Khushwant Singh. People of Sikh, Hindu and Muslim religions live together, happily. There are only three bricks buildings, one of moneylender, Lala Ram Lal and others two of Sikh temple and the Mosque. Mano Majra

situated at the bank of Sutlej River in Punjab and known for the railway station. There is close association between people, nature, religion and train. The day begins with crows, bats, Mullah, Sikh priest and arrival of mail train early in the morning and ends with passing goods train at night. Men works in the fields and women are at home. The people in this village pray for blessings from divine power to all Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Pseudo-Christians.

The novel, 'Train to Pakistan' is the realistic picture of Mano Majra before and after partition of India and Pakistan (Dar, 2013). Khushwant Singh portrays multiculturalism, political idealism, communal violence, pain, agony, trauma of partition, humour, bribery, hypocrisy, drunkenness, unfair police, bureaucratic functioning and customs, love and sacrifice (Gawain, 1998, Menoti, 2011, Sehrawat, 2013). The masses of different religions are freely looted, killed and women and girls raped (Thakur, 2014). Tank (2011) has reported that this is a politically dramatic novel presents the grossness, ghastliness and total insanity of the two nation theory. These countries are ruined their people, social relations, morality, economies, lands, properties, cattle, administration systems, securities but also millions displaced from their homes (Dar, 2013). Mohammad (2012) has critically analyzed this novel in the light of postcolonial theory and compared with 'Ice Candy Man' (1988) by Bapsi Sidhwa. He compared the Muslim and Sikh women characters in 'Train to Pakistan'. However, people like Juggut Singh sacrifice his life in an attempt to save the lives of migrating Muslims for the sake of love with Nooran (Sehrawat 2013). The novel reflects the impact of violence as physical torture and psychological inner world of the characters. The common men and women are baffled and victimised in the partition.

Purohit (2012) has pointed that Singh portrays patriarchal representation, victimization of the partition violence, misses women characters in his 'Train to Pakistan'. Women in this novel are engaged in routine menial domestic work, victimized, less important, silent, submissive and co-existed. Therefore, the present study is focused on representation of women in 'Train to Pakistan' by Khushwant Singh with a feminist approach.

## 2. Patriarchy

The patriarchy expresses through family structure as an individual man holds power through the institution of fatherhood. The 'symbolic power' of fathers present as the essence of patriarchy within culture and unconscious. The foundations of patriarchy are as specific to the father-daughter relationship and complexities between power and gender. Khushwant Singh presents patriarchal family head, hold, power and relations in 'Train to Pakistan'. The man, Lala Ram is the head of Hindu family carries all kind of powers and hold. The women informed to the dacoits:

'I tell you Lalaji is not in. He has taken the keys with them.  
We have nothing in the house.' (8)

In other example, Nooran unwillingly goes with her father instead of her love and desire to stay with Juggut Singh at Mano Majra. She has no courage to inform her father about her love with Juggut and desire to stay with him. Iqbal Singh explained the complexities in relations in patriarchal Indian society.

‘Term like Sala, wife’s brother (‘I would like to sleep with your sister’), and susra, farther-in-law (‘I would like to sleep with your daughter’) were as often term of affection for one’s friends and relatives as expressions of anger to insult one’s enemies. Conversation of any topic – politics, philosophy, sport- soon come down to sex, which everyone enjoyed with a lot of giggling and hand-slapping.’ (113)

Women are also carries the patriarchal principles willingly or unwillingly. It is very difficult to accept Nooran with her pre-marital pregnancy for Jugga’s mother. In patriarchy, religious marriage and the son are the essentials. Therefore, Iqbal Singh expresses that

.....claimed to possess remedies for barrenness and medicines to induced wombs to yield male children. (113)

### 3. Subconscious Presence of Matriarchy

Iravati Karve (1972) explored the maternal relations are prominent in matriarchal society. In this society children lives with mother and there relations are mother, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. Therefore, we feel comfortable with these relations and call them in emergency. They are the evidences of matriarchy presence in subconscious. In this novel, the women are calling to dacoits as brothers to save from attack.

‘Do not kill, brother. In the name of the Guru - don’t.’ (9)

### 4. Women are Passive and Dependant

Women in ‘Train to Pakistan’ are more passive, obedient and dependant for all kind of activities. Prestigious and responsible works i.e. Mullah, Sikh Priest, Train driver, farming, magistrate, subinspector , etc are assigned to men in Mano Majra. Whereas, women are busy in the passive and domestic unpaid works like cooking, cleaning, washing, rubbing, etc. Religious power is centred with men like Imam Baksh is mullah and Meet Singh is Sikh Priest. Khushwant Singh presented as:

‘Women rub clarified butter into each other’s hair, pick lice from their children’s heads, and discuss births, marriages and deaths.’ (5)

Women in Mano Majra works for unpaid like pick lice from children’s heads. But they are very cooperative in nature expressed through rubbing clarified butter into each other’s hair. They discussing about their emotional issues like births, marriages and deaths. The qualities are inculcated right from the childhood. The girls are plays under the trees at safer side as compare to the boys. The boys are grazing cattle and plays adventurous games like ride on buffaloes into the pond. Men do not only active, productive and responsible work but also dacoit and violence.

It includes man-woman relationships, way of life, work distribution, sub-conscious mind setup, discriminating approach, male dominance, etc. Women are co-operative each other in this

village (6). **Women in this novel are helpless, weaker and need protection from someone.** Women in Lala Ram Lal, the moneylender's house calling to villagers for help when dacoits attacked.

The women in the courtyard heard the cry and started shrieking,  
'Dacoo! Dacoo!'

The dogs barked all round. But not a villager stirred from his house. (10)

But they remain helpless only. There is fear, crying, wailing, beating, spitting blood, horror, cruelty, spear, gunshot, dogs barking and village was silenced (10).

**The house works like cooking, rubbing, cleaning and washing is done by the Nooran (140).**

## **5. Pseudo-barter**

Feminist philosophers and activists expect equal relations between man and woman. Many of the feminist writers try to present women rebel against male dominance at least for equalities in their writings. **Women in Khushwant Singh's Mano Manjra are exploited and depressed through their unequal relations.** The dialogues between the dacoits are symbolic expressions of imbalanced barter. **Women exchange their body in barter of jewelleries i.e. bangles, bracelets, anklets and earrings etc. Spearman elaborates the ways of pleasing to girls as he replies:**

**'Yes. A dozen of red and blue glass. They would please any village wench.'** (6)

**However, these kinds of things are not ways to please the men as stated by spearman:**

**'They will not please Jugga,' one of the gunman said. (6)**

Men look towards women as the subsistence to fun. They expect women body features to please and satisfactions. The spearman describes the body of the weaver's daughter as:

**'.... large gazelle eyes and the little mango breasts.'**(7)

**'And cooling to their passions, too.'**(7)

Same type of intention is observed in the expressions of Juggut Singh:

**'Wah, Babuji – great. You must have had lots of fun. The memsahibs are like houris from paradise – white and soft, like silk. All we have here are black buffaloes.'** (113)

**Juggut Singh pleased more by white women as they are white and soft like silk than the black women. He felt that the black women are not beautiful than animals like buffaloes.**

Even though, women are innocent and shy, men considered their willingness as they are expected. The women body features are used to satisfy the men sexual pleasures. They are talking lecherously about women. Gunman said:

Aho, 'the spearman said. 'Nooran. Did you see her at the spring fair? Did you see that tight shirt showing off her breasts and the bells tinkling in her plaits and the swish-swish of silk? Hai!' (7)

'During the day, she looks so innocent you would think she had not shed her milk teeth.' He sighed. 'But at night, she puts black antimony in her eyes.' (7)

Magistrate, Hukum Chand use five rupee note to play with young girl, Haseena. He calls her to take a note. She stretched her hand to take money from the table. He withdrew note and put on his heart. 'He grinned lecherously.' She frightened and looks for help. Old woman apologise to magistrate:

'Government, the girl is young and very shy. She will learn,' she exclaimed. (31)

## 6. Discriminations within the Women

Women in 'Train to Pakistan' are discriminated based on race, colour, religion and occupation. Mohammad (2012) and Purohit (2012) have noted that the Muslim women in this novel are presented weak, inferior, exploited and dependent. Purohit (2012) depicted that Hindu women in this novel are presented as pure whereas Muslim women are exploited and victimized. Indian men attract more towards white women than the black. Juggut Singh discriminate women based on colour and race:

'Wah, Babuji ..... The memsahibs are like houris from paradise – white and soft, like silk. All we have here are black buffaloes.' (113)

Juggut Singh has an affair with a Muslim girl, Nooran. She inform to his mother about Juggut's promise.

'I can't leave. Jugga has promised to marry me.' (138)

Jugga's mother immediately replied:

'Get out, you bitch! ..... 'You a Muslim weaver's daughter, marry a Sikh peasant!....'

Here, Jugga's mother not accepts Nooran as she is from Muslim weaver family. The weavers are not equally treated to the peasants. Further, when Nooran informed his mother about her pregnancy from Juggut, mother changed her approach as a woman. She let Nooran's head drop back on her feet, helped her to up and the both sat on charpai (139). However, Jugga's mother is

helpless and asked her 'I cannot keep you here'. The mother sat on charpai staring into the dark for several hours.

Further, Khushwant Singh tries to present equalities between white and black women and nullify the influence of religion. Iqbal Singh said to Juggut Singh as:

'There is no difference between women. As a matter fact, white women are not very exciting.' (113)

At the end of the novel Juggut Singh sacrifice for his love with Muslim girl and embryo. Ultimately, Khushwant Singh presents union between two religions.

## **7. Glorification of Weaknesses**

Idealistic thoughts and approaches always glorify the weaknesses of women. Most of the weaknesses are customised through number of glorious symbols. They become nothing but equal to femininity and weaknesses. Henna and bangles are most prominent symbols of weakness as women. For instance, subinsector said to Juggut Singh:

'Mali is not a woman with henna on his palms or bangles on his wrists.' (171)

Khushwant Singh has presented this glory with magic between bangles, love and bad. Sundari, the daughter of Hukum Chand's servant newly married with Mansa Ram. Friends insist her to care the red bangles for the sake of love, husbands and better future up to the success.

'Do not take any of the lacquer bangles off. It brings bad luck,' her girl friends had said to her. Let him break them when he makes love to you and mauls you.' (186)

However, she faced tragic end of her love when they travelling by bus. She cares about her bangles. At the same time, one of the men cut her husband's penis and gave to Sundari. The mob seduced her and smashed her all.

'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. That should have brought her a lot of good luck!' (187)

Khushwant Singh acknowledges the weakness as glory of Hindu women which further promote them to die.

## **8. Women abuse for Revenge (Men)**

Khushwant Singh portrays many incidences and situations that show women abuse for revenge in his 'Train to Pakistan'. The village is calm and silence with deep horror, fear, cry, wail, spit blood, cruelty and dogs barking after dacoits attacked on Lala Ram's house. Dacoits pass on the streets and give open challenge to the villagers that they will rape women and girls of Mano Majra.

'Come!' they yelled. 'Come out, if you have the courage!  
Come out, if you want your mothers and sisters raped! Come  
out, brave men!' (11)

Juggut Singh used motherly relations to abuse Mali. The constable report to subinspector about the women abuse as:

I have never heard such abuse. Mother, sister, daughter - he did  
not leave one out. (117)

Again Juggut attack on Mali and beats him rudely on bars. His each jerk was accompanied by women abuse.

'This to rape your mother. This your sister. This your daughter.  
This is your mother again.....'(122)

There are number of rumours about communal violence. However, the intention is on women abuse for revenge each other. Head constable reported that:

'They had heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off,  
being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped  
in the marketplace.' (127-128)

The people loosely talk about revengeful nature of Muslims and purity of Sikh women. They claimed that Muslims never respects women and Sikh women jumped into the well to protect their purity. Khushwant Singh portrays this kind of rumours as:

'And Muslims were never ones to respect women. Sikh  
refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning  
themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims. Those  
who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets,  
raped in public, and then murdered.' (128)

Sikh Priest, Meet Singh speaks angrily in the meeting to prove the information above mentioned is false:

'What have they done to you? Have they ousted you from your  
lands or occupied your houses? Have they seduced your  
womenfolk? Tell me, what have they done?' (131)

The villagers in Mano Majra stand with Imam Baksh, Mullah. They explained their assurance with following words. The revenge not gets away from women abuse.

‘Yes, added another warmly, we first, then you. If anyone raises his eyebrows at you **we will rape his mother.**’

**‘Mother, sister and daughter,’ added the others. (133)**

**Thus, women are considered as things not only to use but also for insult, revenge, etc. Army officer listed women with property and goods as land, house, etc. However, stress on women is more highlighted in the descriptions. Women abuse is not only taken as the tool to suppress the society but also the revenge.** Army officer used women abuse to irritate Sikhs against Muslims efficiently as:

One should never touch another’s property; one should never look at another’s woman. One should just let others take one’s goods and sleep with one’s sisters. The only way people like you will understand anything is by being sent over to Pakistan: have your sisters and mothers raped in front of you, have your clothes taken off, and be sent back with a kick and spit on your behinds.’ (143)

**In another description, women are murdered along with men and children but in addition to that women’s breast have cut off sharply (151). Here, women breasts have cut off to accumulate intensities of revenge.** He continually hammered to the people by using the information containing women insult for revenge as:

‘Do the Mussalmans in Pakistan apply for permission from their government when they rape your sisters? Do they apply for permission from their government when they stop trains and kill everyone, old, young, women and children? You want the government to do something! That is great! Shabash! Brave!’ (156)

Army officer insists to villagers in Mano Majra to abduct and rape Muslim women along with killing.

‘For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussalmans. **For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two.**’ (157)

However, Sikh Priest, Meet Singh trying to propagate understanding that not to punish unarmed innocent people i.e. **women** (157). On the other hand happened different, women of Mano Majra stand up and put their child on the floor and joined to men-folk for the success of the venture. (160)



## 9. Men Violence and Women Silence

Khushwant Singh portrays number of incidences shows men violence and at the same time women are silent in 'Train to Pakistan'. Juggut Singh act violently with Nooran. He is more powerful than her. She opposed him silently for some extent but his control over her body ultimately submitting herself. She urges for to escape from Juggut Singh.

'Let me go. Let me ....'

'She could not struggle against Juggut Singh's brute force.'  
(15)

Juggut Singh is more conscious about his absence in the village troubled with the police rather than Nooran's absence in her house at night (16). Even in problematic situation men are more conscious for presence of male than the female i.e. dacoits treat ill-manner to women but they destroy the men forever i.e. Lala Ram's murder. Juggut Singh told lie to his mother. It shows that telling lies with women is not wrong or sin. It is acceptable. But he blames his mother for who will wake the neighbours. As she is dependent on son, Juggut for support and protection, he must alive. Juggut behaves badly with mother. But she blames herself and her fate, not to son or husband (12).

It is my lot to weep. My Kismet,' she added, slapping her forehead, 'it is all written there. (12)

Even in sexual communication women are remain silent and handle with the sense of Indian womanhood (Nooran). They are always submissive to men whereas the men are aggressive for their satisfaction.

'That is all you want. And you get it. You are just a peasant. Always wanting to sow your seed. Even if the world were going to hell you would want to do that. Even when guns are being fired in the village. Wouldn't you?' (15)

Men always consider women inferior and ignore their claims. Juggut denied Nooran's information.

'Nobody is firing any guns. Just your imagination,' answered Juggut Singh wearily, without looking at her.'(15-16)

It shows male dominance and the control over women's body. Hukum Chand loosely speaks about Juggut Singh:

'His type never risked their necks for women. If Nooran was killed, he would pick up another girl.' (185)

Further, army officer Sunder Singh shoots his wife with three children (187) to escape from complex of communal violence. Thus, there are few examples present women in a silence mode submitting themselves to men.

## 10. Nobility and Purity

Virginity, husband and marriage are fundamental beliefs of caste/religion based Indian society. They are developed and established for protection of caste based hierarchal structure. There are different traditions and customs like Pativrat, Sati, etc. in force. Hukum Chand has expressed the nobility of Hindu women as they are wilfully accepts the death rather than strange person's touch (23-24). The women purity is used in most of the communal violence. Khushwant Singh elaborates few dialogues, events and situations to present this issue. Women abduction declines their positions. Juggut Singh suggests Bhola that:

'Bholeya, I hear a lot of women are being abducted and sold cheap. You could find a wife for yourself.' (73)

'Why, Sardara, if you can find a Mussulmanni without paying for her, am I impotent that I should have to buy an abducted woman?' replied Bhola. (73)

The abducted women are not accepted by men. They always expected virgins. However, Iqbal Singh reported that only few broad minded men accepted flowering widows (76). Abducted women are far away.

## 11. Bureaucratic Exploitation of Women

Women exploitations by bureaucrats are common phenomenon across the world have deep roots in socio-political situations. Supreme authorities in many of the cases exercise their power for this kind of behaviour. The officer makes their arrangements on the demand of authorities for their service securities. Subinspector in 'Train to Pakistan' arranged virgin girl, Haseena for magistrate, Hukum Chand. Haseena dance with love song innocently. She frightened to his lustful behaviour and keep aside. The old woman scolds her go to near Hukum Chand.

'Go to the Government,' pleaded the old woman. The girl turned round obediently and went to the magistrate. Hukum Chand put his arm around her waist.

'You sing well.'

The girl gaped wide-eyed at her companions.

'The Government is talking to you. Why don't you answer him?' scolded the old woman. 'Government, the girl is young and very shy. She will learn,' she exclaimed. (31)

The old woman forcefully pushed Haseena to her exploitation and pleased Hukum Chand. Day after day Haseena become a prostitute for Hukum Chand.

## **12. Women Suffocation**

Domestic facilities like private room for couple are very important to maintain their private life for better man-woman relationships. These facilities are not enough across the rural areas of the nation. Juggut Singh informs that:

‘Where is time or place for fun? In summer, everyone sleeps out in the open and all you can do is to slip away for a little while and get over with things before your relations miss you. In winter, men and women sleep separately. You have to pretend to answer the call of nature at the same time at night.’  
(114).

They have to adjust to environment and available facilities. However, women are more sufferer than the men. The women are suffocated in this society mentally as well as physically.

## **13. Conclusions**

‘Train to Pakistan’ is a prominent novel by Khushwant Singh presents the pre- and post-partition situations in Mano Majra. Mano Majra is a small village situated near to border in Punjab. Sikh is a religion of majority in the village. Muslim, Hindu and Pseudo-Christian are other religions. All they maintain their brotherhood and lives happily. Partition makes communal violence and horror.

Women in Mano Majra are projected in a sense of patriarchy. They are more passive, obedient and dependant for all kind of activities and busy in domestic unpaid works like cooking, cleaning, washing, rubbing, etc. They discussing about their emotional issues like births, marriages and deaths. These qualities are inculcated in girls from the early childhood through their play, customs, traditions, etc. The girls play safe game under the trees.

Man-woman relations are unequal, exploited and make women weak, dependent and submissive. Men use nominal things like bangles, ear-rings, bracelets, etc. to please women. Whereas, women are give their own body to men in barter. There is not only discrimination between men-women but also within the women based on religion, colour and occupation. Bureaucrats also exploit the women in their power.

Women weaknesses and victims are presented with glorious manner in the name of nobility. The focal theme of the novel is partition and communal violence. Influencing characters in the novel use noble symbol, women purity for propagation of communal violence. Women and girls are victimised for revenge in communal violence. The rumours contain information of spoiled mothers, sisters and daughters. In all these situations of violence promoted and maintained by men and women are remain silent. Women follow the men.