

Torn Hearts and Bleeding Populace: A True Reflection of Partition in *Train To Pakistan*

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Abstract

The various genres of literature, especially novels, serve different purposes. Many people read them in order to escape from troubled times. But there are also novels that portray stark realities, not just the simple ones, but also those general realities that we share with other people. Such realistic novels give us a better idea about ourselves as belonging to a group, sharing common worries, threats, achievements etc. This article is an analysis of such a realistic novel - Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan, a novel set in India following its independence and partition. The author explores the impact of partition in the lives of individuals who were affected by it. These individuals represent all the common folks of India and Pakistan during the time of partition. The author doesn't try to omit details of violence and horror, nor does he soften the gravity of the events in his narration. Clearly, his aim is to give a more realistic picture, not just a general outline, of the socio - political impacts of partition. He digs more into the individual level, but at no point the reader feels that it's someone else's story. The article looks at how Train to Pakistan is a socio - realistic novel that has the power to help readers see the unpleasant realities consequent of the independence and the partition of India.

Keywords: independence, partition, social realism, trauma, violence

Introduction

The partition of India, according to the Indian Independence Act, in 1947 was celebrated as a great accomplishment of the freedom movement. But contrary to the expectations, this separation was accompanied by appalling events. Though the British Raj came to an end, the happiness of freedom was still at a great distance for the people of India. Following the partition, it is estimated that mass migrations and violent conflicts caused the death of more than one million people, while several million others were made refugees and tens and thousands of women were abducted and raped. Allok Balla in his 'introduction' to *Stories about the Partition of India* says: "The partition of the Indian subcontinent was the single most traumatic experience in our recent history" (Balla, 1994, p.41). Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the proponent of the two nation theory and the father of nation of Pakistan later admitted that the

creation of Pakistan was the greatest mistake of his life. It is evident from these accounts that partition was clearly a horror story in the annals of Indian history.

There has been two ways in which the writers usually represented independence and partition. While some glorify them as events that ushered in freedom and dignity, others give a more realistic picture of the events that had actually happened during the time. A number of novels in the Indian subcontinent have been written on the theme of the partition of India by novelists like Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Manohar Malgaonkar in *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Attia Hosain in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Bapsi Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), Chaman Nahal in *Azadi* (1975), Bhisham Sahni in *Tamas* (1974) etc.

Train to Pakistan written by Khushwant Singh and published in 1956 is often considered a historical and realistic novel that portrays the bitter aspects of partition in a heart wrenching manner. It narrates events in the lives of individuals who were caught in the violence of partition due to no fault of their own. Out of the crisis of partition, Khushwant Singh weaves a romantic tale of love and adventure.

Social Realism In *Train To Pakistan*

It can be assumed that the major intention of the novel *Train to Pakistan* is to give a socio-realistic picture of independence and partition of India, without omitting ugly and painful details which came along with them. The novel is set in an imaginary village called Mano Majra in Punjab. Before independence and partition, the people of Mano Majra lived in peace and harmony, even though most of the inhabitants weren't very wealthy and had to work hard to earn their daily living. But they were a happy lot because all the people, irrespective of their religion, caste and creed, were bonded by fraternal feelings.

The village was inhabited by about seventy families, among which there was only one Hindu family, while others were Sikhs and Muslims about equal in number. Even though each group followed their own religious practices and ceremonies, there was also something in the village that all the people venerated. This was a three foot slab of sand stone placed in front of a keekar tree in the village. This was regarded as the village deity and people of all religions used to make offerings to this deity. Thus this sandstone slab symbolised the unity of the people of Mano Majra.

Most critics have considered Mano Majra as a microcosm of India. India was relatively a peaceful nation, where different religious and linguistic groups coexisted, before the coming

of the Britishers. It is the Two- Nation theory that they proposed led to an extreme hatred between the Hindus and Muslims in India, which finally resulted in the partition of British India as India and Pakistan soon after its independence from the British rule.

Even while the war was raging between the Hindus and Muslims, Mano Majra was clam. They were unaware about the political turmoil and fights that were happening in the major cities and places. Life to them remained the same as ever until they started to discover corpses of men, women and children in the river Sutlej. Yet the feeling and spirit of mutual welfare and brotherhood remained. When the news of the evacuation of the Muslims came in, it created a mournful numbness in the entire villagers. The tremendous sense of belongingness and the trauma of being uprooted from their soil were reflected in their words and tears.

The consequences of partition were huge. Thousands of people, young and old were uprooted from their place of origin. The people who were brothers and sisters so far were suddenly regarded as enemies. Trains started moving between India and Pakistan, carrying and depositing people from one place to another. No one sought the opinion of the common men. They were regarded as chattels that can be carried to any places. This trauma of partition and massive migration engulfed the entire nation during the time.

Train is an important and recurrent symbol in this novel. The novel creatively expresses how the movement of trains, which used to set the tone of the village, signalling time for action, rest and sleep, transforms into a symbol of despair, darkness and destruction. Instead of depicting the partition in terms of only the political events surrounding it, Singh provides a human dimension which brings to the event a sense of reality, horror and believability.

Khushwant Sign, as the narrator, blames both the groups – Hindus and Muslims for the violence committed during the time of partition. He doesn't try to favour any one group over the other.

Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. . . . mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. (Singh, 1956, p.9)

Problems in Mano Majra started when Ram Lal, the village money lender was killed by a group of dacoits. Juggut Sign, the protagonist of the story, who was also a dacoit, but who had no involvement in the murder of Ram Lal became the prime suspect in the case and he got arrested. Along with Juggut Singh, the police also arrested Iqbal, who was a party worker who came to

educate the people of Mano Majra about the importance of independence and the need to form their own government. Though both the magistrate and the police inspector knew that Iqbal was innocent and that he came to the village only after the death of Ram Lal, they arrested him upon thinking that he was an activist who came to spread communal frenzy, only because his name happened to be Iqbal Muhammad, a Muslim name. This was the situation of India during the time. People were regarded as friends or enemies based on the religion they belonged to.

One major idea that the author tries to bring out in the story is that the partition as well as the independence have been of no great benefit to the common people of the country. In case of the Mano Majrans, independence of India meant nothing to them. They think that they were better off under the British, as there was more safety and security. The 'lambardar' of the village voices this attitude when he tells Iqbal: "freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more land or more buffaloes?" (Singh, 1956, p.65). The true mission of freedom should be the empowerment and strengthening of the spirits of the people of the nation. But Indian independence and partition only brought the people extreme sense of insecurity and fear.

An incident that completely destroyed the fraternal feelings between the religious groups in Mano Majra was the arrival of a goods train one early morning. The train was loaded with the corpses of Hindus and Sikhs who were murdered in Pakistan. The soldiers and police piled the bodies and burned them using kerosene. The smell of burning flesh was spread in the air, and anyone who breathed that air smelled his or her own death. People locked themselves inside their houses. They had no idea who to trust and whom to approach for help. The bewilderment they suffered was beyond imagination.

The evacuation of Muslims from their village is the most poignant part of the novel. The two communities had been together for centuries in such an amicable manner that the thought of Muslims leaving the village brought tears to both. Most of the villagers cannot sleep that night. They kept moving from house to house swearing friendship. The next morning, the Muslims were to be evacuated to a refugee camp at Chundunnugger, later to be transported to Pakistan. "The women sat on the floors hugging each other and crying. It was as if in every home there had been a death" (Singh, 1956, p.113). But the Muslims feared for their lives, and the only option left to them was to leave for Pakistan.

The sensuous love affair between the Sikh dacoit Juggut Singh and Nooran, the daughter of the 'mullah' of the village mosque, that Khushwant Singh weaves into this tale of violence conveys

deeper meaning and therefore has great significance. Love is perennial and this idea is made evident in such a relationship between the people belonging to the two conflicting classes. This becomes all the more relevant as the novel proceeds to its end, when Juggut Singh, who comes to know about the conspiracy regarding the destruction of the train that carries his beloved Nooran and other Muslims of Mano Majra to Pakistan, averts the accident by cutting the rope meant for killing the Muslims and got himself killed in the attempt. Thus Juggut Singh, who was condemned by the villagers as a 'budmash' succeeds in safeguarding the lives of Muslims, which the so called guardians of law failed to accomplish. He thus became an embodiment of love for humanity. This victory of virtue and love over vice and hatred even in utter chaos shows the ultimate optimism of the novelist and his faith in the innate goodness of man. Describing Jugga's character, Khushwant Singh says,

I thought it was time I exploded this myth of the innate goodness in man. There is innate evil in man. And so I just wrote about it, and I did create one character whom I stuffed with the so called innate goodness of man, and he is the only character which is entirely fiction. (Singh, 1999)

Conclusion

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a socio – realistic account of what followed the independence of India and its partition as India and Pakistan. He reveals the horrors of partition by creating a fictional village called Mano Majra and its inhabitants. Those inhabitants are the representatives of the common folks of India, the poor and illiterate people who were fated to suffer the violent consequences of partition. More than giving a general picture of independence and partition, Khushwant Singh has concentrated on producing a narrative centred on the individuals and the trauma and fear that partition created in them. According to Khushwant Singh, this novel is also a reminder to people who are still drumming up for separate states. During an interview, Khushwant Singh made the following observation:

We must not forget the partition because it is relevant today. We must remember that it did in fact happen and can happen again. That is why I keep reminding people who clamour for an independent Kashmir, Khalistan or Nagaland to remember what happened to the Muslims when they asked for a separate Muslim state. I keep telling my fellow Sikhs that the worst enemies of Khalsa Panth are Khalistanis, and of the Nagas those who ask for an independent

Nagaland. Reminding ourselves of what happened in 1947 and realising the possibilities of its recurring, we should resolve that we will never let it happen again. (Singh, 1999)

Khushwant Singh illustrates the tragedy of partition and indirectly suggests the short-sightedness of Indian leaders who failed to foresee the consequences of the division and handle the situation. He also seems to suggest that the future of India and Pakistan, or any other nation for that matter, should not be decided on the basis of superficial differences between people. The novel reveals the naivety and pointlessness of something as artificial as religious fanaticism leading to so much violence and horror.

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