

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* : A Narrative Of The Trauma Of Partition

And

Postcolonial Anexity.

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### **Abstract**

The postcolonial experience has been generally interpreted as extremely violent and complex, while its newer forms of oppression and violence would firmly wish to note the various themes under the light of postcolonialism. Planning to move past this colonial legacy, what one might call the “decolonization” of writing will bring and shed some light on extensive array of themes through its interpretation. Countless novels in India have been written interpreting the various aspects of post-colonialism, but this remarkable historical moment has been apprehended as horrifying by the writer like Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1956). This novel inspects the inevitable rationality of Partition as a sprout of radicalism and fundamentalism ignited by strengthening communal approaches. They efficiently and accurately interpret the exposure of human life and apprehension, triggered by the throes of Partition. *Train to Pakistan* also provides a lot of information while holding their eccentricity on top. Rather than portraying the events in political terms, Khushwant Singh has offered human dimensions that will interpret all sense of authenticity, dismay and credibility. Thus, the novel not just records man's life and survival, but it likewise shows that man is in actual fact humane and genuine and has demonstrated that even society's ostracized characters like Juggat Singh could be a ray of hope and life for the unhappy and distraught souls.

**Keywords:** *Postcolonialism, Interpretation, Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan, Partition, Communal Riot, Peace and harmony, Indian Literature*

Literature is considered to be a harmonious mixture of the past with the present. It is both convincing and inspiring for an artistic author to integrate crucially the legacy of Indian history, as a locus point for the current on top of reinterpreting and re-enacting past experience. One would say that art challenges reality, yet it does not escape from it. Certainly, it is in this creative competition between art and reality with which the aesthetic interpretation of the artiste is voiced or expressed. Eventually and precisely in the framework of historical and socio-political discourse, the accurate implication of historical literature depends in its artistic interpretation of salient themes. Train to Pakistan is considered to be socio-political novel. It depicts a society that is politically polluted, staked by the officials and administrators for their private ends, under the ruse of implementing the alleged rules and plans of the supposed Government.

Train to Pakistan is regarded as a minor classic Indian English fiction that talks and interprets the postcolonial era of India. With its intrepid, fierce and inexorable pragmatism, it tears off cover of pretense and represents the repugnance and cruelty of human life. The disturbing and traumatic events at the time of Partition in 1947 had traumatized the author to his roots and so it was the Art that came to his rescue. Simply through this standard, his passive feelings got an outlet. The novel turns out to be a substitute indulgence, in the sense that it suggests Khushwant Singh's positive and affirmative view of life, his persistent faith in the beliefs of love and humanity and the unbeatable spirit of man against a despicable context of wickedness and cruelty.

Khushwant Singh weaves a well-wrought tale, with a vibrant symbolic system strongly grounded in character, through which the reader is offered a series of perspectives on the Partition, both as a historic event and human tragedy. Drawing upon his personal experience of the Partition, Singh balances pattern and detail in a prose style that has a remarkable sense of control, because of which his work comes across with intensity and power. His fictional response to the Partition is a literary one, yet the human experience recreated by the author and the literary strategies used to mediate the experience afford us a profound understanding of the essence of man in history.

The narrative of Train to Pakistan is woven around the holocaust in Mano Majra caused by partition of India-Pakistan on the advent of Independence to India on 1947. Nevertheless it builds a notion that the freedom struggle is a disillusion since partition is regarded as outburst of the nationalists' approval of the 'two nations theory' imposed by the colonial rule as a must. On the basis of this assumption, an attempt is made to trace and analyses the adversative effect of partition on the people's life in general and the people specifically belonging to Mano Majra in Train to Pakistan

Originally, the story depicts Mano Majra as being atypical with reference to the violence that began throughout the country on the day of partition. There are cases of mutinies, violence and tension all over the nation but Mano Majra remains passive and unpretentious by the mishap of national politics. The communal conflict sprang from the partition is observed first in Calcutta in the story. It is revealed in the first page itself:

“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 roll had mounted to several thousand.”(Singh, 9).

The character of the strength and passion was not only volatile, it was also unparalleled, in scale as well as method. This has left too much resentment and hostility and the most radical of chauvinisms that is unrivaled and it was created through the formal discourse of history in Pakistan and India. Also on the other hand, a substantial amount of reminiscence also gripped the two nations (or various national groups), frequently articulated in the view that this was a partition of siblings who could not live together and decided to divide their home and property.

It suggests two important factors which suppose that the foul lies in the agreement between the outgoing British and the nationalists. First it implies that the proposition of two nations theory had already been accepted by our nationalists. Second, the proposal is against the will of the people of the nation. As a result revolt against such decision is manifested in the communal disharmony between the Hindus and the Muslims who blame each other for the death roll of several thousand. It is portrayed:

“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.”(Singh, 9)

The story by Khushwant Singh even being a work of fiction is very close to realism in terms of the events which were formed. The novel has a very depressing and heart touching plot that kindles the mind of readers. This book is considered to be a must read for all those who wish to find a glimpse of whatever had occurred as a result of one of the most distraught incidents of not just of the past of the India but also in the history of human civilization.

“His sonorous cry did not rise to the heavens to proclaim the story of God” (Singh, 84)

The author's regard for non-violence and the spiritualistic stance as the mode of freedom struggle ends up with a great amount of disappointment on the eve of Independence since it is resultant of the acceptance of partition of the India which is subsequently responsible of human tragedy in enmesh. To expose the flaw in our struggle independence and its subsequent disaster in the communal harmony, he tells a story of the spread of evil of partition in Train to Pakistan. After having described the spread of riots elsewhere, the story dwells upon how Mano Majra is insulated from such riots at the beginning and how it falls becomes an inevitable prey to the pangs of non-violence caused by partition to prove that the disharmony becomes total in the country. A small Punjabi village named Mano Majra that is situated on the bank of Sutlej river. Its social structure is characterized pluralism as it consists of different communities. Thus it is a miniature of India in a sense. There two major communities. The first is that of Muslim the members of which are almost the tenants. The second is that of Sikh the members of which are the landlords. The members of these two communities have lived in harmony for several years and the sense of unity and integrity is manifested in their faith in the local deity called 'deo' regardless of their religions as Hindu, Sikh and Muslim. The author depicts the harmony among various communities in their acceptance of the common deity, which is described as:

“This is a three-foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keekar tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the deo to which all villagers - Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or Pseudo-Christians - repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing.” (Singh, 10)

This instance is manifestation of not only the unity among the different religious communities but also that of how this village is free from the external communal imbalance. Further, the peace in Mano Majra is exhibited in the life style of the inhabitants of this village. They are far from the impact of political unrest caused by the partition.

The analysis reveals disharmony at two levels generated by the partition. First, there is a communal disharmony across the subcontinent of India with bloodshed, rape and atrocities. This is depicted to have erupted on the eve of the partition and to continue even after the division of and freedom to India. The communal violence, which begins first in Calcutta spreads to the major parts of country. They include Noakhali, Bihar, Punjab etc. In Pakistan, the communal violence has taken place in such places as Rawalpindi, Multan, Gujranwala and Shikharipura. A large number of been killed, attacked and molested on both sides. A sort of anarchy and chaos seems to rule the roost during this phase. This mutual massacre seems to believe in the doctrine of "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." While the Sikhs and Hindus have killed the Muslims in India and sent the corpses to Pakistan as their gift to 'Pakistan', a ghost-trains its full load of Sikh refugees from Pakistan to India.

Thus retaliation emerges the philosophy of the two independent nations Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan - divided on the basis of religion. In a sense the division is synonymous to destruction. Besides, it also reflects upon the principle of freedom struggle too but as a total failure. It is so because the happenings are contrary to the vision of our nationalists about freedom to the subcontinent Whereas our leaders looked forward to witnessing integrity at the advent of free India, disintegrity is bred everywhere in reality. The author emerges triumphant in exposing the futility of freedom struggle in the portrayal of the nationwide riots on and after eve of partition. He has taken an objective stance in the depiction of it. The author puts the blame on both the Hindus,

Sikhs and Muslims, for the undue events or riots. In addition, he makes the government officials of both India and Pakistan party to the non-violence. Above all, he considers that there is a fallacy in the decision of national leaders too.

Second, the social disharmony is generated among the people of Mano Majra about whose social fabric for several generations. Mano Majra is Khushwant Singh's vision of India which stands for non-violence, peace, integrity, harmony and Gandhian ideals. It is a village where all sorts of religious and social sections of people live together in peace. They are neither influenced by the politics of freedom struggle nor are they overwhelmed by the communal suspicion prevalent on and after the eve of Independence or partition. While the whole nation witnesses riots everywhere, Mano Majra remains unaffected by the external communal hatred between Hindus and Muslims. When the ghost train arrives there packed with deadbodies of Sikhs from Pakistan, the social harmony remains intact. When a youth provokes the people to retaliate to the massacre of Hindus elsewhere, the people of Mano Majra exhibits a great degree of patience. It becomes evident in the fact that none is reported to be killed in Mano Majra as a reaction the communal violence generated by the partition. There is only the murder of Lala Ram Lai but it is just an instance of dacoity. On the contrary, the social fabric in Mano Majra remains secular and healthy.

Yet Mano Majra is spared by the influence of partition. Though it has sustained itself from nationwide communal crisis for quite a long time, it falls prey to it at one stage. The author hits two birds at a single stroke in *The Train to Pakistan*. On one hand, he exposes the communal riots that been taking place across the nation from the eve of partition and the ruin of social harmony in Mano Majra on the other. Both indicate that the principle of non-violence and integrity that were sown by our nationalists are betrayed.

The narrative of *Train to Pakistan* suggests a theme, which exemplifies freedom struggle as a disillusion in a subtle manner. There are more reasons than one for a conclusion. The foregoing discussion has clearly revealed that the narrative exposes the holocaust of partition. Yet the partition has to be seen in the context of and accompanied with the freedom struggle for they are born together. There are several instances to regard

partition as a partner of the freedom struggle. To begin with, the narrative has origins in the pre-independent phase, the summer of 1947. Though this period corresponds to the end of freedom struggle, its implications are intertwined with the following partition. The riots in the undivided continent is the expression of the people's displeasure over the nationalists' approval of the partition.

There is no gain saying that Mahatma Gandhi transformed the freedom struggle of a few leaders into a peoples' or Mass or National Movement with his spell binding principle of non-violence – *ahimsa*. But the nation is portrayed to the ground of non-violence even before attaining freedom and that too before the eyes of Mahatma Gandhi who popularized *ahimsa* across the world. The instance of massacre, riots, mass rapes and atrocities among the people of Indian themselves whom Mahatma united by his mantra of *ahimsa* is but a definite set back to the freedom struggle which Mahatma Gandhi himself led for about three decades. It is subtly and ironically manifested through the statement:

“...What do the Gandhi-caps in Delhi know about the Punjab? 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 market places at Sheikhpura and Gujranwala? Pakistan police and the army took part in the killings. Not a soul was left alive. Women killed their own children and jumped into wells that filled to the brim with corpses.” (Singh, 31).

The holocaust due to the division of the Indian subcontinent into two nations on the basis of religion has been regarded as a 'national tragedy' by a number of people. In particular, it is a setback to the national movement for the principles of the National Movement are found at cross road and betrayed. The justification of relating the tragedy caused by the partition to the disillusion of freedom struggle.

There is yet another instance in the narrative, which exposes the claim that Train to Pakistan regards the freedom struggle as disillusion. This is found in the incorporation

of Jawaharlal Nehru's address to the people of India on the dawn of Independence. Hukum Chand quotes it which is portrayed with a pinch of satire as:

“He is a great man, this Mr. Nehru of yours. I do think he is the greatest man in the world today. And how handsome! Wasn't that a wonderful thing to say? 'Long ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially. Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, you made your tryst. So did many others - on the 15th August, Independence Day” (Singh, 201).

This instance in the narrative exemplifies the author's attack on the nationalists like Nehru for their failure to contend the tragedy generated by the partition. Nehru as a nationalist is depicted to have betrayed the promises of security to the nation put forth by the smugglers of freedom. While he speaks about redeeming the pledge of the nationalist in Delhi, the riots are let loose across the nation preying on the innocent lots. He has failed utterly to restore peace in the nation, which exemplifies the betrayal of such nationalists as Nehru. Therefore, the holocaust caused by the partition is originated from the fallacy in the decision of our freedom fighters.

The colonial experience and English literary heritage seem to be basically influential in the rise of writers like Khushwant Singh. With its new language, appreciation for each and every aspect, astounding climax and eccentric characters, this novel is an eye opener. An informative read, ‘Train to Pakistan’ not just teaches its readers but it also stays with them much after they have turned the last page. A postcolonial writer writing about the immediate reaction of the colonised country to post colonialism, Khushwant Singh shoulders his responsibility well and sets the tone for other Indian postcolonial writers.

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