

**Censure of Indian Society in Khushwant Singh's Novel
*Train To Pakistan***

M. Thenmozhi

Assistant Professor of English
Adhiaman Arts and Science College for Women
Uthangarai
honeyarul1992@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper attempts to find out and examine the real Indian Society's face when the partition of India through the novel *Train to Pakistan*. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* tells us how to live with that aim in view he presents a picture of Indian Society through his characters and situations. Several novels have been written on the holocaust that preceded and followed the partition of India. The communal riots began when the idea of Pakistan, as a Muslim state was mooted and continues even after the idea was brought into action. Obviously the idea was implemented in a shoddy manner. *Train to Pakistan* is one of such novels.

Keywords: Khushwant Singh, *Train To Pakistan*, Communal, Partition, Freedom, Slavery, inhuman Treatment.

Train to Pakistan refers to the holocaust that took place in 1947. But Mano Majira is the hero of the novel in the way Egdon Heath is the hero of the 'The Return of the Native' every place has its spirit which manifests itself in the routine life of the place, in the vegetation, life and the character of the people.

Khushwant Singh, the author is one of the India's most famous and foremost writers, the editor of The Hindustan Times. He served as a member of the Upper House of the Indian Parliament from 1980 to 1986. His novel begins with a reference to the Hindu Muslim riots that had torn the nation, but he soon shifts the scene to a village.

The novelist has set the action of the novel in a tiny village, Mano Majira, on the banks of the Sutlej, though it is half a mile away from it. The village being on the border is a vital point for refugee movements-The Muslims were to go to Pakistan and the Hindus and the Sikhs were to come from Pakistan. Mano Majira had a small railway station when there were provisions for passenger and goods trains to stay aside to allow passage to the mail and express trains going to

and coming from Pakistan. Mano Majira, is the village where the Indian culture can be seen in its pristine form, unsullied by western civilization. The novelist has tried to put the society on the right track by his honest criticism of life.

“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.” (1)

Mano Majra is a village of the Sikhs and the Muslims. Lala Ram Lal is the only Hindu family. Ram Lal is a money-lender by profession. The money-lenders indeed were fleecing the poor and needy people; they were in line with the Zamindars in perpetrating cruelties on the poor. The British government did nothing to save the poor from these wolves. But they were the targets of the dacoits because dacoits could get large booty from their houses-the ill-gotten money was taken away by the dacoits. In Mano Majira dacoity is committed in the house of Ram Lal and the money lender is killed to purge the village of the only evil it had. The Villager explained,

“Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be the slaves of the educated Indians – or the Pakistanis.” (48)

Iqbal arrives in Mano Majira where he meets Meet Singh, priest of the village Gurudwara. Khushwant Singh somehow believes that the priests are malingerers; therefore, he makes hard remarks about Meet Singh. Meet Singh, he tells, has some land but he has leased out his land and has become a priest to make his living with the rent and the offerings at the temple. Further, he says that Meet Singh is not learned in the scripture, yet he is a priest. In his living, he is rather untidy and indecent, generally appears in dirty shorts and unkempt hair. His short stature makes him look all the more ugly. The novelist is scornful in painting the portrait of a Sikh priest, but he is appreciative of the Mullah. Though Mullah Imman Baksh belongs to the community of weavers, who are “traditionally butts of jokes”, ‘a race of cuckolds’ and considered ‘effeminate and cowardly’, yet he commands respect in the society because people have pity for him due to ‘ a series of tragedies’ that had taken place in his family. His eyes have become weak.

It is important to note that Iqbal or the learned people are less of action, while the people of Juggat breed are less of talking.

“The bullet is neutral. It hits the good and the bad, the important and the insignificant, without distinction. If there were people to see the act of self-

immolation.... The sacrifice might be worthwhile; a moral lesson might be conveyed...the point of sacrifice...is the purpose. For the purpose, it is not enough that a thing is intrinsically good: it must be known to be good. It is not enough to know within one's self that one is in the right." (170)

The novelist writes about the ignorance of hygienic rules of the Indians. Here as a researcher this paper also talks about the rural treatment on refugee. Meet Singh brings a glass of water for Iqbal with his dirty finger dipped in water. Similarly, the Lambardar brings a glass of milk, and puts his finger in the milk to show that it was still hot and also to show the purity of the milk. It is indeed true that Indians are not particular in observing hygienic rules. They spit and urinate anywhere.

But the Indians keep sexual morality above everything else. Meet Singh complains that the Christian men and women go freely with other men and women, hinting at wife-swapping. Iqbal snubs him for harping on the stock opinions, saying that the Christians do not tell lies as the Indians do. But this aspersion is not true about all Indians, and telling lies is a human tendency all over the world.

Lack of social justice in India also thrusts people into a world of crimes. Nobody wants to know why a man has to resort to thieving or robbing. An unemployed hungry man has no option but to steal, and when he does so he is branded a thief, clapped into prison where the company of hard-core criminals turn him into a criminal. A large part of India's population is half-fed and half-clad. It should not be a surprise if people become Nexalites or Maoists or even dacoits.

It is wrong to say that crimes can be stopped or even checked by punishment. Iqbal is right to say, "They put them in jail or hang them. If the fear of the gallows or the cell had stopped people from killing or stealing, there would not be no murdering or stealing. It does not. They hang a man every day in the province, yet ten get murdered every twenty four hours. No, Bhaiji, criminals are not born. They are made by hunger, want and injustice." But the judicial system in India is averse to taking a note of prevailing social injustice.

It is an irony of situation that the whole country is fighting for freedom but there is a section in the lower strata which does not know that independence actually means for them, and why the English are leaving the country. These are difficult questions to answer. One is discomfited to see that the people were not clear about the meaning of independence for which a long struggle is afoot. The Lambardar asks Iqbal, "Will we get more lands or more buffaloes?" what a travesty of independence! The great idea of independence has come to mean nothing more than land and buffaloes. Though the Lambardar and Meet Singh have no idea about the meaning of liberty, yet they are sure that all the advantages will get to the higher sections of educated persons and the lower section will remain high and dry as a Muslim says in no

uncertain words, “Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians-or the Pakistanis”.

Even Iqbal thinks that independence will not give social justice to the people though Mahatma Gandhi has said time and again that the core issue is the welfare of the poor-the lowliest of the lowly. Therefore, the novelist asks the people in communistic tone, “Get the Bania Congress government out. Get rid of the princes and the landlords and freedom will mean for you just what you think it should”.

Iqbal notices that the Indians are uneducated, superstitious and reactionary people. They are, therefore, backward looking people. He observes that the Indian society is class-ridden. Disparity is seen everywhere- “inequality had become an inborn mental attitude. If caste was abolished by legislation, it came in other forms of class distinction clearly visible in the westernized circles like that of the civil servants. In the government Secretariat in Delhi, places for parking cars are marked according to seniority, and certain entrances to offices are reserved for high officials. The society is divided into sections and classes which do not see one another eye to eye.

“And Muslims were never ones to respect women. Sikh refugees had been told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of the Muslims. Those who had not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public and then murdered now a train load of Sikhs massacred by the Muslims had been cremated in Mano Majira.” (128)

The two young men came to Mano Majira to ask the villagers to avenge the wrongs that the Muslims have done to the Sikhs in Pakistan they remind the Sikhs of Mano Majira that it was a Muslim who had stabbed Guru Gobind Singh in the chest when he was sleeping he tells the Sikhs that a Muslim knows no argument but the sword. They succeed by their declamations to enlist a few Sikhs to go with them to attack the train that is to carry the Muslims to Pakistan.

Criticism of Indian attitudes and tendencies have given through the character Iqbal, though some of it is prejudiced and meaningless. He is wrong to say that ‘philosophy, about which there is so much ho-ha...is just muddle-headedness and Yoga, particularly Yoga, that excellent earner of dollar! Stand on your head. Sit across and tickle your novel with your nose’. Iqbal, being a communist, cannot think beyond ‘roti, kapra and makan’. But he is right in saying that the Indians depend on faith more than logic and arguments. He is right to some extent as he says, “we are the mysterious East. No proof, just faith. No reason, just faith.” This paper has tried to put the society on the right track by both the researcher’s and the author’s honest criticism of Indian society people’s life.

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