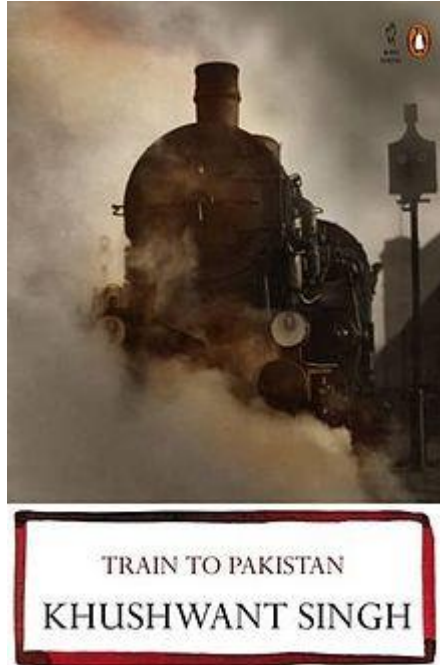


Revisiting the Colossal Scene of Carnage of Partition through *Train to Pakistan*

Dr. Gurpreet Kaur, Ph.D., M.Phil., M.A., B.Ed.



Abstract

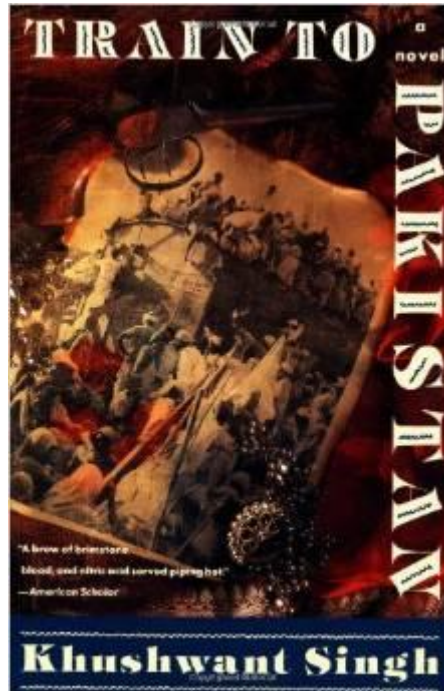
The colossal scene of carnage of Partition has become the theme of innumerable works of literary art like, Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1980), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1974), Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1965), and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1988). There are also several short stories such as *Toba Tek Singh* (1955) by Saadat Hassan Manto, Urdu poems such as *Subh-e-Azadi* (Freedom's Dawn, 1947) by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. A non-fiction work by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre that recorded the events surrounding the first Independence Day celebrations in 1947 is *Freedom at Midnight* (1975). It is indispensable to bring to one's mind the name of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* while revisiting Indian history, especially Partition history, through literature. This paper discusses nature of violence, characters involved and the ultimate message communicated in the novel *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh.

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Key words: Partition, carnage, religious riots, violence, Khushwant Singh, massacre on the train



Introduction

The colossal scene of carnage of Partition has become the theme of innumerable works of literary art like, Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1980), Bhasham Sahni's *Tamas* (1974), Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1965), and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1988). There are also several short stories such as *Toba Tek Singh* (1955) by Saadat Hassan Manto, Urdu poems such as *Subh-e-Azadi* (Freedom's Dawn, 1947) by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. A non-fiction work by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre that recorded the events surrounding the first Independence Day celebrations in 1947 is *Freedom at Midnight* (1975). It is indispensable to bring to one's mind the name of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* while revisiting Indian history, especially Partition history, through literature.

Khushwant Singh's Works

Khushwant Singh is one of the finest historians and novelists apart from being a candid political commentator. He had a keen eye of observation. His writings, both fictional as well as non-fictional in nature, are deeply rooted in the history of India right from Partition of India and

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Pakistan till present. He is an author of classics such as *Train to Pakistan*, *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale*, *Delhi*, *Burial at Sea*, *The Company of Women*, two volume of *A History of the Sikhs*, *The Sunset Club*, etc. *Truth, Love and a Little Malice* is his autobiographical work. *Paradise and The Portrait of a Lady* are the collections of short stories.

Revisiting the Heinous Event of Colossal Bloodshed

Khushwant Singh has attained an iconic status being a sharp, thought-provoking and entertaining writer and journalist. This paper revisits the heinous event of colossal bloodshed occurred in 1947, during Partition and the role played by Khushwant Singh in bringing back the moments and memories in the minds of the readers every time it is read. The perspective is a little different from existing studies. *Train to Pakistan* is a portrayal of not only suffering and pain but a search for the existence of some compassionate and humanitarian characters in literature also. All characters are not evil and to be measured through the same weight. There is love which fulfills the hearts of some characters and makes them eternal in the history of Partition literature.

Train to Pakistan (1956) was Khushwant Singh's first novel and it brought him immediate fame. This fine piece of narration deals with the ethnic and cultural violence between Muslims and Hindus which started in Calcutta before it became contagious to Mano Majra. This work of fiction is a descriptive account of the chaotic period of Partition, set in the border area of a fictitious village, Mano Majra. It depicts the tragic love story of Juggut Singh, a Sikh and Nooran, a Mussalman Girl.

A Tragic Background

Khushwant Singh writes *Train to Pakistan* (originally titled *Mano Majra*), with a tragic background. It is the time in history when thousands of natives of both India and Pakistan, are uprooted leaving behind all their belongings, to lands foreign to them. The period is ghastly, but Mano Majra in the opening of the novel is shown to be somewhat unaffected. But with the passage of time, this very village becomes the place of action. It is half a mile away from river Sutlej.

Structure of the Novel

Khuswant Singh structures his novel into four chapters entitled most suitably, Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra, and Karma. He begins the novel with the description of the simple life of the villagers. This village has a railway station, a Gurudwara and a mosque. About seventy families of Sikh and Muslim, except one Hindu family of Ram Lal, the moneylender, reside here. The villagers had no idea whether the Britishers have left the country or not. The residents' day begins and ends with the noise of coming and going trains through the railway station.

Characters

'It had always been so, until the summer of 1947' (6). These families only understand the feeling of brotherhood for each other until Lala Ram Lal is looted and murdered by Malli and his companions. On the contrary, Juggut Singh, who is a bad character with *badmash* number ten, is put behind the bars for this murder. He is in love with a Muslim weaver's daughter, Nooran, who is later shown to have been carrying his child in her womb. Their love was interreligious and so strictly forbidden in those days. Yet they used to elope in the night. But this Partition of countries also parted them, forever.

Later we meet other prominent characters like Meet Singh, a priest in the Sikh temple and Iqbal Singh, a social worker who has visited many foreign lands before reaching Mano Majra. Hukum Chand, a magistrate and deputy commissioner, is an important character.

Hukum Chand

Hukum Chand depicts a mixture of evil as well as good qualities. In the beginning, we find him to be an immoral person looking for sex and love in a sixteen year girl. This girl reminds him of his daughter who is no more and who if alive would have been similar in age, yet he does not feel ashamed. Playing with the body of that girl is a means of escape from the reality for him. He does not hesitate in manipulating the data about the criminals in his custody. For some unknown reasons he orders the sub-inspector to 'fill in the warrant of arrest correctly. Name: Mohammed Iqbal, son of Mohammed Something-or-other, or just father unknown. Caste: Mussulman. Occupation: Muslim League worker. (69)'

But as the plot moves we have a different and changing form of Hukum Chand. He proves to be more humane. After cremating hundreds of dead bodies in the train from Pakistan, he behaves like a fearful small child. During the crisis in the village, he makes possible arrangements for the Muslim families to evacuate the village and leave for Pakistan peacefully. He was against killing and was of the view that bloodshed was of no benefit. He wanted the Muslims of Mano Majra to leave behind their belongings as Sikh families were forced to do in Pakistan.

Iqbal, Jagga and Their Arrest

Iqbal is a social worker belonging to Jhelum. He is arrested with no explainable reason even when he reaches Mano Majra after the murders. His actual aim was to do something to stop the bloodshed taking place during Partition. For him morality is a matter of money, not afforded by poors, who instead have religion. He thought that criminals were not born but made by hunger, want, and injustice. He is very patient even when he is caught without any reason by the constable.

The arrest of Jugga and Iqbal gives a picture of the way police used to act during those days. They gave different facilities to different prisoners, and had different ways of deal with them:

‘The pattern of torture had to be carefully chosen. Some succumbed to hunger, others--- of the Iqbal type---to the inconvenience of having to defecate in front of the policemen. Some of the flies sitting on their faces smeared with treacle, with their hands tied behind them. Some to lack of sleep. In the end they all gave in’.

(80)

Arrival of the Ghostly Trains

Most heinous depiction takes place when a ghostly train, without lights, reaches the Mano Majra railway station. There was deathly silence in the village afterwards. People spent whole day, forgetting about their daily chores. They were shocked and confused about the happenings. They spent their day on the roofs of their houses to know what was actually happening. Soon they are ordered to collect all wood and kerosene oil from their houses and

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deposit at the truck and containers near the railway station. When Meet Singh wants to enquire, he is insulted in front of all.

Then a train loaded with Sikhs massacred by Muslims is cremated. We are taken inside the trains and the torture through the reverie of Hukum Chand, remembering which brings a vomit to his mouth:

‘There were women and children huddled in a corner, their dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just then become voiceless. Some of them did not have a scratch on their bodies. There were bodies crammed against the far end wall of the compartment, looking in terror at the empty windows through which must have come shots, spears and spikes. There were lavatories, jammed with corpses of young men who had muscled their way to comparative safety. And all the nauseating smell of putrefying flesh, faeces and urine.’ (90)

The terrible scenes and thoughts keep disturbing him even in dreams. ‘Hukum Chand felt feverish. The corpses! A thousand charred corpses sizzling and smoking while the rain put out the fire. A hundred yards of charred corpses! Beads of sweat broke out on his temples. He felt cold and frightened’ (99). When he is alone he looks for the company of the little girl. Another train loaded with Sikh corpses visits Mano Majra but this time the bodies are buried near the railway station.

News of the Murder of Sikhs from Pakistan

People got the news that Sikhs were being tortured, murdered in Pakistan and women were being stripped, paraded naked and raped in the streets. Something similar was happening in Patiala, Ambala and Kapurthala to retaliate. Sikhs ale started committing atrocities on Muslims in Punjab. To avoid any such happening in Mano Majra, Hukum Chand planned for a peaceful evacuation of Muslims to Julludhar and eventually to Pakistan.

Some lines are bound to bring tears to the eyes of the reader. When they (Muslim villagers) are requested to go to Pakistan, Imam Baksh is reluctant and says, “‘What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as

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brothers.’ Imam Baksh broke down. Meet Singh clasped him in his arms and began to sob. Several of the people started crying quietly and blowing their noses” (133). It is a depiction of the closeness of the villagers, whom religion did not divide but unfortunately Partition did.

Karma of a Religious Agitator

In the last chapter ‘Karma’ the author portrays the coming of a religious agitator group to Mano Majra, who tempts and encourages the villagers and refugees to take revenge from the Muslims residing in the nearby areas. First they hesitate but eventually agree to follow them. Their plan is to attack a train taking the Muslims from Jullundhar to Pakistan. This train is expected to pass through Mano Majra in the late evening. About fifty men plan and prepare for the same, except Meet Singh and Lumberdar.

Jagga’s Sacrifice of His Life

When Hukum Chand is informed about this, he orders the sub-inspector to release both Jugga and Iqbal, hoping that maybe they can prevent the attack by the angry mob. Iqbal Singh is disinterested in dealing with the mob. But Jugga, who loved Nooran and knew that she would be in the train to be attacked, played his final act successfully by sacrificing his life to avert the attack. His love for Nooran surpasses the destructive environment of those days. There is no hero like character in this work but Jugga becomes so in the end when he sacrifices his life for Nooran and other Muslims travelling on the Train to Pakistan.

Jagga’s sacrifice proves that violence cannot be won by violence only and it is love that makes one immortal and actually humane. Man is no one to punish or take the decisions. God has sent us to this earth as a human being. It is only we who divide us in castes, classes and religions. We have divided the God’s image also. We must rise above all this and listen to preaching of the Guru:

*“For God is True and dispenseth Truth,
There the elect his court adorn,
And God Himself their actions honours”.* (183)

A Platform Where Truth, History and Fiction Meet

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Thus, *Train to Pakistan* is a platform where truth, history and fiction meet. It is a narration that reminds well of the then occurring suffering, trauma, and tragedy. The Partition of India in 1947, a reason of huge setback in the history of India's integrity and democracy has been effectively and philosophically depicted. It brings a shiver through the spine. It touches the heart of every human. The recreation although not real is yet close to reality giving glimpses of the merciful happenings as a consequence of Partition. This paper can suitably be ended with the opening lines of this classic of Indian literature containing the whole event in them:

‘The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed.
Both tortured. Both raped. (1)’

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Dr. Gurpreet Kaur, Ph.D., M.Phil., M.A., B.Ed.

Assistant Professor in English

SGTB Khalsa College

Anandpur Sahib 140118

Punjab

India

Gurpreetcommskills@yahoo.com

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