



Train to Pakistan: A Chronicle of Partition

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Abstract

Indian writing in English is the voice of people to explore different issues mental trauma, upheaval of society, women rights and partition through short stories, novel and novellas. The partition of Indian in 1947 was a heart rending experience in the history which brought agony, humiliation, and a defeating sense of being uprooted to the lakhs of people. In this research paper has taken the novel Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* 1956 is a saga of ill-fated nations that went through agony of partition, which was heart rending situation. It deals with communal theme which a political sponsored riot, rebuilding lives, tolerated experience of friendships across border.

Keywords:- heart-rending, partition, communal, ill-fated chronicle

Though the dominance of British imperialism came to an end but it prompted the inevitable partition of Indian subcontinent, which ushered into two sovereign states, ending a long standing communally shared history and cultural heritage. But the western hegemony flourished through knowledge. Setting a new tradition, the writers portrayed cultural, political and intellectual hybridity in a fragile amalgamation of history and language. "History can only be a narrative construction involving a dialectical relationship of past and present concerns" (Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh 252). On Feb. 02, 2014, in his keynote address in the National Seminar on the topic "The Historical Novel from Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh: An Overview", Bhim S. Dahiya argues:

Historical or otherwise, literary narratives are, of course, to be judged by their power to evoke real life and their moral perspective that evaluates the human actors as well as historical events in terms of right and wrong. That is where literature, more so the novel, shows its proximity to philosophy. Thus, even the historical novel, to be a literary narrative of high order, has to have the philosophic component.

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The study of the novel *Train to Pakistan* written on the theme of communalism has been made in the context of these socio-political, economic, religious and historical factors. Here Urvashi Butalia's comment in *The Other Side of Silence* is worth mentioning, "These aspects of partition-how families were divided, how friendship endured across borders, how people coped with the trauma, how they rebuilt their lives, what resources, both physical and mental,

they drew upon, how their experience of dislocation and trauma shaped their lives, and indeed the cities and towns villages they settled in find little reflection in written history.” From the beginning of the novel it is clearly seen that the communities’ hate each other and that is the reason bloodshed took place and even though different communities of Mano Majra are seen in the light of brotherhood they stereotype each other in order to prove themselves superior over the other.

"Our Hindu women are like that: so pure that they would rather commit suicide than let a stranger touch them. We Hindus never raise our hands to strike women, but these Muslims have no respect for a weaker sex." {23}

And none of the community takes responsibility of their own actions of what they are doing to destroy the opposite community but Singh clearly blames both Hindus and Muslims and hold them accountable for their deeds and actions.

"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}

Where primarily there arises communal frenzy in the novel, Singh brilliantly through the character of Iqbal personifies multi-cultural ethnicity. His religious background is not clear and he is also portrayed as a social worker who is not supposed to be biased to any particular religion which further confuses the reader about his identity about his caste. Iqbal comes to Mano Majra to raise awareness about land reform and to encourage peasants to demand more political and works for a communist organization. He is described a small, somewhat effeminate man and was educated in England. But instead he sees the situation of Mano Majra different from what he assumed as the only Hindu is murdered the night before he came and the village is in chaos and suspicion. Iqbal, when first met meet Singh, bhai of Gurudwara, chose not to reveal his religion and for his own convenience went with the name Iqbal Singh when meet Singh called him so. He neither corrects nor denies him which perhaps further symbolises his multi-cultural ethnicity.

“He did not have to say what Iqbal he was he could be a Muslim, Iqbal Mohammed. He could be a Hindu, Iqbal Chand, or a Sikh, Iqbal Singh. It was one of the few names common to the three communities. In a Sikh village, an Iqbal Singh would no doubt would get a better deal, even if his hair was shorn and his beard shaved, than an Iqbal Mohammed or an Iqbal Chand. He himself had few religious feelings.”{38}

Iqbal has a touch of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. He in that sense is coalescing of those communities. His religious background is not fully revealed or perhaps we can say that readers are confused about Iqbal’s character. Still he was not fully biased for any particular community.

Furthermore, Iqbal was accused falsely of the murder of Lala Ram Lal and is thus arrested and put in jail. He quickly became known in Mano Majra as political agitator and so he was also falsely identified as a Muslim who is working for a Muslim league. Yet again the readers can see that his real identity remains uncovered as he was checked by sub inspector and perhaps was found circumcised. Before the riot there can be seen cultural harmony between the communities which created a mutual understanding. People of different sects,

racess and religions lived together. But in spite of this ‘mutual-cultural understanding’, Mano Majra missed the sense of brotherhood. People of Mano Majra misunderstood their ‘understanding of mutual-cultural harmony’ as brotherhood. The actual communal frenzy becomes evident in the novel with the arrival of the ghost train. This arrival of ghost train breaks the sham of brotherhood which the communities of Mano Majra portray. It implants the seeds of distaste and resentment in the minds of Sikh community against the Muslims as the train carried dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs, which were coming back from Pakistan. If seen from another aspect, this arrival also instils some emotions in the minds of Muslim community like that of horror and dread. When the train arrives the dark clouds of deafening silence hover over the village, no one wants to talk with each other as the people of village know that two polar opposite communities are residing and ‘the talk’ will result in immediate violence.

“That evening for the first time in the memory of Mano Majra, Imam Baksh’s sonorous cry did not rise to heavens to proclaim the glory of God.”(89)

Riots between two communities cannot only germinate from physical violence done against the other community but can also take birth from an emotion such as love this situation is explained well by Singh in his novel when Juggut Singh’s mother rejects the idea of his son impregnating a girl without marriage that too, a Muslim girl. In midst of all this panic and chaos Juggut Singh chose to love a Muslim girl and the first thing he did after getting bailed out of prison he went in search of Nooran, his lover and got to know that all the Muslims of Mano Majra are being forced to go to Pakistan due to safety reasons. Juggut Singh without giving a thought to his safety, decided to save the people in the train by letting go the train and so instead of choosing the hand of his own community he chose the hand of the opposite enemy community. If he would have not died in the process of saving the people in the train, he would have been beaten to death by his own community people because what he did was unjust according to his community.

Another character similar to Juggut Singh is Hukum Chand. He also was infatuated with a Muslim girl, Haseena, who was a sixteen year old prostitute, just like Juggut and was ready to take the extreme measures to save her from the brutality which Sikh community was ready to partake. Character of Hukum Chand is painted as culturally conflicted. His opinions regarding the Muslim community changed after meeting Haseena, and it was because of her, he bailed out Juggut and Iqbal from jail and cleared their names from any kind of suspicion or crime which they might’ve or might’ve not committed.

Meet Singh is another character who is a hard core Sikh and thus does not considers other religion like Christianity moral. They have exchanges of their wives and they dance and Drinks in the clubs. These are very much different if compared to Hindus and Muslims codes of conduct. This shows that there is no respect for the cultures and traditions of other communities. Meet Singh meets Iqbal in the Gurudwara and gives him a room to stay in the Gurudwara. Here, meet Singh without asking him assumes that Iqbal is Sikh and calls him ‘Iqbal Singh’. A reader might think and question that had Iqbal denied his caste as a Sikh and had been a Muslim in reality, then would’ve meet Singh given him a place to stay?

“Iqbal Singh? Queried the old man. Without waiting for an answer, he continued. ‘I’m the bhai of the temple. Bhai Meet Singh.’{38}

If Iqbal were to belong to a Muslim community, it can be questioned whether meet would’ve given him place to stay or not or even if would’ve, then was that out of communal respect and humanity or to save his own reputation and respect in Mano Majra? Neither Meet

gave a chance to Iqbal to reveal his own identity nor Iqbal himself do such thing. The quietness of Iqbal cleared the suspicion of him belonging to any other caste, other than Sikh, in the mind of Meet Singh, which earned a place to stay for Iqbal, but clouds of confusion were created in the minds of the readers.

Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* has shown meet Singh as the ‘man of his own culture’, who does not respects other communities but still meet Singh does not want to indulge in horrendous activities which include bloodshed and violence especially of those people with whom he shares his own village even though they belong to different community. And so he tries to keep up with the debate that is coming from the opposition to persuade other Sikhs to kill the Muslims that are going to Pakistan to have proper revenge.

The story takes a sharp turn when Muslim community were evacuated from Mano Majra and were forced to go to Chundunnugger and from thereon to Pakistan. When Muslims came out of their houses to leave Mano Majra, other villagers also came out of their houses to see them off and became emotional. This emotional site of the villager’s shows that despite of belonging from different cultures and having ethnic issues both Muslim and Sikh communities used to share a common routine before partition which is engraved in their minds and forever will reside there. Their understanding was so authentic that they could feel each other’s pain.

“The Sikhs watched them till they were out of sight. They wiped the tears of their faces and turned back to their homes with heavy hearts.” {145}

Khushwant Singh explains how love and humanity prevalent in the moments of crisis. Jugga- a self proclaimed goon and his love for a Muslim girl Nooran is exposition of the victory of goodness and love in critical time. It is the love of Nooran and Juggut Singh ‘Jugga’ that tolerates and transcends the damage of partition. When he was released from jail, Jugga realizes that any attack on train to Pakistan must mean danger to his beloved Nooran, so he decided to stave off the ambush on the train, if needed he will sacrifice his life. The vandalism was set using a rope ‘stiff as a shaft of steel’ tied up across the first span of the bridge to decimate the passengers on the train. He used his ‘kirpan’ to cut the rope that was tied up to bring about the train cataclysm. When Jugga was cutting the rope, a volley of shots pierced his body and he collapsed, snapping the rope in the middle as he fell. “The train went over him and went on to Pakistan” (Singh 190) with all the Muslim Refugees safe and sound and it is the ending of the novel. Thus, Jugga becomes the hero of action “when the bureaucracy, the intelligence, the man of religion and the political leadership failed to act” (V. Pala Prasada Rao, et. al. 40). Jugga’s sacrifice culminated in the safe passage of train to Pakistan saving hundreds of innocent life. Quoting ChrintanKulshrestha: “Jugga’s act of love and sacrifice silhouetted against the backdrop of hatred and violence, towers above the communal differences and lends a meaning to the general aimlessness of life in the partition days” (qtd. in V. Pala Prasada Rao, et. al. 41). Here Jugga’s sacrifice symbolizes harmony and integration when everything else was disintegrating and humanity was the biggest casualty. So, Khushwant Singh accords an authentic and convincing but sorrowful description of ill-fated nations by creating such characters that transcend their actual. Kavita Daiya argues in her book on partition that “the humanistic exploration of violence-its representation, naming, remembrance and reproduction-is essential if we are to uncover the sites and strategies to challenge the discourses that initiate it and then propagate it” (30).

Khushwant Singh has described the tragedy of Partition and indirectly suggests the shortsightedness of Indian leadership who failed to foresee the consequences of division and to handle the situation ever after Churchill’s forecast of blood-bath. Communal discord was

not a future of Indian rural scene but it was engineered first by the British Government under the policy of divide and rule and then by the nationalist leaders, with attitude tinge. He has explained Mano Majra is a sphere of the communal temper of the country during the time of partition. It is the sacrificing love of Jugga that breaks the rule of the forest, an eye for an eye, and a throat for a throat. On this battlefield of Mano Majra, the efforts of evil are vanquished by one of the efforts of good that is love.

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