
SOCIO POLITICAL CONCIOUSNESS OF KHUSWANT SINGH “IN TRAIN TO PAKISTAN”

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TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* pictures the brutal, realistic story of political hatred, and of mass passions during the tragic days that preceded and followed the partition of India. It was a terrible time when all human values sank deep into inhumanly passion of communal violence. The trains were halted and the unfortunate passengers were ruthlessly butchered. Men, women and children were indiscriminately victims of mad communal frenzy; they were molested and killed by the armed bands of men. The predominant quality of this novel is its stark realism, symbolism, meaningful atmosphere, ironical style of diction and a powerful unvarnished naturalistic mode of expression or style. Khuswant Singh describes it as, “a documentary... with a sugar coating of characters, and a story but it remains the best regarded novel in English on Partition.”¹ But in reality it is a careful operated and penned down psychological study of the people of two countries at the time of partition. Khuswant Singh has portrayed the ‘psychic-web’ around his characters physical world and depicts the fateful journey of one such ‘Sleepy’ Village Mano –Majra, Undisturbed by the impact of Partition.

Khuswant Singh himself felt thoroughly disillusioned and completely shaken. He accepted :

The belief that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country. I had believed that we Indian were peace loving and non-violent...After the experience of autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe these views. I became... an angry middle-aged man, who wanted to shoot his disenchantment...I decided to try my hand at writing²

Although the communal riots first started in the Calcutta and after that all over in India, but the most affected state by these communal riots was Punjab and its Sikh community. Khuswant

Singh himself had suffered the terrible experience of the Partition and its aftermath. The thought of guilt that he could not do anything to save his peoples forced him to write this novel.

For the millions of people living in the Indian sub-continent, history is divided into two similar eras BP (Before Partition) and PP (Post Partition). This way Indian literature in English should be studied by keeping this thought always in mind. It is surprising that no novel in English by an Indian about the partition was written until 1956.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khuswant Singh remains within “the obvious limits of socio-cum political narrative fiction of contemporary interest”.³ The people have moved so deeply on both sides of the boarder that even today when they read the poem “Aj Aakhan Waris Shah Noo” written by Amrita Pritam. The tear starts rolling down from their cheeks. They weep for what they themselves have done to each other – a sign of disgrace and shame which have descended on us from those fateful days.

In this novel Juggat Singh a villain is the main Sikh protagonists and the whole story of the novel revolves around, his actions. Other Sikh characters are Bhai Meet Singh, who is a priest at Gurdwara, Iqbal Singh, a stranger. Banta Singh, a Lamberdar, a young angry Sikh boy, Sardar Sahib and finally a group of Sikhs came from Pakistan also plays an important role..

Train to Pakistan portrays the life of the frontier between India and Pakistan that had become the scene of rioting and bloodshed. The communal harmony between the Muslims and the Sikhs, existing for centuries, was shattered by a series of tragic events. Death the result of man’s cruelty – over powered the trains and disturbed the age old harmony of the Muslims and Sikhs even in the peaceful villages. The novels relates the story of one village Mano-Majra, where the traditional bond of friendship and goodwill was ruptured by horrible events.

The village become a battle field of conflicting loyalties. The magistrate and the police failed to stem the rising tide of violence save and the human goodness and innocence were people were drowned into the tide of violence and hatred.

The story is set in a small 'sleepy' village Mano-Majra on the banks of the Sutlaj where the only event of importance is a train crossing the railway bridge. Problem arise when a group of young Sikh villagers including Malli seeks to stir up the villagers to attack Muslims traveling on the train to Pakistan. The situation is saved by the villain of the novel Juggut Singh who finally emerged as a hero, at the cost of his own life.

Singh does not simply deal with the effect of the partition on the entire country; but also concerned with how the life of the Sikh’s community transformed as a result of the partition.

The chief protagonist of the novel is Juggat Singh, a badmash. Being from the Sikh's Community the novelist says that "the partition theme was born out of a guilt that I had done nothing to save the lives of innocent people and behaved liked coward."⁴ The novel is indeed about the sense of guilt weighing heavily on the conscience of the community as well as of the individuals. Reviewing the book in *The New York Herbold Tribune Book Review*, R.H. Glauber says, "Individual redeem themselves, but the weight of guilt remains in the community."⁵

As the novel opens Mano Majra is already disturbed by the news of communal violence in Bengal and Punjab and people seems to think that God is punishing them for their sins. But despite the news Mano- Majrans maintain a perfect harmony, brotherhood and cordiality among its various communities. Singh describes how both communities Sikhs and Muslims were blaming to each other for their loss but Singh shows impartially the reality of the situation by laying the blame of the horrible tragedy upon both the communities. Khuswant Singh says :

The fact is both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. By the summer of 1947... (9)

The novelist, introduces the main Sikh protagonist of the novel through conversation of the decaits and it seems clear from their conversation that they had already planned to make him victim of their evil plan. It is only through them that we come to know that Jugga is a villian, a budmash number 10 and is forbidden to leave the village after sunset. But they are also aware of the fact that he is completely mad in love with Nooran and remains busy with her at night. So, they take the advantage of this and make him victim of their plan by throwing a dozen of red and blue glass bangles in his house after looting and murdering Lala Ram Lal, the only Hindu in the village. Almost at the same time when Malli and his gang are busy in robbery and murder and Jugga and Nooran are lost in each others arms. It is an interesting fact that without doing anything wrong Jugga became the real culprit of Malli's design.

This interrogation also clearly indicates that, although Juggat Singh is a 10 badmash, yet he is a God fearing man. Jugga's love is indeed a positive and dynamic force of the novel. The love affair between the villain Jugga, a Sikh and the preety Muslim girl cuts across religious barriers. As Walter Scott wrote:

"Love rules the court, camp, the grove,

And men below and saints above;

For love is heaven and heaven is love.”⁶

Khuswant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* has given his own philosophy of love. Khuswant Singh has declared in one of his interview “Love is an ephemeral and divine concept. It does not last; lust.”⁷ The novelist commented on Juggat character after the publication of this novel, “You must remember, Juggat Singh. He is like a stud bull.”⁸

The arrival of the ghost train with corpses from Pakistan to Mano-Majra stuns the villagers, the lambardar and the beurocrait Hukum chand, is a moving symbol of *kalyug*. It was after the arrival of this ghastly train that the name Pakistan had meaning for them. It creates conflicts and divisions in Mano-Majra. The scene of the train from Pakistan, which bring countless corpses to Mano-Majra is awful and heart rending. It was a symbol of darkness and death :

“There were no lights on the train.”

“The engine did not whistle.”

“It was like a ghost.” 124

Jugga, a Sikh, by religion like most of other, is a god fearing Sikh, and is very well aware of the existence of God in this world. Khuswant Singh makes Jugga his mouthpiece and raises the issue of innocent human beings killing. These people are more concerned about the dogs live but not about humans life. Jugga, “an outlaw” becomes almost noble by his last act of self sacrifice.

Khuswant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* with its realistic and touching portroyal of characters, chiefly round, lays bare the grimly tragic situation of the human context in which his fictional people march towards the altars of self – immolation.

Khuswant Singh’s objective in this novel is to expose and explore the world around him and to present it in all it naturalistic setting. The socio- political theme he takes up in this novel is intrinsically a journalistic tour-de-force chiming in with the artistic tenets of sincerity and truth.

Jugga is an invincible person whom neither darkness can blind nor death scares. With his indomitable courage and unconquerable will, he becomes the symbol of self- sacrifice and goodness that humanity basically stands for. He redeems himself by saving the lives of thousands of Muslims in a thrilling climax. But all is not lost. Jugga does everything, he can to assert the nobility of his self.

The conversation of Meet Singh a gurdwara bhai, with the young Sikh avenger and highlights the position of the Sikhs people during the Partition and communal riots. Bhai meet Singh had an humanitarian attitude towards the mankind. He says that only the guilty should be punished. But the young Sikh adds that this is the same community that had killed their fifth Guru Arjun Devji and ninth Guru Tegh Bhadur Singh Ji. The young Sikh avenger also told that the only way to stop violence in Pakistan was to return blood for blood. Retaliation was the only answer, he said aggressively. “Do you know how many train loads of dead Sikh and Hindu have come over ?” “Do you know of the massacres in Rawalpindi and Multan, Gujranwala and Sheikhpora?” Iqbal questions Meet Singh angrily that “Why don’t you do something ? You must !”

Bhola, the tonga driver, a very short character came on the scene for a short time and stressed over the madness of the blood hungry people and remarked - “When the mobs attack they do not wait to find out who you are”. Hindu or Muslim they kill....” (195)

In terms of religion partition resulted in the most obnoxious and monstrous holocaust ever witnessed in this country. Religion which is supposed to be an embodiment of human and spiritual values become an instrument of hatred, rapaciousness, evil exploitation, sadism, torture, murder, rape and wholesale destruction.

The novelist has presented very realistically the behaviour of an ordinary or common man living in this world through the character of Jugga. He behaved like a true worldly man who is in confusion, “What to do and what not to do ?” He prayed to the God for giving him strength to fulfill his desired objective.

During one of his interview with John Thompson given to the canadian Broadcasting Commission, in 1961, Khuswant Singh’s admitted - Jugga is a character “stuffed with the so-called innate goodness of man he is the only character which is entirely fiction.”⁹

Hukum Chand, insisted on maintaining law and order. He knew his duty and restrained himself from indulging in destructive acts as his counterparts in Pakistan had Sadly done. During his conversation with the Inspector Sahib, he comments, “Logic was never a strong point for Sikhs when the were roused, logic did not matter at all.” (135) This way, the tragic sense is shown through small gestures and through apparently trivial suggestions. Hukum Chand remarks - “I hope we do not get trains with corpses coming through Mano-Majra” (35) - has a touch of dramatic irony since it constitutes a for warning of future event. Banta Singh, is a Lambardar and a staunch believer of British Raj. Although his character is very small in this

novel but during not conversation with the stranger Iqbal, he comments over the importance and value of freedom. "Is this the freedom which we were looking for ?" and again, "freedom must be a good thing but what will we get out of it?" (35)

He is the same man who advised Immam Baksh to take Shelter at Chundunnagar camp and when they decide to roll their baggage's, he started weeping like a small child. The novelist has shown the struggle of Juggat Singh for existence in a society which is not ready to accept his efforts. The search for authentic existence ends when one achieve the state of happy co-existence and harmony with his fellow mortals.

Ernest Heming way and Arthur Miller both these novelist are known for the existential quest between the individual and the society. The style is tough and terse, concise and spare in this novel and this style shows the existential conflict between the individual and the society. He had come for deep into the sea of reality like E. Hemingway's hero Santiago. The bond of fraternal feelings, existing between the Sikhs and the Muslim in Mano-Majra, was shattered by the unfortunate developments. The manipulation of the district authorities, of the police in particular, created rift to force the Muslims to leave the village and to go to Pakistan.

The arrival of the ghost train at Mano-Majra station is presented to show the nihilistic point of view of the novelist. The slogans written on this ghostly train '*Gift from Pakistan*' and after that '*Gift to Pakistan*' aptly suits to the term '*nihilism*.' The arrival of this train poisoned the happy and undisturbed environment of the sleeply Mano-Majra. For example the Malli, the young Sikh average and the group of the Sikh migrants are the embodiment of the nihilistic approach of Khuswant Singh. In *Train to Pakistan*, the message of peace and love is embedded in the sacrifice of Jugga. But this sacrifice is seen as an act of a person--romantic, pure of heart, illiterate but 'wise'--yet desperate to save his beloved against all odds.

After reading the novel we can conclude that in Khuswant Singh fictional world individual is silhouetted against this vast, panoramic background, the great human catastrophe of the partition of India and the ghastly and inhuman events which followed it. "This individuality in his writings is an account of his anger and disenchantment with the long-cherished human values in the wake of inhuman bestial horrors and insane savage killings on both sides during the partition of the sub continent between India and Pakistan in August 1947."¹⁰

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