

# Reflection of Politics and Post-Partition Violence in Khushwant Singh's Novel *Train to Pakistan*

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## Abstract:

Through this present research paper attempt has been made to study the politics of partition and post-partition violence caused by the great socio-political event of Indian subcontinent during 1947 through Khushwant Singh's acclaimed novel *Train to Pakistan*. The partition of India not only had a far reaching impact upon the common man but also upon the social thinkers, artists, literary figures and political analysts. Khushwant Singh is one of the most significant authors in the field of contemporary Indian-English political novel. His *Train to Pakistan* is the first novel written on theme of partition of India by an Indian and one of the finest novels which focus the great socio political event of the subcontinent from various angles. The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. The selected novel will be the source for Primary data. Secondary data will be obtained from various other published sources like news paper articles, published memorial lectures, scholarly journal articles, related websites etc. It will be descriptive as well as analytical in nature.

**Key Words:** Politics of Partition, Violence, Migration, Social Justice, Trauma, Indian Sub-continent.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Khushwant Singh occupies a very distinct place in the domain of Indian English political novel. He was born in a village in the West Punjab in 1915 into an affluent family of tradesmen. He was the second son of accomplished builder Sobha Singh and his wife, Veeran Bai. After studying law in Lahore and London, he worked as a lawyer in Lahore until he was forced to leave his home and migrate to Delhi on 12 August 1947, three days before the partition of the country. He started his professional career as a practicing lawyer in 1939 at Lahore in the Chamber of Manzur Qadir and Ijaz Husain Batalvi. He worked there for eight years where he worked with some of his best friends and fans including Akhtar Aly Kureshy, Advocate, and Raja Muhammad Arif, Advocate. His experiences in Lahore were deeply influenced by India's independence movement and the sociopolitical environment of pre-partition India. In 1947, he entered the Indian Foreign Service for the newly independent India. He started as Information Officer of the Government of India in Toronto, Canada, and moved on to be the Press Attaché and Public Officer for the Indian High Commission for four years in London and Ottawa. In 1951, he joined the All India Radio as a journalist. Between 1954 and 1956 he worked in Department of Mass Communication of the UNESCO at Paris. From 1956 he turned to editorial services. After two years of working for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in London and Canada, Singh decided to become a full time journalist and writer from around 1950 onwards. As a brilliant novelist, story writer, historian, political commentator and distinguished journalist, his literary achievements are far-ranging. He is famous for his two novels – *A Train to Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. *Train to Pakistan* is considered one of the finest realistic novels of post-war II of Indian English Fiction. *Train to Pakistan* was published, for the first time, in 1956, almost ten years after the events that found their way into the novel. It tells the story of imaginary Mano Majra, a small village with both Sikh and Muslim families. The village is known for its railway station and the large single-track railway bridge spanning the nearby river Sutlej. As the events take place in late August 1947 Mano Majra finds itself located on the Indian side of the newly created border, with the bridge now connecting the two countries. Till then Mano Majra has escaped the mayhem following in the wake of Partition—a situation that is about to change when

the story sets in. In the course of the book, we witness how communal violence gradually closes in on the village. Singh confronts us—as well as the characters of the novel—with a narrative of Partition violence that slowly moves towards the emotional and narrative climax. In order to achieve this he skillfully combines and contrasts two narrative strands of the 1947-discourse: a general narrative of politics and a personal one of loss and pain. The objective of the study is not only to discuss the trauma and violence of the partition but also to look into the socio political causes revolved around throughout the whole phenomena where the politics of religion is also a main concern. Khushwant Singh through his novel *Train to Pakistan* rightly portrayed the entire nation through the fictional border village named Mano Majra. He depicted this small village as a miniature form of the entire nation. He discussed how people are facing difficulties for the boundary division. The village was inhabited by Muslims and Sikhs. Both the communities started to grow hatred for each other. Under the influence of the political and religious leaders they started to judge people on the basis of religious parameters. The novelist depicts this politics very convincingly in his novel. Earlier the people used to live in that village very peacefully. But some national leaders from both sides started to contaminate the whole atmosphere in the name of religion for their political gain. As a result the common people of the peaceful village had to suffer a lot.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:**

The Partition of Indian Sub-continent is one of the most terrible events in the socio-political history of the sub continent. Urvashi Butalia rightly says that the political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions of history. There are various causes for the behind the scene. Through this present research paper attempt has been made to study the politics of partition and post - partition violence caused by the great socio-political event of Indian subcontinent during 1947 through Khushwant Singh's acclaimed novel *Train to Pakistan*.

## **3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

It is worth mentioning that there are various scholarly texts that have already been written focusing Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* from different angles. Through this novel he tries to depict the widespread violence that consumed the entire subcontinent in the post-partition days. He is one of the most significant authors in the field of contemporary Indian-English Political novel. Works of such acclaimed literary figures should be studied from close corners.

## **4. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:**

The objective of the study is to focus on the politics of partition and post - partition violence caused by the great socio-political event of Indian subcontinent during 1947 as depicted by the great Indian English novelist Khushwant Singh in the selected novel.

## **5. MATERIALS AND METHOD:**

Research methodology is the most important aspect of any study. It facilitates the materials and provides reliability and validity to it. The information collected for the purpose of the study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data source is the selected novel under study and secondary data have been collected from various published and unpublished sources like relevant literature, news papers, journals, scholarly articles, related websites and others. Textual interpretation methodology is used for this research work. The selected work has been analyzed on perspective of Partition of India by different angles. It is a study that tries to describe the politics of partition as reflected in the selected novel by Khushwant Singh. It is analytical and descriptive in nature.

## **6. DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS:**

Khushwant Singh who occupies a very distinct place in the domain of Indian English fiction portrays the partition of India very convincingly from different angles through most of his novels. His first and acclaimed novel *Train to Pakistan* is very outspoken on the theme of partition and discusses the causes and traumatic influence of the great socio political event of the subcontinent through imaginary characters. Though imaginary it perfectly depicts the reality of the partition of India from his first hand experience. It tells the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events that followed, which will be

remembered as one of the blackest chapters of human history. Just on the eve of independence, India was partitioned causing a great upheaval in the whole continent. Independence brought in its wake one of the bloodiest carnages in the history of India, the upshot of this, was that twelve million had to flee their home nearly half a million were killed.

It is quite true and accepted view that the partition of India occurred just after the independence because of the immature decision of the political leaders of that time from both of the countries namely India and Pakistan. The whole story of the novel centers round a fictional border village named Mano Majra. This entire village is surrounded by Sikhs and Muslims. Both Sikhs and Muslims started to hate each other on the basis of their religion. They forgot their previous peaceful life. Earlier they used to live as a family but this border snatched away all the bonding they made. Sometimes they fall prey to some rumors. They are not responsible for the whole situation. The whole situation has changed because of some political decisions. As the situation became worst, the Pakistan government has decided to move the common people from Mano Majra to Pakistan. The decision came all of a sudden and was executed all of a sudden. Common people were not happy with the decision. The Muslims opined that they had lived very peacefully amidst the Sikhs and they had nothing to do with Pakistan. Mano Majra was their place where they were born and their ancestors were there in the soil of this village. Juggut Singh, a sturdy man who loved a Muslim girl named Nooran expressed very clearly his view regarding the decision of the government. A group of religious provocateurs travels to Mano Majra after the Muslims depart for a refugee camp from where they will ultimately travel to Pakistan. They sow discord among the local Sikhs and persuade a local gang to carry out a mass slaughter attempt as the Muslims board their train to Pakistan. Juggut moves instinctively and gives his life to save the train since he knows Nooran is aboard one of the train line. Here the novelist chose this as a title of the novel. Basically, this novel talks about the village Mano Majra where both the community used to live. From the description we can have an idea that the common people were not responsible all theses. Some National leaders, for the sake of politics, from both the country aroused hatred and violence in the mind of the common people. These pseudo politicians were responsible for the violence and brutality. The politicians used the religion card very cruelly and as a result both the Muslims and Hindus started to blame each other for the brutality. Common people from both sides were killed, raped and tortured. The people lost the harmony and they were displaced. Though the decision was unplanned, the politics was so planned that the common people refused to abide by the warning and saying of the local educated people. They tried to convince the common people and explain them the real meaning of liberty. But they did not want to hear them. German social thinker Karl Marx rightly says religion is just like the opium. He thinks religion like opium dormant reasoning capability of the people and they start giving priority faith or belief over rationality. The common people in the context of Indian situation at that time started to think that Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. They were slaves of the English, now they would be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis. Khushwant Singh in this novel very perfectly depicts the socio political aspects of that time in line with the other aspects like personal life, love, humanity, displacement, brutality etc. One occasion he depicts - "The mullah at the mosque knows that it is time for the Morning Prayer. He has a quick wash, stands facing west towards Mecca and with his fingers in his ears cries in long sonorous notes, Allah-o- Akbar". In the same way he depicts the practice of Sikh also. "The priest at the Sikh temple lies in bed till the mullah has called. Then he too gets up, draws a bucket of water from the well in the temple courtyard, pours it over himself, and intones his prayer in monotonous singsong to the sound of splashing water". Bilquees Dar rightly opines that the Partition of India was the process of dividing the sub-continent along sectarian lines, which took place in 1947 as India gained its independence from British Empire. The northern part predominantly Muslim, became nation of Pakistan and the southern predominantly Hindu became the Republic of India, the partition however devastated both India and Pakistan as the process claimed many lives in riots, rapes, murders and looting. The two countries began their independence with ruined economies and lands without an established, experienced system of government, not only this, but also about 15 million people were displaced from their homes. The Partition of India was an important event not only in the history of the Indian subcontinent but in world history. Its chief reason was the communal thinking of both Hindus and Muslims; but the circumstances under which it occurred made it one of the saddest events of the history of India. No doubt, the Hindus and the Muslims were living together since long but they failed to inculcate the feelings of harmony and unity among themselves. The fanatic leaders of both communities played a prominent role in stoking the fire of

communalism. The partition was exceptionally brutal and large in scale and unleashed misery and loss of lives and property as millions of refugees fled either Pakistan or India.

If we analyze the novel from thematic point of view, we see that as the word partition is not a positive word the story of the novel is also not positive. The novelist depicts the trauma, violence, displacement and brutality occurred from the partition of India in a convincing way. As he had firsthand experience of the great socio political event of this subcontinent he portrays the phenomena in a realistic manner. As mentioned earlier, the setting of the story is in a fictional border village named Mano Majra. There is a dacoit named Malli. One night in August he with his partners enters the village and demands Ramlal's treasures who is a money lender. When he refused he was murdered. The gang leaves the village dropping a few bangles in the house of Jugga whose full name was Juggat Singh. He has served jail terms on many charges. He was at that time out in the fields. He was required not to leave his house after sunset, but the call of Nooran, his beloved the Muslim weaver's daughter is, too, compelling for him to abide by the restrictive rules of the police. Jugga and Nooran return to the village only to find the people gravely disturbed by the dacoity and the murder of Ramlal. Almost at the same time, the Divisional Commissioner, Hukum Chand has arrived at the officer's Rest House. He is engaged in a sordid affair with Haseena, a teen-aged prostitute. He tries to take liberties with her. He hears the noise of gun-shots and voices of the people. He swears loudly and leaves the girl. The next day, policemen arrive at Mano Majra railway station to conduct an enquiry into the murder of Ramlal. By the same train arrives Iqbal Singh, a Western educated youth. He has been deputed by the people's party to work among the common folk. This young man goes to the village Gurudwara. He is welcomed by the Sikh priest, Meet Singh. He is, however, arrested by the police through a misunderstanding. Iqbal and Juggat Singh are held by the police on the charges of complicity in Ramlal's murder, though no proceedings are started against them. Malli and his gang, the real culprits are also arrested but they are latter released. The police inspector suspects Iqbal to be a Muslim. Events move fast. The fate of individuals in Mano Majra is affected by the catastrophic events of partition. The arrival of the ghost train filled with dead bodies at Mano Majra from Pakistan created a commotion. The dark clouds of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims who have lived together for centuries. Yet feelings of brotherhood have not disappeared. They meet for taking view of the scene that is both intensely human and touching. Madness has engulfed the village. Muslims are evacuated to a refugee camp at Chundunnuger. They are expected to be transported to Pakistan. Nooran, who is with Jugga's child, visits his mother but she is compelled to go to the refugee camp. Hindu fanatics vow revenge upon Muslims for what they have done to Hindus in Pakistan. Hukum Chand is infolined that Haseena would be also on the train which carries Muslim refugees from the Chundunnuger camp to Pakistan. Jugga and Iqbal are released at this crucial stage. Juggat Singh goes to Mano Majra only to find the Nooran who has been taken to the refugee camp and that she would be travelling on the train to Pakistan. He also comes to know the plot of the Hindu fanatics to blow up the train with dynamite when passing the rail road bridge at Mano Majra. Jugga climbs the steel spans of the bridge and begins to cut off the rope connecting the explosive material with a sharp instrument. The Hindu leader fires at him. Jugga clings to the rope with his hands and finally cut it to pieces. The engine of the incoming train was almost on him. Thus, the train passed over him and went to Pakistan. Jugga sacrifices his life for the love and humanity. Before his final act of sacrifice we see the sub-inspector carrying out the orders at once by releasing both Iqbal and Jugga. He purposefully informs Jugga that all Muslims of Mano Majra were to be evacuated to Pakistan by train that night. They were also told of Malli's misdeeds in looting and killing Muslims. Iqbal and Jugga got into a tonga on their way to Mano Majra. On the way, Iqbal dreamed of being a hero consequent on his being in Jail. Jugga's main concern was the fate of Nooran and her welfare. He jumped off the moving tonga and disappeared in the darkness. His arrival at a late hour in the Gurudwara to seek the blessing of Guru underscores the duality in his character. He asked Meet Singh: "I want the Guru's word. Will you read me a verse?" In compliance of his wishes, Meet Singh reads the prayer that God, the Giver of truth, honors the work of men who want to perform good actions. For Meet Singh indulgence in immoral practices would be overlooked if it was motivated by the desire to help and protect a friend. He was not horrified by the ugly fact that Jugga was a professional robber but he was shocked by his alleged action of murdering a fellow villager. Fellowship was more important than blind adherence to an abstract moral code: "What bothered Meet Singh, a priest, was not that Jugga had committed murder but that his hands were his hands were soiled with the blood of a fellow villager. If Jugga had done the same thing in the neighboring village, Meet Singh would gladly have

appeared in his defence and sworn on the holy Granth that Jugga had been praying in the Gurudwara at the time of the murder." Since Jugga had no part in the crime of Ramlal's murder, his conscience was clear. His mother, who was shaken by his arrest, produced a packet of broken bangles which had been thrown by Malli soon after the robbery. The police did not accept the broken bangles as evidence of Jugga's innocence, nor did Jugga make a revelation of the place he had gone to or the person whom he had met. He left home without showing a trace of emotion for his mother. He also recovered his temper because he had no malice or towards the policemen. The novelist describes the situation with a sense of humor which appears almost a psychic release: "Iqbal and the two constables joined Juggat Singh's party by the river. They all proceeded upstream toward the bridge. The head constable walked in front. Armed policemen marched on the sides and at the rear of the prisoners. Iqbal was lost in the khaki and red of their uniforms. Juggat Singh's head and shoulders showed above the turbans of the policemen. It was like a procession of horses with an elephant in their midst-taller, broader, and slower with his chains clanking like criminal trappings." The mode of introducing Juggat Singh aims at bringing out the essential duality in the nature of the character. Juggat Singh, a confirmed criminal had served several Jail terms on various charges; at the time of the dacoity, he had been released on the guarantee of good behavior. He was notoriously known as "Jugga, the badmash", but at moments he shows a degree of deep self-awareness. He embodies that rare combination of the criminal and the lover, which is a baffling aspect of the realities and complexities of life. He bears the ambivalence of moral values. The novel very realistically depicts the partition of India which created two independent countries followed by one of the cruelest and deadliest ethnic clashes, migration and displacement in human history. People in the bordering areas of the both countries can never forget these politically motivated cruel phenomena that resulted in loss of identity, brutality, violence and trauma among the common people who used to live in a peaceful atmosphere irrespective of religious identity they bear and fought together against the colonial rulers.

## 7. CONCLUSION:

*Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh is a village-centric novel which revolves around the theme of partition. Partition of any kind is surely not a good experience. Through the novel the novelist tries to depict the partition of India which is undoubtedly the greatest socio – political event of the subcontinent. Many people were displaced, murdered brutally and raped. Both sides are affected irrespective of Muslims and Hindus. But, the idea of partition was not in the mind of the common people before the independence. All the people of the country lived in a harmonious way in the villages of undivided India with the same identity. They fought together for the independence from the colonial rulers and achieved that. But, just after the independence the common people had to face a different destiny. It was politically motivated where we can use the term politics of religion. *Train to Pakistan* is Khushwant Singh's Supreme achievement. It is one of the finest realistic novels of Post-world war II Indo Anglican fiction. It has a well-knit structure, a well-conceived plot, an absorbing narrative and beautifully portrayed characters.

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