

Revisiting the Agony of Partition: An Analysis of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*.

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Abstract

The year 1947 marks two remarkable events in the history of our country. While on one hand the country got freedom from the clutches of British imperialism after near about two hundred years of colonialism with the collective efforts of the entire nation, irrespective of caste creed, colour or religion, and on the other hand the free nation was divided into two countries- India and Pakistan. The very act of partition was politically driven and had large scale repercussions, the memory of which can never be erased from the history of the country. It equipped the writers and artists with a subject that could be kept alive in writing and literature. History has been preserved in fiction that describes this tragedy of great magnitude and consequences. Partition Literature centres upon the excruciation and tribulations that became a part of the life of the people who suffered this partition. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a significant work of partition literature that portrays the bestialities associated with the horrendous act of the partition of the country. The current paper seeks to analyse Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and highlight the agonies faced by masses on account of partition.

Keywords: partition, exploitation, violence, division, tragedy.

Introduction:

The year 1947 marks two remarkable events in the history of our country. While on one hand the country got freedom from the clutches of British imperialism after near about two hundred years of colonialism with the collective efforts of the entire nation, irrespective of caste creed, colour or religion, and on the other hand the free nation was divided into two countries- India and Pakistan. The united nation was divided into two lands: Hindustan- the land of the Hindus and Pakistan- the land of the Muslims. The very act of partition was politically driven and had large scale repercussions, the memory of which can never be erased from the history of the country. Events and incidents which led to large scale massacres, loss of lives and homes, cruelties to women and children, loot and indescribable atrocities on human lives marked this politically driven partition. It led to people turning into refugees, running to save their lives and properties and promoted enmity between sects, and different religion. The long era of fraternity came to an end with the announcement of the division of the country. It was not just a geographical division but a division of the feeling of fraternity, and oneness. An entire mass was uprooted from their homes and lands. The two countries suffered en masse on account of this event and the freedom of the country was celebrated with partition at the backdrop.

The partition of the country was a great political design as it aimed to weaken the country base and divide its power. It was no less than a tragedy. It equipped the writers and artists with a subject that could be kept alive in writing and literature. History has been preserved in fiction that describes this tragedy of great magnitude and consequences.

Partition literature is one such genre that portrays the mental and psychological anguish as well as the physical torture that the people underwent as a consequence of partition.

A significant body of literature concentrates on the depiction of facts and realities associated with this miserable event which were cruel, pathetic and depressing. Writers took command and delineated the dismal picture of the effect of partition on the population that inhabited the countries for years. Literary work encompassing the theme of partition has been done in many Indian languages. It focuses on the theme of partition and describe the irreparable loss, undefined terror and massive destruction caused by this historic event that affected the people of both the nations alike.

Partition Literature centres upon the excruciation and tribulations that became a part of the life of the people who suffered this partition. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a significant work of partition literature that portrays the bestialities associated with the horrendous act of the partition of the country. It has faithfully delineated the conditions of those times that had wreaked havoc in the lives of many who had never dreamt of a religious and political separation. This politically motivated separation divided the people at multiple levels. It was a geographical, religious, sectarian, and politically division that divided the people at the psychological level too.

The Novel:

Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* accentuates the dismal picture of brutal actions that characterised the Indo -Pak partition and relates the tragic tale of the events that followed as a consequence of this great political upheaval that turned the lives of people topsy -turvy. The fact is that this political tumult brought with it one of the most inhuman carnages in the history of India and millions were rendered homeless, and thousands lost their lives.

According to Khushwant Singh, the time of partition was sans peace. It was the time that witnessed disintegration of values and marked a period that was overshadowed with disillusionment. The horrific impact of this historical act is honestly dealt with in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. He caustically attacks this political design and exposes menacing truth in the most poignant manner. *Mano Manjra*, as the novel was originally known is a document that pictures the time of great political turmoil characterised by incessant acts of hatred and violence, disorderly and compulsive communal agitation. It was a period marked by depreciation, devaluation, decadence and deprivation. It was no less than a holocaust that affected the innocent population in the most negative manner. The novel begins with a description of an unusual weather that symbolically forebodes the upcoming of a tragedy. The tone is thus set from the very start of the novel.

The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. It was hotter than usual, and drier and dustier. And the summer was longer. No one could remember when the monsoon had been so late. For weeks, the sparse clouds cast only shadows. There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins.(1)

The situation in the country was no better. Peace and harmony were at stake with communal riots dominating parts of the country and people suffering consequently. A significant population was bearing this disturbance and many lost their homes and livelihood. There was religious agitation, political disturbance, mental anguish and a state of turmoil all over. "Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the north-west frontier abandoned their homes and fled towards the protection of the predominantly

Sikhs and Hindu communities in the east. They travelled on foot” (1). The communal riots forced people of all religion, predominantly Sikh, Hindus and Muslims to flee from a land which they thought of as their own.

As the country reeled under the pressure of this political event, there was still a small village named Mano Manjra that was yet untouched by the political design. They knew communal peace and lived in a state of harmony. "The only remaining oases of peace were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villages was Mano Majra."(02) Sectarian conflicts were unknown to them. They were completely unaware of the political upheavals that were dominating the parts of country. They had no idea of Gandhi or Jinnah.

The village of Mano Manjra was a melting pot of cultures with seventy families living together. In the village dominated by Sikhs and Muslims, there was only one Hindu family. Yet there was complete freedom from any sort of civil, religious or sectarian disturbances. It was a tranquil zone with everyone involved in their own forms of life and worship. There was one object that bound them together, a three-foot slab stone that was resorted to by everyone irrespective of caste, class or religion whenever special blessings were needed.

The idyllic atmosphere was disturbed by an event that trumpeted the beginning of times that would be overshadowed by agony of partition. Malli the gangster, along with his four companions conspired to loot Lala Ram. He was eventually stabbed by one of the robbers. Even though the primary reason behind the murder was monetary, but it precluded the beginning of times that would witness the worst of times. There were new entrants in the village who came with the aim of bringing about political changes. Iqbal Singh was

supposed to create political awareness among the peasants of the village. However, he was not successful in executing his political designs and was eventually arrested.

Meanwhile the news of atrocities committed by the Muslims in Pakistan on Hindu and Sikh communities began to pour in, disturbing people of India, especially Punjab. The train that once served as a lullaby now symbolizes the disturbance marked by the arrival of ghost trains. “The arrival of the ghost train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Manjra. People stood on their roofs to see what was happening at the station. All they could see was the black top of the train stretching from one end of the platform to another” (121). The train carried corpses. The peace was disturbed.

The people of the village were rendered speechless. The gory scene of the train led corpses had dispirited the most courageous of men. Mano Manjra was now sans peace. Mano Manjra which was once a symbol of peace and harmony turns into a place of horror, hatred, suspicion and death. There was no tranquillity. “People barricaded their doors and many stayed up all night talking in whispers...(164). The placidity of the atmosphere is shattered as the news of partition spread. Communal differences gained grounds. The Muslims looked at the Sikhs with suspicion and Sikhs were now enemies.

Rumours of atrocities committed by Sikhs on Muslims in Patiala, ambal and Kapurthala which they had heard and dismissed, came back to their minds. They had heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market places... they had heard of mosques being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on the premises, and copies of the holy Koran being torn up by the infidels. (178)

The communal elements worked in full swing. "For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot two. For each trainload of dead, they send over, send two across. For each road convoy that is attacked, attack two. That will stop the killing on the other side. It will teach them that we can also play this game of killing and looting" (222). The once harmonious land was now full of violence, bloodshed, suspicion and hatred. The two communities that had only known peace now were dead against each other. The Sikhs lost all faith on the Muslims and the Muslims considered Sikhs to be their dead enemies. Not only communal harmony was at stake but also the mental state of people was in jeopardy. Years of friendship crumbled under the weight of partition and communal frenzy led to the imperilment of psychological stability. Finally, the Muslims of Mano Manjra had no choice but to leave the land that had hosted them for years. And it was evident that Muslims of Mano Manjra would face the same fate as other passengers did. They would be brutally killed in order to satiate the animal instinct triggered by communal fanaticism. However, the lives of these passengers are saved by the noble intervention of Jugga who sacrifices his life to ensure the safety of his beloved Nooran, who was also travelling in the same train. "He went at it with the knife, and then with his teeth. The engine was almost upon him. There was a volley of shots, the man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan."(181) Jugga wanted to save Nooran, but his action served a higher purpose. He saved many lives. It is ultimately the feeling of unconditional love that wins.

Conclusion:

The novel, *Train to Pakistan* deals with the exploitation of common people and situations out of sectarian conflicts, leading to irreparable loss of human dignity, and a

frustrating sense of being uprooted from one's own land. The novel foreground the horrors of the partition time period and portray how this period was marked by the negativities of physical as well as mental nature with widespread violence, loss of lives, peace and harmony in the nation. It revisits the agony in times of partition that had led to the displacement of people from the land they called their own. It has preserved the agonies of partition and portrays the times of horror in black and white.

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