

## **Hukum Chand**

Hukum Chand is the Magistrate and Deputy Commissioner of the district. His duty is to maintain law and order in his jurisdiction wherein Mano Majra is located. According to Punjabi ethics and Meet Singh believes he is true a *Nar Adami* , He-Man. because Hukum Chand is true to his friends and always gets things done for them. He has given good jobs to dozens of his relatives. For Meet Singh he is “one of a hundred”. Hukum Chand started his job as a foot-constable. He always kept his *sahebs* pleased and gradually rose in life by getting promotions. The last promotion gave him a post of Deputy Commissioner.

Hukum Chand’s personal life is not happy. He lived with an unattractive wife, been through the deaths of his children, and spent nights in the crematorium to come out of the fear of death. However, after such tragic experiences, he has been spending a “good” life – hoarded money, helped friends, etc. He is not only a corrupt government employee but also a man who likes to fulfil his sexual pleasures. As per his demand, a prostitute Haseena who is young enough to be his daughter, is brought to entertain at the rest house and please him. However, the girl’s youth and aloofness make him uneasy. Still he favours pleasure over ethics and tries to make love to her. However, towards the end of the novel, when he is informed that Haseena is on the train to Pakistan, she becomes one of his reasons to save the Muslim refugees going to Pakistan.

Amid communal violence in the North of India and before the dacoity, he arrives at Mano Majra in the morning since it is a sensitive village located on the border of newly found India and Pakistan. He is worried that the trouble in Amritsar, a nearby city could spread to Mano Majra since Mano Majra also has a railway station. However, he is informed by the subinspector that the religious groups are living peacefully and there are no communal incidents in the village. He is also informed that the Muslims and Sikhs have close relationships for centuries and hence do not give importance to religious affiliations. Hukum Chand is also told that the convoys of the Sikhs and Hindus have yet not arrived in the village like the neighbouring villages. However, since Hukum Chand is aware of the horror and violence in other parts, he is concerned about the safety of the Muslims. He also fears that when the trains carrying corpses will come through Mano Majra, there is bound to be violence in which the local Muslims will be killed as a revenge. Hukum Chand insists that law and order must be maintained in the village and the Muslims must leave the village peacefully before the violence erupts.

At one helpless moment, when Hukum Chand realises that he is powerless against the fury of violent mobs, he blames the government for being negligent of what is happening around them. Though as a government official, his initial concern is about the maintenance of law and order at Mano Majra, later when he senses the upcoming violence and killings of the innocents, he genuinely thinks and plans to save the lives of Muslim Mano Majrans. Through Hukum Chand, Khushwant Singh seems to imply that little help can come from leaders who are busy with their ideologies. He is so disturbed by the violence and his helplessness to control it that the sight of the geckos fighting with each other on the roof of his bedroom threatens him. He associates their fighting with the aggressiveness of the religious groups. Later when a gecko kills the moth, Hukum Chand anticipates the brutal clashes between the religious groups. He has to accept the fact that the fate of the weak is at the mercy of the strong. Hukum Chand is of the view that bloodshed would not benefit anyone. His own conscience as well as his official responsibilities compel him to save the lives of people under his charge. He believes that an individual's conscious effort should be directed to save life when it is in danger, preserving the social structure and honouring its conventions.

When the ghost arrives Mano Majra, he is terribly shocked when to see the heaps of dead bodies of men, women and children huddled in a train from Pakistan. A cold numbness overtakes him. Though he no more fears the death, the gory sight of dead bodies terrifies him. After the train incidence, Hukum Chand gets to know that all Muslims are evacuated from the neighbouring Chundunnugger; the Hindu refugees from Pakistan are given shelter in Gurudwara and the Muslims in Mano Majra are providing them food. Hukum Chand knows that once the refugees who have been through massacres and have lost relations arrive at Mano Majra, the situation will get uncontrollable and worse and then the Muslims will be at risk. His immediate concern is the safety of the Muslims and he decides to evacuate them in any way he can.

Accordingly the wily Magistrate plans to evacuate the Muslims safely to Pakistan as soon as possible. He had made a mistake in arresting Jugga and Iqbal on the false charges of dacoity and murder of the money lender but soon he corrects his mistake by releasing them and turn the situation to his advantage. He asks the subinspector to send message to the commander of the Muslim refugee camp to provide trucks for evacuating Mano Majra Muslims. He orders him to take Malli and his gang to Mano Majra and release them before the villagers. He tries to create an impression among the villagers that the dacoit

Sultan killed Lala Ram Lal and ran away to Pakistan. Sultan being a Muslim had put the Mano Majra Muslims at risk and hence they must be evacuated. He also asks him to enquire about the dacoit Sultana and Muslim Leaguer Iqbal to create insecured feeling among the Muslims.

When Hukum Chand is informed that the Sikhs have planned to kill the refugees travelling to Pakistan the next evening, he immediately issues orders to release both Jugga and Iqbal Singh, the social worker (not Mohammad Iqbal) and sends them to Mano Majra as quick as possible on a tonga. Hukum Chand believes that Iqbal, being a member of People's Party of India will convince the Mano Majrans to stop violence at once. However, Hukum Chand wonders whether his decision to release Jugga and Iqbal was right. Still his only hope is Jugga who he believes will save the lives of Muslim refugees since his Nooran is travelling on the same train. By saving the lives of the Muslims on the train Jugga thus proves Hukum Chand's decision right. Finally Hukum Chand succeeds in saving the lives of Muslims of Mano Majra by evacuating them peacefully and fulfils his purpose for coming to Mano Majra successfully.