

Juggut Singh

Juggut Singh aka Jugga is a dacoit from Mano Majra, the village on the border of newly found India and Pakistan. He is six feet four inches tall and a robust young man. He is the tallest man in the area and for the subinspector, he is 'like a stud bull'. His association with the police has come with an inheritance. His father Alam Singh too was a dacoit and was hanged two years ago for dacoity with murder. Juggut Singh's mother had mortgaged the land to pay the lawyer's fees and Jugga redeemed the land within a year. No one knew how he raised the money but at the end of the year the police arrested him and his name was entered in the register number ten. Since then he was declared a man of bad character and behind his back he is called 'number ten'. He is often in and out of jail whenever he has no work in the fields. His fingers 'itch' to do something and this lands him in jail. He is confined in the village and is not allowed to leave the village after sunset. He reports to the lambardar every day and goes to the police station once every week. Jugga has no ill will towards police. He knows that while arresting him and giving him third degree, they merely do their duty. He also knows that he and the police are on opposite side of the game. He takes his arrest as a routine matter. Hence, whenever he is arrested, he cracks vulgar jokes with them and the police too reply him in his language. He is a regular visitor of the sex workers and is proud of his manliness about which he boasts to Iqbal.

Lately he has not done any mischief; not because of the fear of the police arrest but because he is in love with a Muslim weaver's sixteen-year old daughter, Nooran. Since the village knows Jugga's love for Nooran, nobody dares say a word against the Muslims. This dark beautiful girl with the magic of her darker eyes has kept Jugga in the village. On the night of dacoity, Jugga goes to meet Nooran on the pretext of driving pigs away from the field. When the dacoits murder Lala Ram Lal, Jugga is with Nooran. Both Jugga and Nooran hear the gun shots and later watch Malli and his gang leaving the village. When Jugga sees his rival dacoit Malli, he gets angry on him for doing robbery in his village. Knowing that his absence from the village will be discovered, Jugga is worried about his arrest for violating the rule and going back to jail. The fear makes him careless about Nooran's safety who is frightened to face her father at odd hours. Observing Jugga's selfish reaction, Nooran wonders whether Jugga loves her at all. However, we see his genuine feelings for Nooran over the course of the novel. Jugga returns home but leaves for the river again when he sees the villagers in the courtyard talking to his mother about his possible involvement in the robbery and murder. Malli by dropping bangles in his courtyard involves Jugga in his crime and thus takes revenge on Jugga for not joining them in the robbery. Jugga is soon arrested for the crime he has not done. He could have prevented his arrest by proving that he was with Nooran on the night of dacoity. However, to protect the honour of his love, he accepts his arrest.

Jugga is arrested without any proof of his involvement in the crime from his home. He is in fetters and handcuffs fastened on his right wrist as if he is a hardcore criminal. Jugga cannot even think of murdering a man who loaned him money to fight in the court for his father. When Jugga's mother tries her best to avoid his arrest, by showing the bangles to the police and proving him innocent, Jugga feels humiliated. He loses his temper; abuses Malli for insulting his manliness and hits a constable's palm. For this he gets a good thrashing by the police and taken to the magistrate, Hukum Chand. Soon he forgets the thrashing and

walks with Iqbal, another accused in the crime. Jugga smiles; raises his hands in greeting to everyone and cracks obscene jokes with them. The impression Jugga gives here is of a carefree man who does not have any self-esteem.

Jugga is taken to Chundunnugger police station along with Iqbal Singh. In few days he names the real culprit of the crime, Malli, when the police use third degree. However, the police do not release Iqbal and Jugga even though he discloses the name of a dacoit. Instead on Hukum Chand's order he is kept in jail till the right time comes. Later, when Hukum Chand sees the unrest among Muslims and Sikhs of Mano Majra, he plans to arrest Malli and his men but soon releases them. While Malli is leaving the jail, Jugga takes the revenge by hitting Malli so hard that once again he proves that no one can challenge him and no one can take liberty to dishonour his relationship with Nooran.

Interestingly, Jugga who plays a crucial role in the novel is absent in two major parts of the novel – 'Kalyug' and 'Mano Majra'. In these parts Mano Majra witnesses many important and sensitive incidences which remarkably change the otherwise peaceful atmosphere of the village. Jugga is not in Mano Majra to see the arrival of the ghost train; to hear the rumours spread among the Muslims and Sikhs about the atrocities by the refugees; to control the unrest thereafter; to stop the evacuation of the Mano Majra Muslims to refugee camp at Chundunnugger refugee camp; to protect Nooran who carries his child; to stop Malli from robbing Muslim homes and to prevent the young leader from planning to attack the train carrying the Muslim refugees of Mano Majra to Pakistan.

However, as Hukum Chand has planned, he releases Jugga at the crucial moment when he is most needed. After his release, Jugga's immediate concern is Nooran. He believes that she must be in the village since no one would want Imam Baksh to leave Mano Majra or even if Imam Baksh has left, she must be hiding somewhere in the fields waiting for him. As soon as he reaches the village, he disappears in the darkness; goes home; learns about Nooran's visit to his house and as the night falls, goes to gurudwara to take the Guru's blessings. On the other corner of the village Hukum Chand wonders whether his decision to release Jugga was right. Now his only hope is Jugga who he believes will save the lives of Muslim refugees since his Nooran is travelling on the same train.

At little after eleven it is too dark for the men to recognise each other. The attackers spread on either side of the railway track a few feet from each other with their rifles and spears. Jugga walks toward the bridge where the rope is tied tight on the first steel span horizontally above the railway line about twenty feet above the track. The rope is as stiff as a shaft of steel. The attackers know that if the train is fast it might cut many people in two. Soon they hear the soft puff-puff of the train. All the attackers look at the lights of the arriving train. No one looks at the bridge. It is then Jugga starts climbing the steel span. He is noticed only when he reaches the top where the rope is tied. When the leader sees someone on the rope, the train is already approaching near the bridge. By standing on the knot, Jugga stretches himself on the rope and begins hacking the rope vigorously. His six feet four inches body almost reaches the half of the rope. When his identity is cleared the leader fires shots from his rifle. Though injured, Jugga still continues cutting the rope with his knife then with his teeth among the volley of shots. Now the engine is almost on him. Finally, the rope gets cut in the centre and Jugga falls down the track. The train goes over him to Pakistan. Jugga, the badmash number ten of Mano Majra sacrifices his own life and bravely saves the life of

his beloved Nooran and the Muslims of Mano Majra and Chundunnugger. He runs to action instinctively, with no second thought about his religion or about his own safety. No theory guides him to go against the evil force. It is simply and naturally the impulse to save human lives that drives him to self-sacrifice. He, the notorious man of the village shows the nation that love and humanity are more sacred than hatred, killings, massacre, atrocities on women and the religious beliefs.
