

## **Portrayal of Violence and Horror in *Train to Pakistan***

*Train to Pakistan* is a magnificent novel where Khushwant Singh 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. The Independent India was partitioned causing a great upheaval in the whole continent. Independence brought in one of the bloodiest massacres in the history of India. The upshot of this was that twelve million people had to flee leaving their home; nearly half a million were killed. It is also on record that over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, mutilated. Thus, thousands fled from both sides of the border seeking refuge and security. The natives were uprooted and it was certainly a ghastly experience for them to give up their belongings and rush to a land which was not theirs. The harrowing and spine chilling events of 1947 had shaken the faith of the people in the innate human beings. It had driven them into a state of wonder over what man has made of man. To Khushwant Singh, this was a period of great disillusionment and crisis of values, a distressing and disintegrating period of his life.

It is true to note that partition touched the whole country and Singh's attempt in the novel is to see the events from the point of view of the people of Mano Majra, a small village which is the backdrop of this novel. All the actions depicted in the novel, the dramas enacted by the characters take place in this tiny and typical Punjab village. What impresses us most in this description is the author's balanced and unprejudiced account of this tragedy. In the beginning he writes:

Muslim said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured, both raped.

The first part of the novel, the writer has repeatedly pointed out that even after the savage blood bath throughout the Punjab, in the wake of independence; Mano Majra remained surprisingly free from communal stress and tension. The action of the novel spans a few weeks of the fateful days of August and September in 1947 in Mano Majra a border village. Though the frontier between India and Pakistan turns a scene of rioting and bloodshed, everything is quite and normal in Mano Majra where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims still live peacefully together as they have been living since times immemorial. Partition does not yet mean much to them. It is in fact like a small oasis in the vast desert of communal violence and unprecedented carnage. The slow process of unrest in the village by communal virus, in fact, forms the crux of the novel. The writer painstakingly points out all the factors leading to this process of unrest and how the peaceful life in Mano Majra suddenly came to a

jolt. Singh effectively depicts the pangs of partition of the Indian subcontinent which was certainly a dark chapter in its history.

The partition serves both as a background and a foreground to the novel's vision. The action of the novel centers around a tiny village called Mano Majra on the Indo–Pakistan border during the partition. Though dominated by the Sikhs, Mano Majra has as its inhabitants the Hindus and Muslims too. Soon the condition in Mano Majra deteriorates further and its time schedule starts going wrong because of the sudden irregularity of trains. People whisper about a train which comes from Pakistan at an unseal hour, carrying dead bodies of Sikhs and Hindus. Simultaneously are heard rumours about Muslims being slaughtered in Patiala, Ambala and Amritsar mosques being demolished and the holy Koran being torn by infidels. Soon the village becomes a battlefield of conflicting loyalties. Though Mano Majrans still pledge to protect their Muslim brothers, they shift them to the refugee camp. As the flooded Sutlej brings the dead bodies of more Hindus and Sikhs, tension rises in the village. Even the tension is observed in arrival of the train also. As is mentioned:

The engine driver stated blowing the whistle and continued blowing till he had passed Mano Majra station. It was an expression of relief that they were out of Pakistan and into India.

A reference has already been made of the ghost train. The author has given a ghostly and blood curdling description of the massacre. There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just then become voiceless.

The communal fire is fanned by the young Sikh boys who comes from outside and incite Mano Majrans to take revenge upon Muslims. They succeed in getting the support of bad character like Malli who hopes to reap a profitable harvest by the annihilation of Muslims. They conspire to fire at the train taking refugees to Pakistan to massacre them, the Sikhs and Muslims, who were living like brothers, turned ferocious wolves overnight. A Sikh youth tells:

Tomorrow a train load of Muslims is to cross the bridge to Pakistan. If we are men, this train should carry as many people dead to the other side as you have received.

Khushwant Singh has depicted how the emotions of people are roused by the rumours spread by both the communities about the barbaric deeds of each other. It is described by the author through the mounting tension between Sikhs and Muslims who had hitherto lived in amity in Mano Majra. As the village gets divided into two halves, Muslims and Sikhs gather in separate group and talk of inhuman savagery of each other. Muslims brood over the rumours

of atrocities compiled by Sikh. They have heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place. They have heard of mosque being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on the premises, and of copies of the holy Koran being torn by infidels. Sikhs on the other hand feel. "Never trust a Musalman". Sikh refugees have told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims. Those who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered.

The blood-curdling account of the inhuman cruelties let loose by the partition is conveyed through the- recollection of incidents by the Deputy Commissioner, Hukum Chand. The author relates these incidents with stark realism. Prem Singh, a colleague of Hukum Chand, made his wife's jewellery from Lahore and was killed by dozen heads with fez caps and Pathan turbans. Sundari, the daughter of Hukum Chand's orderly, had been married four days. She had not yet slept with her husband. She had hardly seen even his face through her veil. As she day-dreamt of her first night with her husband, her bus suddenly blew up. Then hundreds of people surrounded them. Everyone was ordered off the bus. Sikhs were just hacked to death. The clean-shaven were stripped. The mob held the husband of Sundari and cut off his penis and gave it to her. The mob made love to her and she was molested brutally. Sunder Singh's case was different. Muslim did not kill his family; he killed them himself. Stranded for four days during scorching heat of summer on a wayside station in a small railway compartment stuffed with five hundred men and women he could not bear the agony of his children whom he could not provide even urine to drink. So, he pulled out his revolver and shot them all. Mob attacks were a common phenomenon in those days and when they attacked, they never waited to find out whether the persons concerned were Hindus or Muslims. For example, four Sikh Sardars in a jeep drove alongside a mile-long column of Muslim refugees walking on the road. Without warning they opened fire with their sten gun. A lot of women were abducted and sold cheap. Police stations were concentration camps and third degree methods were adopted to extricate 'truth' from those who were caught.

Khushwant Singh objectively treat the brutal atrocities committed on either side of the border. Apart from these, there are certain situations like the arrival of the ghost train that makes the reader shocked. The arrival of the train in broad day light created a commotion in Mano Majra. When the villagers were asked to get all the wood there was in their house and all the kerosene oil they could spare. The villagers soon 'smelt' something wrong. There was a deathly silence in the village. A train load of Sikhs massacred by Muslims had been cremated in Mano Majra. Hindus and Sikhs were fleeing from their homes in Pakistan and

having to find shelter in Mano Majra. There was no time even to say good-bye. Truck engines were started. Contrasted against these scenes of heinous crimes is the moving picture of the people who feel utterly broken as they are compelled to leave the land of their and their forefathers' birth. When Imam Baksh is asked to leave Mano Majra for Pakistan otherwise he would be tortured by Sikh refugees, he is moved and tears trickle down his eyes. He breaks down. Meet Singh clasped him in his arms and began to sob. Several of the people started crying quietly. When after much deliberation, all come to the conclusion that in the interest of Muslims themselves, it will be better for them to leave the village. Describing the condition of the village and its people on the eve of the departure of Muslims from there, the author writes:

Not many people slept in Mano Majra that night, they went from house to house-talking, crying, and swearing love and friendship, assuring each other that this would soon be over. Life, they said would be as it always had been.

Khushwant Singh has accurately depicted the real picture of the adverse effect of partition and the suffering that people were made to experience through a train journey of Iqbal as written in the novel:

Every time he had dozed off, the train had come to halt at some wayside station and the door was forced open and more peasants poured in with their wives, bedding and tin trunks. Some child sleeping in its mother's lap would start howling till its mouth. The shouting and clamour would continue until long after the train had left the station. The something was repeated again and again-till the compartment meant for fifty had almost two hundred people in it, sitting on the floor, on seats, on each other or standing in the corners. There were dozens outside perched-precariously on footboards, holding on to the door handles. There were several people on the roof; the heat and smell were oppressive.

Thus, *Train to Pakistan* is both a grim and pathetic tale of individuals and communities caught in the swirl of partition. Khushwant Singh effectively depicts the pangs of partition of the Indian subcontinent which was certainly a dark chapter in its history.

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