

## **Train to Pakistan**

### **Comprehensive Summary:**

Khushwant Singh wrote *Train to Pakistan* in 1956. It has been reprinted several times as well as translated into many languages since its publication. The novel deals with the partition of India into India and Pakistan. As far as the theme of partition is concerned, *Train to Pakistan* is the first novel deals with such a sensitive theme. Since Mano Majra plays an important role in the novel, Khushwant Singh had named the novel as *Mano Majra* and published it in 1956. However, as the train plays a crucial role in the novels and affects the lives of the people, its title was changed into *Train to Pakistan*. The novel has won the “Grove Press India Fiction Prize” for the same year. The episode of partition in the history of India is the most brutal episode. In this sense, the genre of the novel is historical one. The novel is divided into four parts entitled as Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra and Karma.

In the summer of 1947, ten million Muslima, Hindus and Sikhs flee from their homes on each side of the border between Pakistan and India. Northern India is in turmoil however the isolated village of Mano Majra remains for now at peace. All villagers live happily with peace and harmony. Mano Majra known for its railway station is a small village on the India – Pakistan border and is situated half a mile away from the banks of the Sutlej river, the longest river in Panjab. It has only three brick buildings – a Gurudwara, where Meet Singh lives as a caretaker Bhai; a mosque led by the mullah and a weaver Imam Baksh; and the home of the Hindu moneylender Lala Ram Lal. Of the seventy families in the village, only Lala Ram Lal is Hindu while the rest of the population is equally divided between Sikhs and Muslims. The Sikhs own all the land in the village and the Muslims are their tenants. The lives of Sikhs and the Muslims are interdependent; hence there is no enmity between them. Imam Baksh and Meet Singh are respected by all the villagers.

Mano Majra has a single-track railway station. The activities of the village are closely associated with the arrival and departure of the trains. The stationmaster does all the duties. He is a ticket clerk, ticket collector, sends and receives telegrams, and also waves signals to the passing trains. There are some shopkeepers and hawkers who sale food, betel leaves, cigarettes, etc. Express trains do not stop at Mano Majra. Only two slow passenger trains stop at the station – one from Delhi to Lahore in the mornings and the other from Lahore to Delhi in the evenings. Life in Mano Majra is regulated by the timings of the trains. The village wakes up when the mail train rushing to Lahore at daybreak gives two long whistles. The mullah, Imam Baksh gives *azan* which is followed by prayers at gurudwara by Meet Singh.

By the time the 10.30 train from Delhi arrives the village has started its routine. When the mid-day train goes by, the village stops to take rest. And when the evening passenger train from Lahore arrives, the villagers call it a day. After the *azan* and prayer at the gurudwara, the village comes to a standstill. This is the pattern till the long, dry and dusty summer of 1947.

Mano Majra is so isolated from rest of India that the villagers do not even know that the British have left; India is divided into two parts and Pakistan is formed. Some know who Mahatma Gandhi is, but it is doubtful whether they know who Mohammad Ali Jinnah is. The poor and illiterate villagers do not have any access like radio or newspaper to get information about what is happening in other parts of the country.

However, this peaceful village becomes a notorious place when Lala Ram Lal is murdered by the rival dacoit, Malli and his gang from another village. It is the beginning of its countdown towards the partition of the village. The dacoits while fleeing the village pass by the village dacoit, Juggut Singh's house. They drop bangles in his courtyard to shame him for not joining them. Juggut Singh, the six feet four tall and strong young man is known as Jugga by the villagers and 'badmash number ten' by the police. Jugga loves Nooran, Imam Baksh's beautiful daughter who has kept him out of trouble. Her beauty and innocence make Jugga forget his criminal background. Jugga is not allowed to leave the village after sunset but leaves his house on the pretext of driving pigs from his field and meets Nooran by the riverbank. 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. Jugga is worried about his arrest for violating the rule and going back to jail and hence is careless about Nooran's safety who is frightened to face her father at odd hours. Nooran wonders whether Jugga loves her at all. However, we see an evolution of his 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.

Hukum Chand, the Magistrate and Deputy Commissioner has arrived Mano Majra in the morning before the dacoity. 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, in the morning he is informed by the subinspector that the religious groups are living peacefully and there are no communal incidents in the village. He also tells him 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 village. Hukum Chand informs the subinspector about the horror and violence in other parts as well as about the safety of the Muslims. Both of them know that when the train 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 tells the subinspector that they must maintain law and order in the area and let the Muslims leave the village peacefully. Though we see Hukum Chand's concern for the helpless Muslims, we also find him a corrupt government employee as far as his sexual pleasures are concerned. As per his demand, a prostitute Haseena who is young enough to be his daughter, is brought to entertain 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. At night Hukum Chand too hears the gun shots from the village and gets disturbed.

The day after the dacoity a young and effeminate communist, Iqbal Singh arrives at Mano Majra. He is an urban westernised liberal minded man. He stays at gurudwara where he is welcomed by Meet Singh. He is a clean-shaven Sikh and belongs to district Jhelum which is now in Pakistan. He has been to Europe for some years and follows their way of living. He has returned to India to serve his communist party. The purpose of his visit to Mano Majra is to awaken the poor villagers about their exploitation by the rich and abolish landlords. Since he has come to help the exploited poor, his only concern is to help them get justice. When he is informed about the dacoity, he is worried about the communal unrest and his own safety in the village. He does not wish to risk his life for his political interests. He feels strange that Meet Singh cares less about the murder and is upset about Jugga for breaking an unspoken code of conduct. The ethical code among the dacoits is they don't rob their own villagers. Moreover, Iqbal with his western education feels that he does not belong to such a social set up where people are more interested in the personal matters and their weird beliefs. He hates the present government and feels that it is in favour of the rich class. According to him to get real freedom the peasants and workers must unite and fight; they must get the *bania* government ruling in Delhi out. When he meets Banta Singh, the village Lambardar and Imam Baksh at the gurudwara, he gets annoyed by their favourable comments about the British. He calls the British 'a race of four twenties'. He asks them if the villagers want to be free and they answer him that freedom is for the educated. Freedom will have little impact on the peasants because they were slaves of the British before freedom and will remain slaves of the educated Indians or Pakistanis after freedom. Iqbal doubts whether he will change these people whose heads seem full of cobwebs.

Early next morning Iqbal is arrested illegally from the gurudwara. However, the police as well as Iqbal are ignorant about the charges on him. He wonders he has been arrested for his politics and feels humiliated for such an unlawful act. He plans to register his complaint to the party headquarters and also thinks that he can use his arrest to become a leader of his party. Jugga too is arrested from his house but he is not as disturbed as Iqbal. The police are uneasy since they know that they have made mistake in arresting two innocent men. The subinspector too is uncomfortable for his mistake in arresting Iqbal. To avoid further complications and cover their mistake, the subinspector with the consultation of Hukum Chand brands Iqbal a Muslim; registers his name as Mohammad Iqbal and calls him a Muslim Leaguer who has come to create communal trouble in Mano Majra. Both Iqbal and Jugga are taken to Chundunnugger police station where in few days the subinspector extracts the name of the real dacoit from Jugga by using third degree torture.

In September 1947, life in Mano Majra changes. Since the trains are late the people are confused about the timings. The ghost trains pass by Mano Majra but at odd hours between midnight and dawn. The railway station has been changed to suit the security arrangements. A unit of Sikh soldiers has put up tents near the railway station; sandbags are placed near the bridge with mounted machine guns; armed sentries patrol the platform and no villagers are allowed near the railings.

One morning a train halts at Mano Majra station but no one gets down; no one is seen sitting on the roof and no one is clinging between the bogies. Soon the station is cordoned off and the armed policemen along with the subinspector and Hukum Chand arrive at the station. The arrival of the ghost train creates commotion in Mano Majra. The villagers stand on the roof of their houses and speculate about the happenings at the station. However, no one can see anything except the rooftop of the train. The villagers get more confused when the police ask for wood and kerosene. Still they are ignorant about the communal riots in other parts. At night the villagers smell the familiar odour of flesh and know that the train that arrived from Pakistan carried dead Hindus and Sikhs. Nearly fifteen hundred are burned that night. For the first time in years Imam Baksh does not give *azan*. The sight of the dead bodies is so horrifying that even Hukum Chand cannot forget the corpses of men, women and children being dragged out of the train. He later slips like a baby near Haseena.

The next day Hukum Chand gets to know that Muslims are evacuated from the neighbouring Chundunnugger; the Hindu refugees from Pakistan are given shelter in Gurudwara while the Muslims in Mano Majra are providing them food. Hukum Chand is worried about the safety of the Muslims since he fears that the situation might get worse if

the Muslims are attacked by the refugees. The wily Magistrate plans to evacuate the Muslims safely to Pakistan as soon as possible. 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 insecure feeling among the Muslims.

Silence descends on Mano Majra when people learn about the burning of fifteen hundred corpses at the station. A mutual feeling of distrust and hostility takes root among the Sikh refugees and Muslims. Both Sikhs and Muslims get reports of atrocities on their community people. The Sikh refugees in the gurudwara who are waiting for an opportunity to take revenge on the Muslims are angry on hearing the atrocities on their women. However, Meet Singh and the Lambardar calm down the temper of the Sikh refugees. They appeal the Sikhs of Mano Majra to save their Muslim brethren with whom they have lived for years. On this the Sikhs of Mano Majra promise Imam Baksh that they will sacrifice their lives to protect the Muslims and never permit their evacuation from Mano Majra. Moreover, even if they were forced to evacuate, their Sikh brethren will protect their property until they return from Pakistan. The forced evacuation makes the villagers emotional. However, they decide to migrate. They take leave of each other and swear undying love and friendship. Nooran who is carrying Jugga's child too visits Jugga's house with the hope to meet him, but she has to leave with a promise from his mother that she will reunite her with Jugga.

The army convoy bound for Pakistan arrives early in the morning and the officer announces the evacuation. He orders the Muslims to leave their belongings and board the truck taking what they can carry. When the Muslim officer asked about the property of Muslims which they are leaving behind, he refuses to take any responsibility of their property. On this the Sikh officer announces that Malli and his gang will look after it. The Muslims and Sikhs of the village are helpless before the government authority. Nooran along with Imam Baksh and other Muslims leave Mano Majra for Chundunnugger Muslim refugee camp. Soon Malli, his men and the Sikh refugees unyoke bullocks, loot the carts, drive the cows away and ransack the Muslim houses.

Meanwhile the Mano Majra villagers experience incessant rains. The Sutlej continues to rise, and the fearful villagers forget about the Muslims and Malli's misdeeds. The Lambardar and other villagers who guard the village at the riverbank see the terrible sight of

dead bodies of men, women, babies with mark of wounds and cattle floating in the river to an unknown place. Soon another ghost train from Pakistan halts at Mano Majra station but this time the heaps of dead bodies are buried in the fifty-yard-long deep trench.

The scared villagers gather at gurudwara where Meet Singh mumbles evening prayers. They prefer to sleep in the gurudwara where they feel safe. Soon they are awakened by a group in khaki along with their teenager group leader. The leader curses and provokes the sleeping Sikh men to take revenge of the massacre of Sikhs in other parts by the Muslims. By recounting the horrors of killings in Punjab, he tells them that since the *bania* government has failed to stop the violence, it is their responsibility to stop the killings of their own people. He conspires to kill the Muslims going to Pakistan by the next evening train. The shocked Meet Singh talks about the virtues of Sikhism and reminds him that the train they are going to attack is carrying the Muslims of Mano Majra. However, he is outrightly silenced. The young leader appeals the Sikhs to volunteer his mission of avenging the massacre of Hindus and Muslims. Malli, his men and the refugee Sikhs join the young boy's mission.

Immediately the lambardar along with two villagers go to Chundunnugger police station to alert the subinspector who then informs Hukum Chand about the plan of the Sikhs to kill the refugees travelling to Pakistan the next evening. The subinspector assures Hukum Chand that all the Muslims from Chundunnugger and Mano Majra have been peacefully evacuated and are being taken to Pakistan. If the Muslim refugees are not evacuated on the next day, they will be definitely killed by the angry Hindus and Sikhs who have arrived from Pakistan. His words remind Hukum Chand of Haseena and he agonises over having allowed her to return to Chundunnugger. He is anxious to save the innocent girl. He also knows that he has few police force which is insufficient to control the violence. 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. The subinspector tells both that there is a 'big change' in the village and all the Muslims have been evacuated to Chundunnugger refugee camp and that night they would go to Pakistan on train.

Jugga' 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 and as the night falls, he 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 notices only when he has got to the top where the rope is tied. When the leader sees someone on the rope, the train is approaching near the bridge. By standing on the knot, Jugga stretches himself on the rope and begins hacking the rope vigorously. His six feet body almost reaches the half of the rope. Soon 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 Badmash Number ten of the village, thus redeems himself; he not only saves the life of his beloved of Nooran but the lives of hundreds of Muslims of Mano Majra and Chundunnugger.

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