

A Study of National Impact The Train to Pakistan

Dr. Ravi Kant Dwivedi

(Assistant Professor)

Department of English

M.L.B. Govt. College of Excellence

Gwalior (M.P.)

Paramjeet Singh

Subject : English

Research Scholar

Jiwaji University

Gwalior (M.P.)

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Abstract

Khushwant Singh also had an extremely successful career as an author. He has written a poignant short story about his grandmother-The Portrait of a Lady. She would constantly be occupied in recitation of the Holy Scriptures-'The Granth Sahib' and 'Sukhmani' the psalm of peace. This greatly influenced Singh and probably generated his interests in religion. Perhaps this guided him afterward specialize in Sikhism. He translated the Sikh sunrise Prayer 'Japji', composed by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. He also wrote a book entitled The Sikhs. His parents had rented a small hovel where his father had taken contracts for the construction of a new capital of India, New Delhi. Khushwant Singh's father was a contractor; he saw his father go ahead the life of a contractor as has been presented in careful details in the chapters like 'The Life of a Contractor' and 'The 204 Builders' in his novel Delhi. The diplomatic attitude adopted by Sir Sobha Singh and by the other Indians in their transactions with the British officers has depicted by Khushwant Singh in his second novel- I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale. In Delhi Khushwant Singh attended the Modern School for nine years. It was a nationalist school; national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sarojini Naidu were invited to address the students in those days. He also published two classic volumes History of the Sikhs, several works of fiction comprise the novels Train to Pakistan; I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, Delhi and The Company of Women.

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Apart from that a number of translated works from Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi, non-fiction books on nature, current affairs...etc. Khushwant Singh was a Member of Parliament from 1980 to 1986. He has obtained several awards and honours, he was awarded 'the Padma Bhushan' in 1974 by the President of India but he returned the declaration in 1984 in remonstration against the Union Governments cordon of the Golden Temple, Amritsar.

Keywords : Contractor, Successful, Construction, Builders, remonstration

The first major step forward in Khushwant Singh's literary career appeared in 1950 when he published his extraordinary collection of short story The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories. This was based on foundation of real experiences of his colleagues and friends. It is remarkable fact that Khushwant Singh did not become a full-time writer by preference; he had not any such intention to become a writer. He decided to write only when he had found rather persuasive to write about. This was the time of the Indian Independence and the Partition of India. He was greatly moved by the traumatic events in these disordered days of the Partition. Under the influence of the partition his outlook towards life underwent a drastic change. He felt completely disillusioned with the contemporary situation. Khushwant Singh witnessed the terrified holocaust that followed in the wake of the partition of country. It was indeed one of the cruelest commotion of history that claimed innumerable innocent lives and loss of property. The traumatic experience made Khushwant Singh restless and in order to give way to his sentiments, he moved towards inscription and the product is the famous novel- Train to Pakistan.

Train to Pakistan is a splendid novel where Khushwant Singh acquainted with 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. Just on the eve of 205 independence India was partitioned and set a foundation to a great commotion in the whole continent. The partition of India is a purely political decision which has given depression, anguish and deprivation to the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. Independence brought in its wake one of the cruelest carnages in the history of India. The consequences of this incident were that twelve million people had to escape from their homes; nearly half a million were slaughtered. It is also on record that over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, mutilated. Thus, thousands escaped from both sides of the border in search of refuge and security. The millions of inhabitants were uprooted and it was certainly a horrible experience for them to give up their possessions and rush to a land which was not familiar to them. Thousands of Hindus, Sikhs who have lived together for centuries on the North West Frontier have to leave their homes to seek

protection in the east while millions of Muslims who left their homes and set to west in search of safe haven. They covered distance on foot, in bullock carts, in Lorries and on the roofs of train. The traumatic and spine scary events of 1947 had shaken the faith in the innate human beings. To Khushwant Singh, this was a period of great disappointment and crisis of values, a stressful and decayed period of his life. The belief he had cherished all his life were shattered. Khushwant Singh opened his mind and expressed his inner struggle and anguish, he says:

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country... I had believed that we Indians were peace loving and non- violent, that we were more concerned with matters of the spirit, while the rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. After the experience of the autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe to this view. I became... an angry middle age man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world... I decided to try my hand at writing.¹

The sinister and deadly impact of partition and the resentment in his mind has practically expressed in an ironical way in Train to Pakistan. The novel Ice Candy Man was previously entitled as Mano Majra, the novel represented a courageous and remorseless pragmatism, the brutal story of political disgust and violence in the chaotic and fateful days that proceeded and followed the partition. The strength of communal agitation and a passionate passion for self expression was supported and mishandled in the mass. Every citizen was trapped in the holocaust of partition of India. No one could remain untouched and no one may perhaps be trusted to be unprejudiced. The administration, the police, even the armed forces, was trapped up in the fire of disgust. Mob ruled the streets, ablaze, loots, slaughter, and humiliation of women and mutilation of children. The intensity of hatred could be noticed by the fact that even animals owned by the rival community became the justifiable targets of punishment. As Manohar Malgaonkar quotes: The entire land was being spattered by the blood of its citizens, blistered and disfigured with the fires of religious hatred; its roads were glutted with enough dead bodies to satisfy the ghouls of a major war.²

It is true to note that partition has touched the whole country. Khushwant Singh has attempted in the Train to Pakistan to distinguish the events from the point of view of the people of Mano Majra, a small village which is considered to be the background of this novel. All the actions depicted in the novel are the tragedy experienced by the inhabitants of this minuscule and typical Punjabi village Mano Majra. Before the presentation of the real story the author has given a concise but adequate description of the heart breach national tragedy. The most extraordinary aspect in the description is the author's objective and impartial explanation of this catastrophe. 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.³

In the initial part of the novel, Singh has repeatedly pointed out that even after the brutal carnage, in the come around of independence, in the Punjab. There was only one village left untouched by the national upheavals and remained surprisingly free from communal stress and tension. It was Mano Majra, a small provincial village. It was in reality similar to a small safe haven in the vast wasteland of communal violence and exceptional bloodbath. The leisurely process of altered form of the village by communal disease forms the bottom line of the novel. The writer carefully points out all the factors leads to this process of altered form and how the peaceful life in Mano Majra suddenly changed into a battlefield. Khushwant Singh has effectively depicted the abbreviation of partition of the Indian subcontinent which was undoubtedly a sinister chapter in its history. Khushwant Singh made very attractive comments about the pain of partition in one of his interviews after the broadcast of the film version of Train to Pakistan directed by Pamela Rooks at the International Film Festival in New Delhi from 11th to 20th January, 1998.

It appears to be very significant even today i.e. sixty eight years after the significant tragedy, partition of India took place. Khushwant Singh commented that partition must be remembered and it is even relevant today. It has happened in reality and also it could happen again in the future. So, the proponents of an independent Kashmir, Khalistan or Nagaland should reminded to appreciate the potential of persistent event happened in 1947. The event of partition is an unstoppable process in the World history. Thus, he advised community to never consent to partition come about again. The partition of India has served both as a backdrop and a forefront to the novel Ice Candy Man. The narrative of the novel centered on a minuscule village called Mano Majra on the Indo-Pakistan border in the partition days. Singh intertwined a narrative around existence in this village; make the village as a microcosm in place of a larger world. Though Mano Majra was dominated by the Sikh community, it has the Hindus and Muslims too as its inhabitants. The chief protagonist of the novel is the village Mano Majra itself.

The novel has divided into four sections as Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra and Karma. The four chapters are deviation on a single theme, but each section foregrounds the action of the next and moves the story forward to profounded visualization. The novel begins with a focus on Mano Majra but slowly moves to suggest that Mano Majra surpasses its physical identity and becomes an allegory. Its well distincked objectives and mental possessions become darkest as the narrative advances towards its end. The development in the novelistic revelation gets more and more complex as we move from one section to next section.

In the first section of the novel, Dacoity a major allegory is worked out. The murder of Lala Ram Lal by a band of dacoits from an adjacent village sets the tone of the narrative by suggestive of further height to the event. Dacoity has caused classification in the village and some innocent persons were suspected for the murder of Lala Ram Lal. Here, it is noteworthy that the charge of Lala Ram Lal's murder was put on the usual suspect of the village Juggat Singh and a new comer CPI activist in the village Iqbal Singh. The incident is the representative of the contemporary period and similar to the political strategy of the British government to put charge of partition on

local and national leaders of India. In other words the incident stands for the political mutilation of India by the British government who held responsible the local and national leaders for the partition. Thus, a common event happened in Mano Majra has transformed into a powerful demonstration. All the events took place in course of the novel appeared as if resulted from the dacoity. Khushwant Singh has introduced most of the important characters in this section of novel. The next day of Lala Ram Lal's murder in Mano Majra, the train discharged at Mano Majra station a group of equipped policemen and a young Communalist radical named Iqbal Singh. Hukum Chand, the Deputy Commissioner of the district also appeared in the village about the same time. The police arrested Iqbal Singh and Juggat Singh as suspects of the money lender, Lala Ram Lal's murder.

Consequently, the quiet Mano Majra village got up to existence and gradually connected to the commotion outside the village. The unexpected disorder in the village brought history in action and the remoteness of the village step by step faded away. The next section of the novel is Kalyug which suggested that the novel has an enormous revelation. According to the Hindu philosophy, the concept of grand era i.e. 'Kalyug' comes at the end of the succession of the world when the old order is damaged and basics for a new era put down. The train at Mano Majra station has carried dead bodies from Pakistan for cremation. The scene is an indicator that the old world has breathed its last breath. The incident of mass burial at Mano Majra completely disturbed the tempo of Mano Majran's life. There is a recede tide of darkness on the village. Everybody in the village has well thought-out the 'train' as a premonition of evil times ahead. The Muslim high priest of the Mosque Imam Baksh, who had sustained promptness in his daybreak and sundown prayer, did not pray that dawn. On that day his resonant whimper did not rise to the heavens to announce the account of the Almighty. The calm and quite life of Mano Majra has disturbed due to the train episode. This disruption in the tempo of Mano Majran's life suggested that the end of the world order has got nearer.

The third section of the novel Train to Pakistan is Mano Majra, this sections forwarded the actions to its further concentration. This section of the novel has built around the representation of the village in conversion. Not only the exterior of the village has changed remarkably, but also in its consciousness of the human state has also undergone a drastic change. This section has opened with a note on the changed ambiance of the village Mano Majra:

A heavy brooding silence descended on the village. People barricaded their doors and many stayed up all night talking in whispers. Everyone felt his neighbor's hand against him, and thought of finding friends and allies.⁴ The horrible episode of the 'ghost train'- Arrived from the Pakistan side has completely transformed the calm life of Mano Majra into a chaos. As Mano Majra lost its healthy isolation and got entangled in the national upheaval, the action of the novel moved into the strange situation. The Head Constable of the Police station divided the village into two bisect among the Sikhs and the Muslims. He has also succeeded to persuade the Sikh inhabitants of the village that Muslims deserved penalty for their slaughter on their 'Guru' the religious teacher.

The single incident at Mano Majra promoted for the mass exodus of the Muslim refugees and the village turned into a terrible sight. The houses of the Muslims are raided by the band of Mali. It is very ironical and full of depression that Malli who had robbed and killed Lala Ram Lal, is assigned by the police to look after the possessions of the evacuated Muslim refugees.

The last section of the novel is Karma it has given the novel a beyond the world height. Khushwant Singh tried to suggest that in such an atmosphere of violence human accomplishment is insignificant. All the efforts however grand it might have proved meaningless, in other words even a superhuman work done in such a period did not carry any cost. In an extraordinary turn around of position, the bad character Juggat Singh has turned into a superman. And one more instance of such a transformation is the dacoit Mali has converted into a custodian of the evacuated Muslim's possessions. The novel closed with a paradoxical turn around of the order. Jugga's act of sacrifice protected the thousands of innocent lives of Muslims, but their fortune remained uncertain. Through Iqbal Singh the author tried to reflect the temperament of human action and on the worth of freedom:

If you look at things as they are, he told himself, there does not seem to be a code either of man or of God on which one can pattern one's conduct. Wrong triumphs over right as much as right over wrong triumphs. Sometimes its triumphs are greater. What happens ultimately you do not know? In such circumstances what can you do but cultivate an utter indifference to all values? Nothing matters. Nothing whatever.⁵

Khushwant Singh gives the impression that merely suitable reaction to the partition would be unresponsiveness towards it, which means the acceptance of the philosophy of 'Karma' as intact lay down your arms to a deterministic world. One has to admit that the traumatic event of the partition of India in 1947 had surprised the trust of all the insightful and thoughtful populace of India in the inherent dignity of man. The novel Train to Pakistan is both a severe and pathetic account of individuals and communities trapped in whirlwind of the partition. Consequently, the novelist has depicted the eruption of the partition of the Indian subcontinent which was without doubt a sinister episode in the world history. The novel Train to Pakistan commence with an indication to the hot summer and late Monsoon. It was an indication of abnormal alteration in the Nature. The year of 1947 was renowned for its roasting heat and rainlessness and marked for hot and covered in dust atmosphere:

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