

## Political Upheaval and Communal Frenzy as Witnessed in Kushwant Singh's Partition Narrative *Train to Pakistan*

IMRUL KAYES ALAM SARKAR

Research Scholar

Department of English and other Modern European Languages  
Visva Bharati, Santiniketan  
India

### Abstract:

*Kushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan is considered as one of the most realistic novels of Post World War II in Indo Anglican Fiction. The present paper attempts to show how he vividly describes the realistic story of political hatred, violence and of mass destruction during the partition days. Though some writers greet independence in their works, he has expressed the negative aspects of partition and this paper aims to focus on 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 in Indian History. The result of the partition is reflected through the people of Mano Majra and Mano Majra allegorically becomes a microcosm which represents the whole scenario of India or Pakistan. Here Singh is neutral and he does not blame any community for the partition. He very skillfully describes real situation where each community blames another community. What he tries to emphasis is the aftermath of partition and he opines - "The fact is both sides killed. Both shot and stubbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped"(Singh 9). Finally, in my paper, I would like to explore how he has employed the theme of tragic suffering of the people who are affected by the madness and communal frenzy of partition and the theme of human compassion, love and kindness as witnessed in the time of utter chaos and bewilderment.*

**Key words:** *Train to Pakistan*, Kushwant Singh, partition novel

Political violence, religious enmity and the trauma left by the partition of 1947 become a major concern of Indian English Literature after independence. Though some writers greet independence in their works, most of the writers have expressed the negative aspects of partition, such as great massacre, rape, terror, arson, rioting, hostility, distrust and religious struggle etc. Important works which have enriched that field are Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, K. A. Abbas's *Inquilab*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*. Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is considered as a classic novel in the genre of Indian Partition Literature. The novel vividly describes the realistic story of political hatred, violence and of mass destruction during the partition days. It differs from most of the novels of partition for the account of vast canvas and unity of time, place and action. The most significant thing is that he becomes enable to amalgam the raw historical facts with fictional element to give the novel a total shape.

Singh had won international name and worldwide acclaim for his magnum opus *Train to Pakistan*. He was the editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, The National Herald and The Hindustan Times. He had written many novels which have translated into many languages. His important novels are – *Train to Pakistan*, *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* and *Delhi*. He was the member of Indian Parliament from 1980 to 1986. In 1974, he was awarded the Padma Bhusan but returned it as a protest when the Indian army attacked the Golden Temple of Amritsar. Later, Indian Government awarded him a more prestigious honour – the Padma Vibhushan in 2007. John Adkins praises him by saying – “The author's objectivity in the treatment of theme and event, his skill and insight in the delineation of character, and his vision of humanity-the power and glory, the weakness and the defeat — all align him with the finest novelists in the English Language”.(Adkins, 11)

Singh is brilliant and minute observer of world and his novel *Train to Pakistan* provides a unique insight into one of the most remarkable political events of this country. It focuses 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 Indian History. It has a great effect on the both parts of India and Pakistan and creates a great upheaval in the whole continent. It compelled twelve million people to flee from their motherland and half million people were brutally killed for the sake of partition. The north part of India dominated by Muslims becomes the nation of Pakistan and southern part of India dominated by Hindu becomes the Republic of India.

The partition of 1947 has shaken the beliefs of the people and at the same time it had changed their viewpoints. According to Singh, that period was a period of great disillusionment, bewilderment and lack of human values. The beliefs that the people had cherished all through their life, were shattered. Even in case of his life, his beliefs were shattered by the pain, anger and agitations of that time. He reveals –

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...After the experience of autumn 1947, I become an angry middle aged man who wanted to show his disenchantment with the world...I decided to try my hand at writing (qtd in Dar 22).

*Train to Pakistan* describes the tale of a fictional village named Mano Majra at the time of Partition. The action of the novel revolves round this small village. It situates in the North – Western region of undivided India, at Indo – Pakistan border on the banks of the river Sutlez in Punjab. At the beginning of the novel, the people of Mano Majra - Sikh, Hindus and Muslims live peacefully with their work and there is religious and cultural integration and there is no communal tension. Though communal riots spread in different part of India, the people of

that village try to keep peace and tolerance in spite of the heterogeneity of the village -

The riots had become a rout. By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people – Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs were in fight. By the time the Monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead and all of Northern India was in arms, in terror or in hiding. The only remaining cases of peace were a scatter of villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villages was Mano Majra (Singh 9).

There are numerous works which are written on the theme of partition but *Train to Pakistan* holds a distinguished position for representing the unusual theme of indiscriminate killings of people. Rituparna Roy holds a point that – “We are just informed about the end result of the violence: the trainloads of corpses that arrive at Mano Majra. What is detailed by Kushwant Singh is the aftermath of the violence.” (Roy36). The brutal story of political hatred and turbulent communal violence become predominant theme in this novel. People become inhuman by the spirit of communal frenzy and they realized the evils of the holocaust. No one remains separated from the influence of partition. Singh has projected Mano Majra as the backdrop of his novel. The result of the partition is reflected through the people of Mano Majra and Mano Majra allegorically becomes a microcosm which represents the whole scenario of India or Pakistan.

The first section decoity shows how the people of Mano Majra are indifferent to the greatest political event – partition or independence. Really they rarely understand the meaning of independence. The lambardar asks - “But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will we get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or buffaloes?”(Singh 62). To them, freedom matters when they get more lands or more buffaloes. Otherwise, it does not matter to them. A Muslim says that they were slaves of the English and now they

will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis. Actually they were common people and they do not realize the change of the situation at the time of partition. The lambardar claims that the people who enjoy freedom are not innocent men but thieves, robbers or culprits.

When the horrible communal riots spread in different parts of India, the people of Mano Majra think that God is punishing them for their sins. In spite of communal violence in different part, Mano Majra keeps its perfect harmony among its various communities and still they live peacefully. They are devoid of political consciousness. They do not know that the British have left India which is governed by Congress Ministry. The speech of the sub inspector gives an account of the ignorance of the Mano Majrans: "I am sure no one in Mano Majra even knows that the British have left and the country is divided into Pakistan and Hindustan. Some of them know about Gandhi but I doubt if anyone has ever heard of Jinna"(Singh 33).

Kushwant Singh skillfully creates an ideal atmosphere at the very outset of the novel. He reflects an unusual weather in the month of august. According to him, this month is extremely dry with the exceptional heat. This heat becomes extreme with the announcement of the division of the country into a Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. It is very symbolic that nature shows its different moods – extreme heat or monsoon flood in that month. Actually Singh tries to show that nature's holocaust coincides with the holocaust of partition. These two unusual happenings are handled side by side to heighten the effect of the novel.

Basically Mano Majra is known for its railway station. In *Train to Pakistan*, train becomes as one of the most important symbols as the train suggests the daily life of Mano Majra. The life or activities of Mano Majra are closely related with the arrival and departure of railway trains. The arrival and departure of the train regulates their daily life –

All this has made Mano Majra very conscious of trains. Before daybreak, the mail train rushes through on its way to Lahore and as it approaches the bridge the driver invariably blows two long blasts of whistle. In an instant, all Mano Majra comes awake. Cows begin to caw. The Mullah at the mosque knows that it is time for the morning prayer. By the time the 10.30 morning passenger train from Delhi comes in, life in Mano Majra has settled down to its dull daily routine. Men are in the fields...as the mid day express goes by, Mano Majra stops to rest...when the evening passenger from Lahore comes in everyone gets to work again(Singh,14).

It is the ghost train that disrupts normal life of the village. Everything has changed when it carries the corpses of thousands of Hindu and Sikhs refugees from Pakistan for their communal funeral at Mano Majra. It creates a great commotion in the village and the villagers firstly realize the savage massacre and the madness of communalism. They try to get more information about it but remain in vain. The situation makes them tense and suspicious.

The train is loaded with butchered corpses of Sikhs and Hindus. The soldiers collect wood and kerosene from the villagers to cremate the corpses in the darkness of night. They are ignorant of what is going on – “The northern horizon, which had turned a bluish gray, showed orange again. The orange turned into copper and then into a luminous russet. Red tongues of flame leaped into the black sky. A soft breeze began to blow toward the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene, then of wood. And then—faint acid smells of searing flesh” (Singh 100). When the people of Mano Majra understand the truth, the village remains in a deathly silence. Everybody understands that the train has returned from Pakistan and the Muslims of Pakistan have created that massacre. When the brutality or the barbarity of Pakistan is revealed, the people of Mano Majra are bewildered and frightened. Hukum Chand, the district magistrate, becomes astonished and asks –

Fifteen hundred innocent people! What else is Kalyug? There is darkness over the land. This is only one spot on the frontier. I suppose similar things are happening at other places. And now I believe our people are doing the same. What about the Muslims in these villages? (Singh115).

The partition of 1947 has compelled the Hindus to evacuate from Pakistan and Muslims from India. The communal riots spread in both countries and they enhance the killings of Hindus in Pakistan and Muslims in India. Even at Mano Majra, the situation changes and the Muslims are ordered to leave the village and to take shelter in a refugee camp. As the Sikhs have watched the pathetic condition of Sikhs and Hindu men, women children who are murdered in Pakistan, they become bewildered and determined to take revenge upon the Muslims.

The Muslims become fearful at this situation as they understand that the Muslims of Pakistan have killed innocent Sikhs, Hindus. They also realize that they have to suffer as a consequence of that massacre. Finally they are tortured by the Sikhs and the Hindus in many parts of India and Muslim women were raped in open market. The relation between Sikhs and Muslims was very good before the partition but after partition, to Muslims, the Sikhs become stranger and lover of their blood. Their life in India becomes intolerable and they think of Pakistan. Singh writes - "For the first time, the name Pakistan came to mean something to them—a heaven of refuge where there were no Sikhs"(Singh141).

On the other hand, Sikhs also remind of the atrocities inflicted upon them by the Muslims in Pakistan. They cannot tolerate the inhuman acts of the Muslims who not only kill the Sikhs but insult and rape the Sikh Women in Pakistan - "...Sikh refugees had told them 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” (Singh142).

Kushwant Singh was neutral and he vividly describes the violence and atrocities of that time. He describes the evacuation of the Muslims with a sympathetic attitude. Here Chacha Imam Baksh does not agree to leave the mother country. He becomes exhausted and becomes fearful about the future...“what have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers”(Singh 110). The Sikh Lambardar agrees his opinion and replies – “Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like...But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands who will be responsible for that they do” (Singh147).

In *Train to Pakistan*, every character's life has been changed by the influence of Partition and they experience the trauma and the holocaust of that time. For the safety of the Muslims and to maintain the situation, the Government orders the Muslims to leave the village and advises them to gather at Chundunnuger refugee camp from where they would get a train which would reach them to Pakistan. The govt plays an intrigue and it “...had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter” (141). Chacha daughter's Nooran does not move to leave the village. She now carries Juggat's child. Her father warns that if she does not leave village, the Sikhs will throw her out of the village. But she claims her rights fiercely. She meets Juggat's mother and reveals the secret to her. But she does not move with her request and shows her displeasure.

*Train to Pakistan* is considered as one of the finest realistic novels of Post World War II in Indo Anglican Fiction. Here Singh does not blame any community for the partition. He very skillfully describes real situation where each community blames another community. He writes –

“Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame”(9). He puts emphasis only on the effect of the partition. He claimed – “The fact is both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped (Singh 9).

The situation becomes more pathetic when another ghost train has arrived at the station of Mano Majra from Pakistan. Once again the people of that village become excited and agitated and experience the brutal act of communal hatred. This time the corpses should be buried in a trench as there is no oil or dry wood. Seeing all these inhuman acts, the Sikhs determine to take revenge upon Muslims. One of the Sikhs orders - “For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Musalmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two...For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across.” (Singh171). As a result, they plan to fire the train which would carry the Muslims of Mano Majra and reach them in Pakistan.

Hukum Chand does not like the killing of people or destruction of property. He thinks that communal riots would not benefit anyone. Like him, Iqbal and Meet Singh have tried their best to resist the evil forces. Meet Singh thinks that there is no reason to punish the Muslims of India for the crimes of Muslims of Pakistan. He thinks that only the guilty should be punished. Hukum Chand is perplexed when he comes to know about the conspiracy to sabotage the train carrying all the Chandunuggar Muslim Refugees to Pakistan that night. He determines to save all the Muslims as there is Haseena, a prostitute whom he loves very much. At that time, he thinks that Nooran will also there in the train. She is Juggat's beloved and Juggat will save her in any way. So he releases him and informs him about the conspiracy of the Sikhs.

Though Juggat is considered as local ruffian, he is concerned with the welfare of Nooran as he comes to know from his mother that Nooran carries his child and determines to save

Nooran and all the Muslims of that train. He thinks that the revenge of the Sikhs might create danger to his beloved. So –

He (Juggat Singh) pulled himself up, caught the rope under his left armpit, and again started hacking with his right hand. The rope had been cut in shreds. Only a thin tough strand remained. He went at it with him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan (Singh 207).

Though he is a culprit, he believes in the philosophy of Granth Sahib and he realizes “If you are going to do something good, the Guru will help you: if you are going to do bad, the Guru will stand in your way. If you persist in doing it, he will punish you till you repent and then forgive you” (Singh 183). Thus he plays the most important rule in the novel and he does not care for his own life. He does the supreme act of self sacrifice for the sake of his love Nooran and for the sake of humanity. C.L.Khatri comments “The ultimate optimism of the novelist is shown in the end that shows the victory of virtue and love over vice and hatred even in this utter chaos”(Khatri, 100).

In *Train to Pakistan*, Singh has projected a comprehensive description of the tragic suffering of the people who are affected by the madness and communal frenzy of partition. Kai Nicholson claims that “the novelist, however, has succeeded in communicating the readers of the ghastliness and grossness and total insanity of the Two-nation Theory and the political tragedy” (Nicholsen, 39). The most important fact of the novel is that Singh has explicitly elaborated the violence of the communality but he had done it with a profound sympathy and at the same time he attacks the Indian political leaders who would fail to foresee the consequences of the division. Though the novel *Train to Pakistan* describes about the trauma, communal riots and holocaust of the partition of 1947, the theme of human compassion, love and kindness is steeped in it. Even in the midst of political chaos and communal

violence, there are some people who encounter the cruel game of life and show human values. S.P.Swain, rightly comments that - "Despite the note of utter despair bordering on nihilism, the novel is a message of hope and compromise. The most basic of all human instincts, i.e. man woman love, sustains is an act of self-redemption" (Swain, 123).

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## BIO-NOTE

I have recently done M. Phil from the Department of English and Other Modern European Languages at Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan. I have qualified UGC NET twice and done Bachelor of Arts from Malda College under North Bengal University and Masters from University of Gour Banga. My areas of interest are Indian Writings in English (especially Indian Partition Novels, Indian Dalit Literature and Indian Diasporic Literature), Post – Colonial Literature and Literature in Translations. I have written many research papers which are published in books and renowned International journals and I have also participated and presented papers in many national and international seminars. Some titles of my scholarly papers are -

1. The Reflection of Displacement, Isolation and Alienation in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.
2. Pain, Anger and Agitation in Sharankumar Limbale's Dalit Autobiography *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*.
3. A Study of Complicated Conjugal Relationships in R. K. Narayan's novel *The Guide*.
4. Bengal's Two Striking Political Movement - Gorkha Movement and Naxalite Movement as reflected in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*.
5. The Marginalized existence of Dalit Women in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*.
6. Rabindranth Tagore – the Pioneer of Naturalism and his innovative ideas towards Education.
7. Subjugation, Caste Discrimination and Quest for Identity: A Critical Dalit Response to Laxman Babu Mane's *Upara: An Outsider*
8. The Neglected and Suppressed plight of motherhood as depicted in Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*