



## Love and Sacrifice in the Time of Partition: A Study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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**Abstract:** *Apart from being one of most unfortunate and bloody religious clashes in India, the partition of India and Pakistan is a highly debatable event. The decision of partition was taken in a hurry and the interests of the masses who were directly going to be affected because of relocation were not taken into account. There was no plan as such to effectively uproot people from the places where they had spent their entire lives and to establish them in an alien place. They were not given even enough time to make preparations for the journey they had to take. There were no arrangements to maintain law and order in a highly charged atmosphere of religious tension. Vandals freely looted the masses and killed people belonging to different religions. Girl and women were raped and killed brutally. There was chaos all over and everybody was struggling to survive. Humanity seemed to be dead. But amidst this atmosphere of communal frenzy, there were people who retained their human values and did not take part in killing or vandalism. They went up to the extent of going against their own community in saving the lives of people belonging to other religion. The paper deals with one such character named Juggut Singh in the novel Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh who sacrifices his life in an attempt to save the lives of migrating Muslims. Unlike other partition novels, the major focus of the novel is not the killings and vandalism. It is the feelings of love and compassion that we find on the pages of Train to Pakistan. Khushwant Singh by his fine narration transforms "the horrendous raw theme into a fine fiction that is steeped in human compassion and love" (Kumar 38-39).*

### I. Introduction

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* highlights the futility of blaming each other for the unfortunate event. Also, the novel is one of the first and most effective works on partition. While writing the novel, the writer has quite objectively treated the event, without blaming a community or religious minority for it. He has tried to stay away from the blame. "Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame" (Singh 1). According to him, "The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped" (Singh 1). Though there are numerous works written on partition but *Train to Pakistan* stands out as it does not treat the usual themes of indiscriminate killings of people. The killings and violence is no doubt a part of it but not the central theme. His focus shifts to the other associated issues at the time of partition. Talking about the treatment of the subject by Khushwant Singh, Bhatnagar says:

Khushwant Singh was the first Indian novelist in English to write about the horror and holocaust of partition with great artistic concern in *Train to Pakistan*. It is not partition but what it gets associated with and what it becomes symbolic of that attracts the attention of the writer. (Bhatnagar 152)

It mainly focuses on the consequences of partition, avoiding the graphic presentation of the horrific events. Roy also talking in the similar manner about the novel says:

... in *Train to Pakistan*, the violence that erupted at the time of the partition is represented in a very unusual way. There is no detailed description in the novel of the train journey undertaken by the refugees-in terms of neither the practical difficulties faced nor the dangers involved. More importantly, we are also not shown the violence happening; for there is not even a reported description of the incidents in the novel. We are just informed about the end result of the violence: the trainloads of corpses that arrive at Mano Majra. What is detailed by Khushwant Singh is the after math of the violence... (Roy 36)

*Train to Pakistan* opens in the fictional village Mano Majra and describes how the entire village gets involved in the carnage during the partition. In spite of the repeated peace keeping efforts by many people in the village, the bloodshed could not be stopped. On the surface, the novel describes how suddenly everything changed and made people react in very unusual ways. Commenting upon the major themes of the novel, Rao and Rani say:

*Train to Pakistan* is the touching tale of a village, Mano Majra, struck down by the hate and the violence that came with the division of the subcontinent when a train-load of massacred men, women and children arrive in the village. It reveals with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border during the days of 1947. The predominant features of the novel are its stark realism, its absolute fidelity to the truth, and above all, its trenchant exposure of the partition horrors. (Rao & Rani 32-33)

The friction among the people belonging to different religions was something that had brewed suddenly. "Before partition, cultural integration between Muslim and Hindu and Sikh in the subcontinent was harmonious and mellifluous but turned into enmity after partition" (Pathak & Mishra 83). In the novel we see that initially the general atmosphere was peaceful and people did not as such mind the presence of people belonging to different religions. Mano Majra remains unaffected as the sub-inspector of police says: "No communal trouble in the area?'... 'We have escaped it so far, sir'" (Singh 20). They never forgot the fact that they had been living together for years and a momentary decision should not be strong enough to break those bonds. Even after the communal tension envelops most of the regions, Mano Majra manages to maintain the 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 1)

But then after sometime, an act of dacoity in the village causes a lot of tension. Later on, the arrival of "ghost train" from Pakistan spoils everything and the killings begin there also. In the changed situations, the inhabitants of Mano Majra, both Hindus and Muslims, become victims of the changed situations. They think of one another not as individuals but mere religious beings; a serious threat to their own security and religion. But in total contrast to such people, Khushwant Singh has used the character of Juggut Singh to highlight the importance of love in saving humanity and compassion. His relationship with Nooran, who is a Muslim girl, hints at the futility of the differences and enmity on the religious basis. His love for her makes him go against his own people who were trying to kill innocents. It was his love which makes him sacrifice his life for the people who consider him a criminal.

Khushwant Singh has divided the novel into four parts and it is in the fourth part named 'Karma', that he emphasizes the philosophy of 'Karma', that is, action, as described in *The Bhagavad Gita*. In this section, the story reaches its catastrophic dramatic end with Juggut Singh sacrificing his life to save the lives of his girlfriend Nooran and other Muslim refugees. When Nooran comes to know about her father's decision to leave the country, she gets bewildered at it as she was in love with Juggut Singh. Juggut was in police custody at that time. She did not want to leave him but couldn't do anything in view of the prevailing circumstance. She goes to his mother and tells her that she is pregnant with his child and does not want to leave him, but all in vain.

Towards the end of the novel, people make a plan to ambush the train taking the Muslims including those of Mano Majra to Pakistan. The Sikhs of Mano Majra who, just one day before, were ready to lay down their lives for their Muslim brothers, now at once become ready to kill them. They decide this at the instigation of the Sikh boy who excites their religious passions to retaliate to the bestiality of the Muslims. But when Juggut Singh comes to know about Nooran and the people's plan about the train, he performs the act of supreme self-sacrifice to save the lives of people. Though there were others also who knew about the plot and wanted to fail their plan but they were unable to prevent the plot against the fleeing Muslims. Juggut Singh, on the other hand, does not care for his own safety and foils the plot to ambush the train, letting it to roll over his body to Pakistan.

Khushwant Singh has hinted at the reality in the novel that there were people who could have done things to stop the disturbance from taking the ugly form that it eventually took. But for various reasons, such people kept them away from the trouble. They did not even try in this direction. In the novel thus, when the disturbance starts in Mano Majra, Juggut was in police custody. Along with him, there was Iqbal, educated in England and an expert in preaching Hindu-Muslim unity. Police free them from the custody hoping that both of them will help in stopping the villagers from killing the Muslims who were going to Pakistan through train. While Juggut loses his life in the effort, Iqbal, a non-communal political worker, an idealist and nationalist takes a worldly wise approach and keeps himself away from the trouble.

Juggut, in spite of knowing the possible consequences of his decision, does not change his mind. His love for Nooran appears for him to be more valuable than anything. His self sacrifice is motivated by his love for Nooran. When he learns from his mother that Nooran visited her before leaving for the refugee camp and she

carries his (Jugga's) child in her womb, he cannot bear the separation from his beloved. When the fanatics prepare to attack the train when it passes through Mano Majra railway bridge, Juggut Singh appears on the bridge and cuts the rope stretched to sweep off the people sitting on the roof when the train passes through the bridge. The leader of the gang fires shots at him and he falls down:

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 to Pakistan. (Singh 190)

Thus we see that Jugga does not hesitate even for a moment while sacrificing his life for Nooran and other Muslims. He never, like Iqbal, indulges in the dilemma of morality or fruitfulness of his actions, and leaves it to Guru (God) to discriminate between the right and the wrong or good and bad acts and reward them accordingly. Juggut Singh understands the philosophy of "Granth Sahib" in real sense, which says:

For God is True and dispenseth Truth.  
There the elect his court adorn,  
And God Himself their actions honors. (Singh 183)

When Meet Singh asks Juggut Singh the meaning of this verse, Juggut Singh explains:

If you are going to do something good, the Guru will help you; if you are going to do something 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)

Juggut draws strength from God to help himself in his noble pursuit which seems to be the novelist's plea also. Violence cannot be conquered by violence and it is only love that can pacify the hatred in human beings. Love has the power to transform a criminal like Juggut Singh into a courageous human being who sacrifices his own life for the well-being of the other people irrespective of their caste, class and religion.

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