

RESEARCH ARTICLE

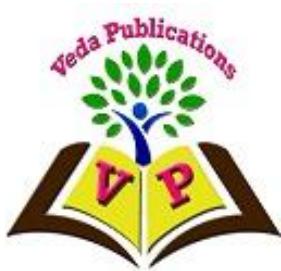


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HISTORY AS LEIT- MOTIF IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN*

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**ABSTRACT**

Historical novel is the one that has a significant event of history at its backdrop. It is an established fact that literature and history move hand in hand. Literature gets affected by the historical movements and the writer cannot ignore the circumstances in which he is living or producing a work of art. In the history of India, partition has a very significant place. The partition and the subsequent developments formed a base for a whole range of writers from the subcontinent to express their feelings in the form of their works of art. Indian novelists like Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie, Manohar Malgonkar, Amitav Ghosh have described in detail about the horrors of partition. In this paper an attempt is made to analyze *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh. This novel was published in 1956 and it brings out the ordeals of partition and looks into the depressing past of Indian history.

Keywords: History, Literature, India, Partition.

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Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* was published originally with the title *Mano Majra* and is considered one of the best realistic novels of Indian English fiction. It is the first comprehensive study of partition and its drastic impact on the individuals of a village. It brings out how partition breaks down a communally hormonal nation. Khushwant Singh had the first-hand experience of partition and this is the reason why he was so realistic in his portrayal of the same. C.N. Srinath labels him as "the witness turned

writer" (59) and N.S. Gundur opines, "that he happened to write *Train to Pakistan* as a therapeutic exercise to overcome the pangs of partition" (76).

The novel is set in 1947 when the weather was much hotter and much drier than usual but in Mano Majra all was well as the partition affected the elites immediately whereas the villages and the common people living in rural areas were hardly aware of it unless and until the shadow of partition started haunting their peaceful and communal

environment. Indian subcontinent that was governed by British was divided in 1947. The idea for a separate Muslim state was conceptualized by a poet and political thinker Mohd. Iqbal in 1930 and this idea for a separate homeland for Indian Muslims to be called Pakistan took a definite shape in the mind of Chaudhary Rehmat Ali and the proponent of a two nation theory Mohd. Ali Jinnah, was too obsessed to have a separate Muslim state that he overlooked the disastrous consequences of the same. N.S. Gundur in the introduction of his book *Partition and Indian English Fiction* writes,

"The emergence of these two nations at the end of colonial rule, celebrated as the crowning achievement of the freedom movement, was nevertheless accompanied by horrendous tragic events because of the unplanned way the leaders proceeded to partition of the country" (1).

The partition of a mighty nation was done and the aftermaths were being looked at in the state of sheer shock by political as well as the general public. Riots and robberies were frequent, accompanied by mass murders and rapes. S. Settar and Indira Gupta in this context writes, "One will never know exactly how many people died in the riots which accompanied it, but around seventeen million people had to relocate themselves across the newly drawn boundaries" (7).

Partition was the most horrible phase of Indian history. In one go it disturbed the communal harmony being shared by the people of subcontinent since ages. Not only a physical division, it was more of a psychological, moral and social division. As the abstract puts that history and art move hands in hand so there are a number of writers, painter cinematographers who accounted for partition in their own style and art form. A work of fiction has a story / plot with a central character and his life. It traces the problem with the life of an individual in relation to the society in which he/she is living. History talks of a specific time, date and event whereas a work of fiction has a character who is struggling at a particular time and event so it is worth quoting N.S.Gundur who says, "However it doesn't mean that fictional narratives neglect politico – historical aspect. They portray both the human and

political problems. Sometimes they act as critiques of the political history and gives insights into the reality of politics of partition" (4).

By reading books on history of partition one may come to know about the event and its aftermaths but by reading a fictional work dealing with history one understands the whole process and its impacts upon individuals and society on the whole. Mano Majra stands symbolic for India and a very authentic reaction has been portrayed by Khushwant Singh. A village equally populated with Sikhs and Muslims was unaware about the aftermaths of partition unless and until a train loaded with dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs arrived at the station.

The trains were symbolic of life's movement in Mano Majra. They were like the timetable for the villagers and it was part of their routine to hear the trains' chugging around every day. They had their routine set upon the time of the trains that used to pass from the station but after the arrival of the train loaded with dead bodies there were very less trains for the route which resulted in a lack of sense of time for the people of Mano Majra. "People stayed in bed late without realizing that times had changed and the mail train might not run through at all. Children did not know when to be hungry and clamored for food all the time . . . Goods trains had stopped running all together so there was no lullaby to lull them to sleep. Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra" (93).

The train that halted at the Mano Majra station changed the entire scenario of the village and the villagers as well. Before the arrival of this train of the dead there used to be communal harmony in the village. A local deity called 'Doe' was worshiped by all the residents of Mano Majra. Suja Alexander writes, "The peace loving people of Mano Majra are injected with the venom of communalism and egoism by the people in the power only to further their own nest. They succeeded in divorcing the people from their much – loved brethren, which results in alienation, enmity, hatred, anger and revenge" (45).

Apart from partition another story finds its place in the novel. It is the love story of Jugga the badmash and Nooran a Muslim girl. As the story

moves forward we come to know how partition affected the lives of these two lovers. *Train to Pakistan* is divided into 4 sections:

- a. Dacoity
- b. Kaliyug
- c. Mano Majra
- d. Karma

The story starts with the dacoity and the murder of Lala Ram Lal the only Hindu resident of Mano Majra. The district commissioner Hukum Chand orders the arrest of Jugga and Iqbal Singh who came to Mano Majra on the very day of dacoity. Both the arrested persons were innocent as the crime was committed by Malli and his gang and they hatched a plan against Jugga by scattering broken bangles in front of his house. After the dacoity it is the Kaliyug that is being projected before the readers. As is stated in the Hindu religious texts that Kaliyug will be the last and the most sinful period of the history of earth and so readers witness bloodshed, mass murders, rapes and many more human incidents in the due course. The trains loaded with dead bodies were brutally exchanged from both sides of the border. Mano Majra also got involved in the same. When the ghostly train arrived in Mano Majra strange things were observed in the village. The villagers were asked by the soldiers to arrange as much wood and kerosene as they can. The villagers were not clear about what all was going on but later when the smoke and smell of charred bodies spread over the village, the people were horrified. Not only the general masses but the police officers like the sub-inspector also wanted to take revenge on the Muslims living there but Hukum Chand maintains his beaurocratic temperament and orders safe exit for Muslims to Pakistan. While the Muslim community was being evacuated, the dacoits like Malli and his gang were taking charge of the homes and the livestock of Muslims families. The village was entirely chaotic. River Satluj was flowing with the dead remains and a perfect picture of kalyug has been portrayed by the author.

Kalyug manifests itself in Mano Majra, a place so peaceful and hardly aware of anything like partition, and it gets involved in the acts of inhumanity. The elders of the village wanted to provide shelter to their muslim friends but the

muslims were advised by the administration to leave for Pakistan as soon as possible. Thus, Mano Majra has been projected as a place with both good and evil characteristics.

The last part that is the Karma forms the climax of the novel. Hukum Chand releases both Juggat Singh and Iqbal Singh with the intention that they might be able to save the lives of the muslims who were to leave Chundunnugger for Pakistan. Iqbal Singh took refuge in a gurudwara but Juggat when realized that his love Nooran would also be going, decides to let go the train safely to the other side of border. He was totally in to the theory of karma and was hardly aware of the results. He bravely cut the rope which was meant to stop the train.

"He went at it with his knife, and then with his teeth. The engine was almost on him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped at the center as he fell. The train went over him and went on to Pakistan" (208). Thus to quote P.K. Singh "the devotional love of Jugga to Nooran, and Hukum Chand to Hasseena, finally won over the communal feelings dividing people from one another" (56).

After analyzing *Train to Pakistan* we come across so many events and incidents that were accompanied by the partition of India. A very authentic and dependable portrayal of the same has been done by the author. His experience being first-hand, has been the source of inspiration for him. This dark event of the Indian history affected many lives and through this novel one comes to know the perils of partition in a more comprehensive and commendable manner.

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