

Picture of Communalism under Partition in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on the portrayal of communalisms which prevailed at the time of partition of India into Pakistan in the novel **Train to Pakistan** by Khushwant Singh. The partition of India was an important event not only in the history of the Indian subcontinent but in world history. Hindus constitute a huge population and they inhabit in every nook and corner of the country. Muslims constitute the largest religious minority. But the adjustment between these two communities has been a failure so far, resulting in violent communal riots. Mano Majra, the fictional village on the border of Pakistan and India in which the story takes place, is predominantly Muslim and Sikh. The author has shown how the people of the village were in a bubble, surrounded by mobs of Muslims who hate Sikhs and mobs of Sikhs who hate Muslims, while in the village they had always lived together peacefully. This novel vividly pictures the accounts of the massacres of Hindus and Muslims, especially on the border towns of India. The novel really pictures an account of the conflict of cultures and clash of violence between two races, Muslims and Hindus, caused by an acute sense of fundamentalism. The novelist tries basically to recapture the period when Sikh-Muslim antagonism reached its climax with the division of the Punjab. Hence, the writer tries to convince that the novel is a picture of communalism under the banner partition.*

Keywords: *partition, communalism, corpses, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs*

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Introduction

Communalism, as we understand it in our country has a blind adherence to one's own religious group. It is described as a weapon to induce people for or against by raising an appeal on communal lines. Communalism is associated with religious fundamentalism and dogmatism. As India is a secular country, Indian society is pluralistic from religious point of view. Hindus constitute a huge

population and they inhabit in every nook and corner of the country. Muslims constitute the largest religious minority. But the adjustment between these two communities has been a failure so far, resulting in violent communal riots.

Communalism may be interpreted as a total commitment to a certain pattern of beliefs and it is something beyond the rationality. It is observed that the following are the characteristics of communalism. It is an ideological concept; difficult process; has a wide base which encompasses economic, social and political aspects for its manifestation; causes violence, rivalry and tension among masses; it is used by the some royal people as a tool for dividing and exploiting the communal identities of the poorer sections of their fellow religion people; simply engineered by situational politics and economic interest of contending groups; strikes at the roots of democracy; secularism and national integration. Its effects are disastrous.

Picture of Communalism

'Train to Pakistan', the debut novel of Khushwant Singh (KS), was titled 'Mano Majra' but it is popular with the title 'Train to Pakistan'. The story of this novel revolves around the 1947 riots of Hindu – Muslim – Sikh which followed the partition of India, when India was divided into two countries when 'India made its tryst with destiny'.

Mano Majra, a fictional village where the story takes place, is predominantly Muslim and Sikh. It is located on the borders of India and Pakistan. The author has shown how the people of the village were in a bubble, surrounded by mobs of Muslims who hate Sikhs and mobs of Sikhs who hate Muslims, while in the village they had always lived together peacefully.

This novel vividly pictures the accounts of the massacres of Hindus and Muslims, especially on the border towns of India. Arrival of train loads of dead bodies from Pakistan to border station of Atari has become the viral of not only the area but also both the country. They were full of dead bodies of men, women, children and oldies. On the

bogies of those trains filled with corpses Pakistanis wrote – Gift to India from Pakistan. These happenings resulted in mass killings of Muslims in India. People were killed without mercy. Men were killed with swords and spears while their women and sisters and mothers and daughters were ruthlessly gang-raped and then their breasts were slashed with spears while their children were killed in front of them and women left to bleed to death. Similar was the fate of Hindus who were coming from Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed in this insanity that followed in the communal riots of 1947.

Story is pretty simple. It is about the sacrifice of one man to save a few hundred lives while insanity prevails everywhere. It is the story of one man struggling with his thoughts and debating with himself whether it is correct to stand in front of 50 armed men waiting to kill hundreds of their own species, to stop because what they are going to do is immoral.

Iqbal is the main character of the novel. He sacrifices his life to save a train full of Muslims. Those Muslims are none other than the refugees in their own motherland. They are escaping to Pakistan while an army of lunatic men waiting with all sorts of modern and traditional weapons to rape and kill and abduct those innocent Muslims going to Pakistan, a land where they will be called ‘Muhajir’ (refugees). Even in Pakistan, they will be seen with an eye of disgust because they came from India, and will again become refugees in a country that was made for them. So much for the irony of ‘tryst that India made with its destiny’

Iqbal debates with himself. The dialogue that he has with himself during the end of story is great to read. The protagonist talks about the irony of proving one’s Sikhism to stay alive in an insane asylum that India had become that time. He talks about the uselessness of talking logic and morals in front of people who have become bloodthirsty. They will rather thrust a sword in your stomach and proceed and call you a traitor rather than listen to the morality you are talking about.

There is a clear reference also to the multi-ethnicity in Mano Majra. It is reflected through acute religious fanaticism of one’s own. Iqbal Mohammad relates to Islam cultural group, Iqbal Chand to Hindu Kafer and Iqbal Singh to Punjabi. Broadly speaking, Iqbal touches to three communities - Muslim, Hindu and Sikh. It is because he is a social worker who should not have discrimination of culture and ethnicity. He feels that the bloodshed and violence caused by the

partition should be prohibited. So he takes several appearances in several communities.

The novelist describes another scene of religious contact. Muslim Mullah at the Mosque sings “Allah-o-Akbar” and Sikh priest in Sikh temple succeeds them. The prayer of monotonous singsong sounds dear. This context shows the cross-cultural contact and attachment to the ethnicity. There is the symptom of cultural and religious harmony in the village where people of different sects, races and religions live together.

The novel really pictures an account of the conflict of cultures and clash of violence between two races, Muslims and Hindus, caused by an acute sense of fundamentalism. Examination of the varied groups of people not only increases cultural and social understanding of that time and place, but also shows that the blame could not be placed on any one group; all were responsible.

Muslims 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. (Singh 1956, 1)

This violence between Muslims and Hindus started from Calcutta (Kolkata) and became contagious to reach Mano Majra, a multi-ethnic village on the border of Pakistan. There was a message that the government was planning to transport Muslims from Mano Majra to Pakistan for their safety and security. Hindu-Muslim feeling became acute. Muslims massacred Hindus and Hindus massacred Muslims. Countless Hindus and Sikhs in the North West Frontier were forced to be homeless and fled to their respective community areas. They were transported by bullock carts, lorries, even on roof tops of trains. Others were forced to go by railroads. Almost a million of them were dead. All of Northern India was in arm, in terror or in hiding.

So far the violence of Partition has spared the village, but then the trains full of bodies start to come across the border from Pakistan and the river brings more. Refugees and vigilantes stir up trouble and Hukum Chand, Iqbal and Juggut have to make decisions which will decide the fate of an outgoing train of Muslim refugees. Though they are ethnically different now, their common culture before Partition still haunts their minds. Their understanding was so good that one was moved by the other’s misery. The novelist gives a vivid picture of their sweet relationship

The Sikhs watched them till they were out of sight. They wiped the tears off faces and turned back to their homes with heavy hearts. (145)

Freedom struggle keeps its unity but the freedom invites fragmentation. Partition that has left many scars in the hearts of several Indians and those tragic days which still haunt the new India, the memories of that tragic period still makes people shiver, are brought alive through the great novel by Khushwant Singh.

The portrayals of several characters in the story are presented in great detail that may allow the reader to form picture of what all happened. The village is portrayed to be a harmonious and peaceful place until the seeds of hatred and suspicion were sown . The story can be viewed from different angles. If it was a love story between a Sikh boy and Muslim girl, it was also a story that depicted the brutalities suffered by the people generated as a result of partition. Not just this, it also tried to show how people viewed famous personalities like Mahatma Gandhi in some way or the other.

The novelist tries basically to recapture the period when Sikh- Muslim antagonism reached its climax with the division of the Punjab. There is a tragic irony that sublimes the acute cultural difference of the speech made by the Magistrate to the S. I. of police:

“Do you know,” continued the Magistrate, ‘the Sikhs retaliated by attacking a Muslim refugee train and sending it across the border with over a thousand corps? They write on the engine “Gift to Pakistan!” (21)

The partition of India was an important event not only in the history of the Indian subcontinent but in world history. Its chief reason was the communal thinking in both Hindus and Muslims; but the circumstances under which it occurred made it one of the saddest event of the history of India. No doubt, the Hindus and the Muslims were living together since long but they fueled to inculcate the feelings of harmony and unity among themselves. The fanatic leaders of both communities played a prominent role in stoking the fire of communalism. The partition was exceptionally brutal and large in scale and unleashed misery and loss of lives and property as millions of refugees fled either Pakistan or India Kush want Singh’s name is bound to go down in India literary history as one of the finest historian and novelist, a forth wright political commentator and an outstanding observer and social critic.

To conclude, it can be said that *Train to Pakistan* is based upon conflict of cultures and ethnic violence. The entire story revolves round the communal riot between Hindus (including Sikhs) and Muslims. Basically the story is developed on the communal clash between Sikh and Muslim in the wake of partition. The novelist shows the passing pictures of dividing India and its effect in grim reality. Hence, the novel is a picture of communalism under the banner partition.

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