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KUSHWANTH SINGH'S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN AS A TRANSCENDENT REPRESENTATION
OF PARTITION

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ABSTRACT

The human tragedy of 1947 has always been a challenging fictional exploration as the narratives offer the stories of savagery, pain, suffering and agony on an unprecedented scale. Partition novels record the incredible suffering, inner turmoil, public frenzy, communal hatred, mass scale migration and bewilderment of the people of the subcontinent. This paper intends to focus on the greatest work, a classic in its own kind, Train to Pakistan, the great human catastrophe of the partition of India. Kushwanth Singh's Train to Pakistan was published in 1956 when the horrendous memories of the holocaust were still afresh. It was the first English novel written on the theme of Partition and portrays its venomous impact with scathing irony and unrelenting realism. He intends to give voice to the heart rending physical tortures and psychological outbursts that plagued the nation, with skilful artistry. Widely accepted as one of the classics of modern Indian fiction, Train to Pakistan is a brilliant account of the exhilarating experience of human tragedy. The post-partition exodus across the border erupting violent riots is quite depressive and Singh enacts this saddened episodes through the stories of his characters in excruciating detail. He articulates the intensity of enormous tragedy that unfolds with Mano Majra, a sleepy village suddenly waking to the horrors that the partition caused. The village that has witnessed peace and harmony once, turned into a battlefield of hatred and religious segregation. Singh represents the majority of the masses whose voices remained unnoticed.

The well sculpted structure, plot and narrative add richness of this classical partition novel. The seasonal setting, the symbolic significance of the trains, multiple aspects of reality and religious tension in the communities magnifies the novelty of the partition fiction. The characters are full of life, compounded of good and evil qualities and ultimately the triumph of good over evil. The narrative technique of contrast is very suggestive. The signal of the train that usually sets the tone of the village in contrast becomes a symbol of destruction and death. Jugga, the well-known 'budmaash' becomes a hero by saving hundreds of lives sacrificing his own. Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan depicts the mind-boggling carnage perpetrated by both the sides in the blood stain partition.

Key Words: Partition, human tragedy, destruction, psychological outbursts.

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India has always retained its unity in diversity. The history of India is a story of absorption, adaptation and assimilation of continuous foreign influences and resistances. Aryans, Persians, Arabs, Turkish Merchants and Afghans came to India and incorporated as its natives. Being a multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural and multireligious society, has promoted its national integration amidst cultural mosaics. As the largest ethnic group the minorities were concerned for their future. The partition of India in 1947 is one of the greatest setbacks in the history of India's integrity, attributed to the British's 'Divide and Rule' policy as they kept the communities apart to perpetuate their rule. In 1906, the All India Muslim League was founded propagating the theory that Hindu and Muslim were two separate nations and could never live together. As a result, the creation of Pakistan followed by the worst communal violence in the history of mankind. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is replete with conflicts arising out of the partition of 1947 engulfing communal frenzy in the remote village of Mano Majra where Sikhs and Muslims had lived in peace for generations. It highlighted the man's wolfish cruelty to man in the name of religion.

The tragedy of the partition is considered as the most lethal incident in the history of India that has left an ineradicable mark on the psyche of every Indian. Years have passed but the wounds still remain afresh and unhealed for those who lived through the days of terror. This traumatic event narrated in literature encompasses some devastated insights of pain and suffering at an unprecedented scale. The best of literature that emerged in the wake of partition bears the brutalized remains and the emotional pain of the sufferers. Novelists who wrote about partition came out with an attempt to define the incredible suffering along with the psychological conflict of the victims. It gave birth to colossal fictional explorations encountering the gruesome human disaster. The violence-begetting element of the partition is the ambient political and social violence along with the contours of internal cultural differences between groups. They were indeed hapless victims of a game plan, worked out by these forces without any consideration for huge population who had no commitment to any political fascination. The high politics of the Partition and its consequences gave birth to majority of the stories that affected the experiences of ordinary people. These stories travel in profound confusion of unrequited violence and a realm of transcending the pain, dramatically and psychologically.

Most of the writers successfully articulated the enormous tragedy that had unfolded in the wake of partition of the Indian subcontinent. The birth of India and Pakistan, and the horrible incidents aftermath evokes the memory of the riots, the massacre on both sides of the border experiencing an ontological struggle between being and belonging. Partition fiction exists as a contemporary phenomenon that explores different challenging interpretations depending on the experiences of different writers. Indian subcontinent was enormously affected that the most awaited independence was not completely fruitful because of a major exodus of people across the border of two new-born countries. The holocaust of partition has resulted in literary concern as the narratives in the form of poetry or fiction; relate the undaunted communal frenzy and the unabated massacres and violent uprooting creating a massive psycho-existential complex in the sub-conscious of the victims. Partition fiction evolved as a promising genre in the Indo-English fiction and large number of novelists has employed the theme of partition namely Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), ManoharMalgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), ChamanNahal's *Azadi*(1975), and AttiaHosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961).

Kushwanth Singh's *Train to Pakistan* was published in 1956 when the horrendous memories of the holocaust were still afresh. Widely accepted as one of the classics of modern Indian fiction, *Train to Pakistan* it is a brilliant account of the exhilarating experience of human tragedy. It also holds a pioneering position in Indian English fiction as it is the foremost attempt depicting the trauma of the victims of partition. Being a victim of this cruel fate, he could easily understand the pain of the people. He uses the medium of creative writing to expose the brutality, inhumanity and genocide of the worst type. Though it was written in the year 1956, it carries credence enough to contest the latest bestselling novels of the recent times. He keeps his narrative detached from political issues enacted behind the saga of partition, and instead chooses to delineate the effects of this horrendous crisis on the common masses. He emphasises on those innocent people who

were absolutely ignorant of what's happenings, while they were brutally killed, bewildered, victimised and torn apart.

The trauma of partition stirred the creative genius of Kushwanth Singh and a powerful trend was set to explore the experience of love amidst the violence in all its pain, sensibility and subtle richness. He recounts the trauma and tragedy of partition through his ruthless realism, symbolic technique and life like characters. One important aspect of the novel is that it does not interest itself with any specific person or group but revolves entirely around a tiny hamlet, Mano Majra. The story is very simple, the plot is neatly weaved, characters sketched with a sure and steady hand and the greatest triumph is the authenticity of dialogue. Originally entitled *Mano Majra*, the novel pictures a brutal story of political hatred and violence during the holocaust. The turbulent and fateful days that followed the partition of British India was caught up in the blaze of hatred. Mass scale migration entailed crimes of unprecedented violence and burning, looting, killing, dishonoring and mutilating women became the order of the day. As Manohar Malgonker recalls, "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."

Kushwanth Singh presents Mano Majra as a remote and obscure village on the border, life in this the village at its own pace, unaware of the communal flames ignited in the nation. He portrays Mano Majra as a microcosm of India to reveal how slowly and steadily violence crept into a peace loving country and helplessness of the people in bringing down the scale of violence. As K.S. Iyenger puts, "Here's functional 'integration', and indeed there are tens of thousands of villages like Mano Majra, where the law has always been peaceful co-existence, and not communal strife." (p. 498). One of the most celebrated novels on the theme of partition, *Train to Pakistan*, is a historical representation of the cataclysmic events of those days. Singh states, "I think it is a documentary novel of the partition, an extremely tragic event which hurt me very much. I had no animosity against either the Muslims or the Pakistanis, but I felt that I should do something to express that point of view." (p.352)

The entire plot is divided into four sections namely: Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra and Karma. The narrative moves forward to a deeper vision and gets complex focusing on Mano Majra and slowly transcends its graphical identity and becomes a metaphor. The signals of the passing trains across the Sutlej Bridge regulate life in Mano Majra. The day starts after mail train rushes through the bridge before daybreak. The whole village awakes with the echoes of Mullah's 'Allaho-Akbar' from the mosque and the Sikh priest's prayers from the Gurudwara. At 10:30 in the morning, a passenger train from Delhi comes in and life settles down to its daily routine. When the mid-day express passes people stop to rest and men and children come home for lunch and the siesta hour. By the signal of the evening passenger from Lahore, everyone gets to work again and when the night goods train comes in, Mano Majra gets to sleep. Thus 'train' becomes a crucial symbol in the life of Mano Majra. But soon things began to change. Partition takes its toll in this tiny village also. In the words of Manaver "Partition touched Mano Majra's at both levels... The dark clouds of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries. Yet feelings of brotherliness have not disappeared, and they meet for consultation in a scene that is both intensely human and touching". (p. 68)

Kushwanth Singh portrays three contrasting characters. Hukum Chand, the magistrate of the district, is a middle aged man who has the responsibility of maintaining calm in the village. Juggut Singh, the village troublemaker, who has frequented jail on many occasions, has a dubious distinction of being 'a budmash number ten.' He is fiercely passionate and gets romantically involved with a young Muslim girl, Nooran which in a sense cut across the religious barriers. And finally Iqbal, a modern urban Indian, who is disillusioned with the rich people's government and roams the rural areas hoping to start a proletariat uprising. These three characters interweave with one another leading to a turn of events among members of two communities living in peace for generations. Singh paints a picture so vivid and creates a narrative that is evocative, imaginative, and most quintessentially Indian.

The first section "Dacoity" opens with a well-defined narrative that depicts three events happening simultaneously after the signal of the night goods train. Kushwanth Singh introduces all the main characters of

the novel in this section. The murder of Ram Lal by a gang of dacoits from a neighbouring village sets the tone of the narrative and adds the meaning to the title of the section aptly. It figuratively stands for the political dismemberment of the country by the British government who blamed the local leaders for causing the partition. The signal of the train is used by the dacoits as their signal to attack the money lender. Simultaneously, the second event takes place where Jugga and Nooran meet in the fields after the train signal. The third event unfolds with Hukum Chand, the Deputy Commissioner of the district also arriving in the village around the same time. The sleepy village awakes to the turbulence of the sudden activity in the village and as a result, the events follow. The police arrest Iqbal, a young Marxist radical and Jugga, budmaash number ten, suspecting for the murder. Even the opening lines of the novel have the symbolic significance as the scorching heat and rainless period are marks of unbearable hot and dusty atmosphere symbolizes something unpleasantness where Kushwanth says "The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. It was hotter than usual, and drier and dustier. And the summer was longer. No one could remember when the monsoon had been so late. For weeks, the sparse clouds cast only shadows. There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins."(p.9)

The next section "Kalyug", has a cosmic vision in its title as it is considered as the last cycle of the Hindu concept of epic time. The end of the rhythmic life of Mano Majra's is suggested with the arrival of the ghost train carrying corpses from Pakistan. The train is considered as a premonition of evil times and the mass cremation completely disturbs and fills the village with a pall of gloom. The author gives a ghostly and blood curdling description of the massacre. There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just then become voiceless. (p. 74). Even the Mullah, Imam Baksh, who always maintains regularity in his prayer, does not pray that morning. Kushwanth remarks, "His sonorous cry did not rise to the heavens to proclaim the story of God".(p. 84) The communal fire is incite in Mano Majrans to take revenge upon Muslims by a group of young Sikh boys who come from outside and succeeded in getting the support of the dacoit, Mali who hopes to reap a profitable harvest by the annihilation of Muslims. A Sikh youth tells, "Tomorrow a train load of Muslims is to cross the bridge to Pakistan. If we are men, this train should carry as many people dead to the other side as you have received. (p. 151)

The bestial cruelties are neatly depicted in *Train to Pakistan* with objective analysis of the consciousness of people during partition. The rumors spread by both the communities about the barbaric deeds arouse the emotions of people mounting tension between Sikh and Muslims who had hitherto lived in amity in Mano Majra. The village was divided into two halves, Muslims and Sikhs gathered in separate groups and talked of inhuman savagery of each other. Both the parties brood over the rumors of atrocities compiled by the other parties. They had heard of gentle women having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place. They had heard of mosque being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on the premises, and of copies of the holy Koran being torn by infidels. (p. 141). Hukum Chand, the Deputy Commissioner recollects the blood-curdling incidents of the bestial cruelties led by partition. Sundari, his orderly's daughter had been married and hardly saw the face of her groom through her veil. Four days after the marriage, hundreds of people surrounded their bus. Few were hacked to death, others stripped and the mob chopped off her husband's private parts and made love to her and molested her brutally. Sunder Singh's case was different, they didn't kill his family but he killed them himself. Stranded for four days under the scorching heat on a wayside station stuffed with five hundred men and women he could not bear the agony of his children whom he could not provide even urine to drink. So he pulled out his revolver and shot them all. Harish Raizada points out, "Khushwant Singh's treatment of brutal atrocities committed on either side of the border is characterized by artistic objectivity and detachment. He exaggerates nothing, he leaves nothing. (p 166). The third section, "Mano Majra", takes the action to further a transformed and intensified level. It is built around the image of the village in transformation. There is a perceptible change in not only the appearance of the village, but also in its awareness of the human condition.

Train to Pakistan can be regarded as a record of the public opinion of people on the effects of partition. It is in a way a news documentary unparallel. Kushwanth Singh reflects the opinion of the peasants

who feel that it was "Mahatma Gandhi's government is in Delhi". He plays the role of a historiographer. "Yes, the English men have gone but the rich Indians have taken their place. What have you or your fellow villagers got out of Independence? More bread or more clothes? You are in the same hand cuffs and fetters which the English men put on you. We have to get together and rise. We have nothing to lose but these chains". (p. 76) He narrates how non-violence was discarded overnight; the voice of sanity was throttled and overtook the sense of balance on both sides with impunity. he interprets man and his worldly ways, psychologically portrays the process of thought as in the case of reformist Iqbal, bureaucrat Hukum Chand, Sikh priest Meet Singh, Muslim Mullah, the village Lambardar and many others. The emotional expressions of Nooran, who is pregnant and in deep love with Jugga, is forced out of Mano Majra to join her community heading for Pakistan along with Hukum Chand's Hassena, the young Muslim courtesan. Their frustration has been portrayed realistically.

In the words of Sanjib Kumar, "Partition was simply an imposed idea, the translation of which saw lakhs of people massacred and displaced". (p. 6) Partition resulted in the loss of homes, identities and finally faith in nationalism. Along with the atrocious tale of partition, murder and killings, Khushwant Singh depicts a message of love with the sacrifice of Jugga to save thousands of Muslims crossing the border along with Nooran. The technique of contrast is applied and the character of Jugga is elevated to heroic dimensions at the end of the novel. As V.A. Shahane writes that it is "The triumph of love, humanism, faith in the invite goodness of man in a moment of real crisis and challenge mark the central significance of the novel."(p. 352). The well sculpted structure, plot and narrative add richness of this classical partition novel. The seasonal setting, the symbolic significance of the trains, multiple aspects of reality and religious tension in the communities magnifies the novelty of the partition fiction. The characters are full of life, compounded of good and evil qualities and ultimately the triumph of good over evil. He depicts an account of violence, pain, agony and trauma along with the strength of narrative technique interspersed with trauma, humour, bribery, hypocrisy, unfair police bureaucratic functioning and administrative hierarchy. The narration makes the novel a classic. Kushwanth Singh provides an ideal back drop of everyday life of a common man to gain a wider audience and adhores generations of readers. He captures the mind of the reader with his highly imaginative construct build by competing cultures, emotions, and ideologies that made *Train to Pakistan* a heart rending story of partition.

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