

**DUPLEXITY AS AN IMPORTANT THEME IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S NOVEL
"TRAIN TO PAKISTAN"**

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Abstract

The 1947 Partition of India resulted in the creation of India and Pakistan. Partition in terms of religion caused mass migration with Hindu and Muslims and Sikhs moving to either side of the Indian subcontinent. It resulted in an identity crisis with millions of people forced to abandon their ancestral homes. Accompanied by political turmoil there followed events that rattled humanity and the two nations. Based on the occurrences Khushwant Singh formed his novel "Train to Pakistan" which narrates the poignant tales of the massacre and riots. An important factor that eventually is brought to notice is duplexity or dualism existing in various characters of the novel. Each behaves differently and responds unusually in tense situations. Their response doesn't align with their nature and henceforth leaves the audience shocked at the unusual turn of events. It takes the arrival of a ghost train to uncover the underlying prejudices present in various characters of the novel.

Keywords: Khushwant Singh, Partition, political turmoil, duplexity

An important aspect of Indian Independence was partition of India on August 1947 and the bloody affairs following it. "Train to Pakistan" reveals the horrors of Partition which drowned the two nations in an unimaginable state of violence and bloodshed. Hindus and Sikhs of Pakistan migrated to India and Muslims of India rushed towards Pakistan. The migration disrupted the daily lives of common people causing anxiety and leaving them traumatized and homeless. A tension was created between the Hindus and Muslims who constantly were at war with each other. Khushwant Singh remains successful in his effort of portraying a vivid image of the consequences of partition and its effect upon the people of both the nations. He describes each such minor event that triggered the peace-loving people to react indifferently. The religious places of worship ironically become the place where people gathered to seek blessings before they took up their weapons for mass killing. The author mocks the inhuman conduct but at the same time he maintains that all is not lost or in

other words love finds its way amidst such turmoil which brings out the prejudicial nature of humans and sacrifice which lies above such religious differences.

This macabre of Partition was well highlighted and its tragic experiences well expressed by several post-colonial authors like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and many others. Singh's novel instigated feelings of nationalism while spawning an unbalanced state of mind of being caught between the freedom from British imperialism and the newly found democratic nation.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is one such novel that portrays the horrors of the partition and the agony of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs on either side of India and Pakistan. Mano Majra is one such fictional village existing in the borders of India and Pakistan. The Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of the village lived in complete harmony with each other. Otherwise divided in terms of their places of worship they were united in-
"a three-foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keeker tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the deo to which all the villagers- Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or pseudo Christian-repair secretly whenever they are in a special need of blessing." (2-3)

The villagers remain engrossed in their daily gossips and chores and life here seems to be least affected till the arrival of the first ghost train from Pakistan carrying mutilated bodies of the Hindu refugees. It causes a disruption amongst the villagers who suddenly perceives the priority of the situation and silently becomes aware of the religious distinction that existed even though they lived in harmony with each other for years. The arrival and departure of the trains is not just used for determining time but rather the trains offer as the only link of the village with the other world and its strange happenings. Soon, the trains become a symbol of bloodshed, horror and misdeeds.

"The Sikhs retaliated by attacking a Muslim refugee train and sending it across the border with over a thousand corpses? They wrote on the engine "Gift to Pakistan!"" (21)

Amidst all such strange happenings we are introduced to an important character Iqbal whose appearance in *Mano Majra* was to create peace in this turmoil and political unrest. An Iqbal could be either a Hindu or a Muslim or a Sikh *"He could be a Muslim, Iqbal Muhammad...a Hindu, Iqbal Chand, or a Sikh, Iqbal Singh"*. His religion becomes an important concern for all and for a multiple number of times the status of his untold title is used against him and for him by the Magistrate. He is seen to be a man who cherishes being called babu and held is revered by the villagers because of his education. He seems to be socially unfit in this village of ignorant people who according to Iqbal fails to understand the need for independence from British colonialists. The unschooled lot of villagers on the other hand believes that freedom has changed nothing- *"We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians- or the Pakistanis."*(52) Iqbal who arrives at Mano Majra with the intention of impregnating the villagers with political ideals of communism fails repeatedly and is stupefied by their injudiciousness. According to Iqbal he has arrived to sacrifice himself for a greater purpose but however in his character we notice a duality. He is not the person he

claims himself to be. He desires to be jailed cause it would earn him reputation and he would be taken seriously. The author mocks his sacrifice repeatedly in the novel. He is presented as a satirical figure. Whatever he does, he does that as a means of flamboyance which makes him more of a Politician than a socialist. This trait of his though unnoticed by others was easily sighted by Hukum Chand.

Iqbal's mission of being arrested is fulfilled when two men in uniform is deployed to arrest him on the grounds of murder of Ram Lal. However, Iqbal has envisioned a different celebrated vision of his going to jail which would be viewed and be appreciated by the spectators. Sadly, here things take place differently and he is being handcuffed for a cause not so noble. All the dreams he has envisioned of being celebrated like Mahatma Gandhi and other freedom fighters were shattered. As a result, he is infuriated and babbles as he walks off to jail. Educated in London, Iqbal uses his rationality in situations to prove his empowerment or to save his skin. Likewise, towards the end we notice that when Iqbal was released from jail people of Mano Majra has planned an attack on the train carrying the Muslims of their own kin. Iqbal at first thinks of saving the situation by doing something heroic but at the same time realizes the futility of it; there would be no one to view his sacrifice and thereby he plans his escape.

"If only he could get out to Delhi and to civilization! He would report on his arrest; the party paper would footage the news with his photograph: ANGLO- AMERICAN CAPITALIST CONSPIRACY TO CREATE CHAOS (lovely alliteration). COMRADE IQBAL IMPRISONED ON BORDER. It would all go to make him a hero." (173)

Jugga is another character who exhibits a similar duality but of a different nature. Jugga or Juggut Singh known as "*Badmash*" by all was a popular figure of Mano Majra. Prominent for his misdeeds he ends up in jail periodically. Burdened by the ill reputation of being a part of Malli's gang; Jugga is escorted to jail under false charges of murder of Ram Lal. However, the audience is well informed previously that Jugga was a innocent victim who at the night of the murder was with Nooran: the daughter of the Muslim weaver Imam Baksh. Still, when interrogated about his whereabouts on the night of the murder Jugga remains silent in order to protect Nooran's honor and lands up to the jail ill-fatedly. Here, the two contrasting characters Iqbal and Jugga shares a common cell and Jugga soon engages himself in a discussion with the westernized man. People of Mano Majra has high esteem about the English. This was also noticed previously when Meet Singh declares that English officers are better than the native ones. They draw a comparison between the English and the natives just on the basis of the way they or their close agnates or cognates were treated by the former. *"My brother's colonel's memsahib still sends my niece things from London. You know, Lambardar Sahib, she even sent money at her wedding. What Indian officer's wives will do that?"*(51) Very much in the same way the natives held a similar conception when it came down to English women. This was reflected in Jugga's remark- *"The memsahibs are like houris from paradise- white and soft, like silk. All we have here are black buffaloes."*(113) It

was a trait of the uneducated villagers whose only concern was religion; they looked upon the English with wonder and appreciation and distinguished them from the natives. E.M. Forster notes in his novel *"A Passage To India"*:

"India like gods".

"And Englishmen like posing as gods" (53-54)

Towards the end of the story, we are left to draw our own conclusions and judge these characters, or perhaps no such judgement is possible within the political complexity of Partition. It's evident from Jugga's actions that the title *"Badmash"* didn't suit him and at the end driven by love for his beloved Nooran he sacrifices his life to protect the train off to Pakistan carrying the Muslims of Mano Majra and most importantly Nooran. Things didn't go as per planned as the unexpected takes place. The *Badmaash* becomes the hero and depicts that there exists humanism and love above religion while Iqbal the hero we perceive to be, turns out to be a coward and flees somewhere where he could flaunt his bravado.

Another duplexity exists at large amongst the villagers of Mano Majra. Even though they have existed for years and generations with each other in tranquility inspite of their religious differences, but nevertheless it took them a fraction of second to shift from being brothers to being the murderers of their own kin. The men are all set with spear to take down the Muslims in the train headed to Pakistan.

Hukum Chand, the district magistrate of Mano Majra also known as *"nar admi"* appears to be a man dismantled by the recent happenings around him. He consumes liquor and suffers from repeated anxiety attacks. As a protector of human rights, he does little and remains engaged with the prostitute Haseena who is nearly the age of his daughter. His mind is constantly at war with his conscience which keeps on reminding him that Haseena is just the age of his daughter had she survived. Nevertheless, having lost his own daughter who was raped on her wedding day, Hukum Chand loses his mind to things similar in nature and struggles all the while with it. He does little of his job and the novel focuses more on his life centered around his guilt, and his repeated efforts to absolve himself from his sins. At the end we find him release Iqbal and Jugga in all hopes to save the massacre which was about to take place.

Thus, the novel *Train to Pakistan* revolves around the effect of partition on people and the different approaches to it. Similar to Sadat Hasan Manto's *"Toba Tek Singh"* in terms of mental breakdown caused by post colonialism, or fate of women during partition era as evident in Manik Bandyopadhyay's *"Sarisrip"* the novel seems to cover all such pre dominant aspects of post-colonial political turmoil while emphasizing the duplexity that shaped characters of the people who were embedded in the period of violence. It remains as one of the most reputed works in the field of Partition literature.

Works Cited

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