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TRAIN TO PAKISTAN: THE THEME OF PARTITION

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ABSTRACT:

No Indo-English writer of fiction has ever taken up the traumatic issue of India's partition and dealt with it so vividly and lucidly as Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan*.

The semiotics in the novel transforms it into a collective symbol of pain and anguish that has remained as a disturbing factor in the psyche of sub-continent. Critics K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri comments:

It is indeed surprising that partition, unfathomably tragic and momentous event, has not stirred the creative imagination and urge of many Indian English writers; not only a few novelists have treated it seriously, but what is more surprising is that none of the foremost fictionists-Mulk Raj Ananad, R.K Narayan, Raja Ram and Bhabani Bhattacharya-has concentrated upon it in any of his novels. In this regard, the western writers presents a contrast to the Indian who seem to have been too dazed to treat recent history, in detail, in their works.

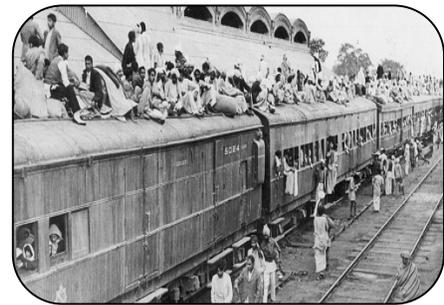
*The theme of partition was in later novels tried successfully by Chaman Nahla in his work *Azadi*(1975) and by ManhorMalgonkar in *A Bend of Gangas* (1964) which are, however. *Studies in violence in the wake freedom, questioning the efficacy of non-violence in the post-independence period**

KEYWORDS : Partition ,tragedy , Freedom, Violence , exploiting, destination, amid excitement, agony, fear, loot, rape and turmoil.

INTRODUCTION:

Khushwant Singh has handled the partition theme deftly, exploiting it both intellectually and emotionally. He has not questioned partition directly, but indirectly has criticized it severally.

In the opening para of *Train to Pakistan*, Singh has taken a cover of the weather, the summer of 1947, which preceded the date of partition, August 15, 1947, which is the date and great day of India's *Independence*, to tell that in effect of the partition signifies cutting one great nation into two halves, accentuating tension in every home and hearth and exploding into bloody riots, turning one-time



friends into permanent foes, men into beasts, seeking blood of their own kith and kin on both sides of the newly-created Indo-Pak border.

The Indian, specially Hindu, perception of misery and natural calamities is one of the punishment to the people of their sins in their earlier life. Relying on this perception, Khushwant Singh develops the narrative on the weather of the year of partition being 'different' the summer 1947 being 'hotter than usual and drier and duster.....was longer. There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins."

Partition then had not taken place. There were only reports of the proposed division of the country into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan and riots had broken out in Calcutta and within a few months the death roll had mounted to several thousand. Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killings. According to Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.

It was then simply a proposal of partition being hotly discussed between the Congress and the Muslim League with Mahatma Gandhi opposing it tooth and nail and Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his ilk supporting it vehemently. While the partition issue was being fought intellectually with arguments for and against by opposing and supporting groups among the Hindus and the Muslims, the Calcutta riots had spread to Noakhali (now in Bangladesh, earlier in East Bengal and later East Pakistan) where "Muslims massacred Hindus and Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of the Muslims killed in Bihar.

The fractured Independence that India attained does not appear to have carried any appeal to the people in the countryside. It would be interesting to look in to what a village Lambardar and a Muslim in the village have to comment on the issue of freedom to Iqbal Singh, a social reformer, who poses a question before them:

Why, don't you people want to be free? Do you want to remain slaves all your lives?

After a long silence the Lambardar answers:
Freedom must be a good thing. But what we will get out of it? Educated people like you. Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes?
No, the Muslim said, Freedom is for the educated People who fought for it. We were slaves of English, Now we will be slaves of the Educated Indians.....or The Pakistan.

This analysis is indeed starting, but the circumstances created by partition it is more than pragmatic as the affected people instead of getting more land or buffaloes lost whatever land and cattle they owned and had to flee or be forcibly transported to their new destinations.

To a question from Iqbal Singh to the Lambardar as to what is going to happen now, the Lambardar answers with some heat,

We know what is happening. The winds of the destruction are blowing across the land. All we hear is kill. The only one who enjoy freedom are thieves,

robbers and cut-throats.

This statement confirms in full what independence through partition meant to the people at large in the countryside and urban centers, and the desperation of the lambardar, who does not value this freedom, is explained in his following statement.

We were better off under the British.
At least there was security.

Partition was, in fact, a parting of ways of life, manners, attitudes a final break with each other, long-held friendship turning into permanent enmity, each one thirsty for the blood of the other.

The ghost train that reaches the Mano Majra railway station is the first cause of worry which is accentuated by collection of kerosene oil and firewood from each of the village inhabitants through the village lambardar, Banta Singh on the order of the police for burning the bodies which the train brought from Pakistan. But though suspicious, the villagers want to be reassured as to what exactly had happened.

The villagers were impatient, "what the lambardar
Because of his proximity with the police." They
ask:

O lambardara, why don't you tell us something?
What is all this big secret you are carrying about?
You seem to think you have become someone very
Important and don't need to talk to us any more....
This was said by Meet Singh angrily.

The poor lambardar replies:
No, Bhai, no. If I know why would I not tell you?
You talk like children. How can I argue with soldiers
and policeman? And didn't you see how that pig's
penis spoke to Chacha? (Imam Bakshi). One's self
respect is on one's own hands. Why should I have
myself insulted by having my turban taken off?

The depiction of the mood of the villagers even at this point is the affirmation of composite culture of the village and shows no signs of the animosity, creating a Hindu-Muslim divide and, in fact, the villagers are agitated at the insult heaped upon Chacha Imam Bakshi by an officer collecting k-oil and firewood from them on his query whether everything was all right.

And what a the villagers saw a little later:
The sun sank behind the bridge, lighting the white
clouds which had appeared in the sky with hues of
russet, copper and orange. Then shades of grey
blended with the gold as evening gave way to
twilight and twilight sank into darkness. The station
became black wall. Warily, the men and women
went down to their courtyards, beckoning the others
to do the same. They did not want to be alone in
missing anything.

The partition took place on August 15, 1947 and there was commotion across the country. But villages like Mano Majra largely remained peaceful, except for gossiping and information about brutalities trickling. But early in September the tempest of partition made difference to such villages as well.

Khushwant Singh makes a pointed and telling reference to the changing scenario:

Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains become less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seemed as though the alarm clock had been set for wrong hour. On other, it was as if no one had remembered to wind it. Imam Bakshi waited for Meet Singh to make the first start. Meet Singh waited for the Mullah's call to prayer before getting up. Children did not know when to be hungry.....everyone was indoors before the sunset and in bed before the express come by... goods trains had stopped running altogether, so there was no lullaby to lull them to sleep. Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours, between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dream of Mano Majra.

The uneasy time for Mano Majra inhabitants started when a "train from Pakistan halted at Mano Majra railway station, one morning....There was something uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality."

The arrival of the ghost train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Majra. People stayed on their roofs to see what was happening at the station. All they could see was the black top of the train stretching from one end of the platform to the other.....occasionally, a soldier or police man came out of the station and went inside again.

The title, *Train to Pakistan*, is very suggestive. It symbolizes partition having taken effect, movement of the people from India to newly created Pakistan and vice-versa, leaving their centuries of habitation for a new destination, amid excitement, agony, fear, loot, rape and turmoil.

The train to Pakistan went to Pakistan safely, thanks to the supreme sacrifice by gallant Sikh, a lifetime criminal, who in his deep love for Nooran, his beloved, who, too, was in the train along with her folk heading for Pakistan, turns a martyr.

The expression:

"The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan", a concluding sentence of the novel, is Very suggestive, poignant and meaningful too.

The novelist ironically brings out the fact that while trains to Pakistan were getting a safe passage from India trains from Pakistan were adding fuel to the raging fire. It is the trains from Pakistan were coming in crammed with slain bodies creating commotion in Mano Majra. Till the dreaded trains came in, the life in Mano Majra had been very peaceful and all communities lived there as members of family.

Commenting on the novel, Train to Pakistan William Walsh says:

It is a tense economical novel, thoroughly true to the events and the people. It goes forward in a trim, athletic way, and its unemphatic voice makes a genuinely human comment.

K.R.S. Iyenger echoes the views of Shahane says:
The simple uncalculating love for a women asserts
itself, adverting the catastrophe.

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