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CULTURAL CONFLICT IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

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Abstract:-

Train to Asian nation may be a impressive novel wherever Khushwant Singh tells the tragic tale of the partition of Asian nation and Asian nation and also the events that followed which is able to be remembered as one of the blackest chapters of human history. simply on the eve of independence Asian nation was partitioned inflicting an excellent upheaval within the whole continent. Independence brought in its wake one of the bloodiest carnages within the history of Asian nation. The issue of this was that twelve million people had to escape feat their home; nearly [*fr1] 1,000,000 were killed. Thus, thousands fled from either side of the border seeking refuge and security. The natives were uprooted and it had been certainly a ghastly expertise for them to grant up their belongings and rush to a land that was not theirs .The agonising and spine chilling events of 1947 had jolted the religion of the individuals in the innate people at large. It had driven them into a state of marvel over what man has fabricated from man. To Khushwant Singh, this was a amount of nice edification and crisis of values, a distressing and disintegrating amount of his life. the assumption he had cherished all his life were shattered

Keywords: Cultural Conflict , Khushwant Singh, Pakistan and Independence

INTRODUCTION

It expresses the creativity asto how the movement of trains, signaling time for action, rest and sleep, becomes a symbol of despair, darknessand destruction. This contrast is very suggestive.

The novel portrays the picture of the prevailing atmosphere of hatred and newly generated distrust between Hindus and Muslims at the time of partition. To depict this hatred, Khushwant Singh criticizes both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists and establishes that a man is basically animal in a frenzied mob; he writes "Mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Provinces with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims in Bihar". He does not spare Hindus and Sikhs alike for their role in violence scene; he narrates the story of our Sikh Sardars on a killing spree in a jeep alongside the column of mile-long Muslim refugees on foot and writes "Without warning they opened fire with their Stan guns. God alone knows how many they killed....3".

Commenting on this novel Sharma and Johari opine: "Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan pictures the brutal,realistic story of political hatred and of mass passion during the tragic days that preceded and followed the partition of India. Trains were halted and the unfortunate passengers were ruthlessly butchered. Men, women and children were indiscriminate victims of mad communal frenzy: they were molested and killed by armed bands of men. The novel depicts the fateful journey of one such train vividly and powerfully."4 The Train to Pakistan is not only a depiction of violence, pain, agony and trauma of partition but also has the strength of narrative technique interspersed with trauma, sex, humour, bribery, hypocrisy, drunkenness, unfair police and bureaucratic functioning

etc.

The novel reflects the conflict of cultures and ethnic violence. It is based on the trauma and tragedy of the historic partition of India in August 1947. It is really 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 fact is highlighted in the following words:

(Singh 1956, 1)

His focus shifts to the other associated issues at the time of partition. Talking about the treatment of the subject by Khushwant Singh, Bhatnagar says:

Khushwant Singh was the first Indian novelist in English to write about the horror and holocaust of partition with great artistic concern in Train to Pakistan. It is not partition but what it gets associated with and what it becomes symbolic of that attracts the attention of the writer. (Bhatnagar 152)

It mainly focuses on the consequences of partition, avoiding the graphic presentation of the horrific events. Roy also talking in the similar manner about the novel says:

... in Train to Pakistan, the violence that erupted at the time of the partition is represented in a very unusual way. There is no detailed description in the novel of the train journey undertaken by the refugees-in terms of neither the practical difficulties faced nor the dangers involved. More importantly, we are also not shown the violence happening: for there is not even a reported description of the incidents in the novel. We are just informed about the end result of the violence: the trainloads of corpses that arrive at Mano Majra. What is detailed by Khushwant Singh is the after math of the violence... (Roy 36)

On the surface, the novel describes how suddenly everything changed and made people react in very unusual ways. Commenting upon the major themes of the novel, Rao and Rani say:

Train to Pakistan is the touching tale of a village, Mano Majra, struck down by the hate and the violence that came with the division of the subcontinent when a train-load of massacred men, women and children arrive in the village. It reveals with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border during the days of 1947. The predominant features of the novel are its stark realism, its absolute fidelity to the truth, and above all, its trenchant exposure of the partition horrors. (Rao & Rani 32-33)

In the novel we see that initially the general atmosphere was peaceful and people did not as such mind the presence of people belonging to different religions. Mano Majra remains unaffected as the sub-inspector of police says: "No communal trouble in the area?"... "We have escaped it so far, sir" (Singh 20). They never forgot the fact that they had been living together for years and a momentary decision should not be strong enough to break those bonds. Even after the communal tension envelops most of the regions, Mano Majra manages to maintain the peace and tolerance in spite of the heterogeneity of the village:

(Singh 1)

But then after sometime, an act of dacoity in the village causes a lot of tension. Later on, the arrival of "ghost train" from Pakistan spoils everything and the killings begin there also. In the changed situations, the inhabitants of Mano Majra, both Hindus and Muslims, become victims of the changed situations. They think of one another not as individuals but mere religious beings; a serious threat to their own security and religion. But in total contrast to such people, Khushwant Singh has used the character of Juggut Singh to highlight the importance of love in saving humanity and compassion. His relationship with Nooran, who is a Muslim girl, hints at the futility of the differences and enmity on the religious basis. His love for her makes him go against his own people who were trying to kill innocents. It was his love which makes him sacrifice his life for the people who consider him a criminal.

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.

Meet Singh is another character who is very much against the Christian morality. They have exchanges of their wives and they dance and drink in the clubs. These are very much against Hindu and Muslim codes of conduct. With varied forms of lifestyle, food habits, social customs and religious stands of different races the village is full of confusions and confrontations. So just after the partition it is difficult to hold communal harmony. Killing, stealing, robbing and raping of women have become common incidents. The entire village is socially disrupted, religiously disjointed and culturally dislocated.

There is another reference to communal frenzy. Muslims hate Hindus and Hindus hate Muslims. This feeling has just started from the day of partition. Another sense of strong ethnic conflict is felt in the difference of feeling between the Sikh and the Gurkha. One horrendous scene of butchery and massacring is presented by the novelist:

The other day four Sikh Sardars in a jeep drove alongside a mile long column of Muslim refugees walking on the road. Without warning they opened fire with their sten guns. Four sten guns! God alone knows how many they killed. (73)

There is also a reference to religious fanaticism of the Muslims and the Sikh. This is sounded in the invocation to God, "Yah Allah. Wah Guru, Wah Guru" (84). Meet Singh addresses Wah Guru, Wah Guru in his invocation while Imam addresses Yah Allah, Yah Allah. But no one interferes with another. This is the reflection of cultural contact which is also the basis for cultural combat.

In the chapter "Mano Majra", the climax of the story, it is revealed that the train has reached full of corpses. To see this, the people present in the station feel hopeless and helpless. And this dreadful scene is described as: *When it was discovered that the train had brought a full load of corpses, a heavy brooding silence descended on the village. People barricaded their doors and many stayed up night talking in whispers. (124)*

Hindus and Sikhs are fleeing from their homes in Pakistan to shelter in Mano Majra. Now a train load of Sikhs massacred by Muslims has been cremated in Mano Majra. This is the clear example of cultural confrontation. When the train arrived at the Mano Majra station, the Sikhs asked one of the villagers to fetch the Lambardar. Within a few minutes the village is echoed:

All Muslims going to Pakistan come out at once. Come! All Muslims. Out at once. (141)

The above incident shows that the people belonging to all communities are terribly afraid of each other's culture. When the Muslims come out of their homes with their luggage to go to Pakistan, the rest of the people in the village come out to see them off. Their parting becomes painful to both the communities. Though they are ethnically different now, but still their common culture before Partition 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. Most of the emotions of ethnic conflict and cultural differences dealt with in this novel have been expressed in the novelist's volumes of A History of the Sikhs (1963). The concluding part of the novel captioned KARMA, presents a realistic picture of communal riot and its result. Both Sikh soldiers and Muslim Pathan soldiers loiter on the platform engaging themselves in the official purposes.

In her book The Twice-Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of Indian Novels in English (1972), Meenakshi Mukherjee expresses that sentimentalism is an important factor in communal riot. This arouses violence. Simultaneously political interference is another factor leading to communal disruption. This is glaring example in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines (1989).

In *Train to Pakistan* communalism may be the stepping stone but Hindu-Muslim feeling is the focal point. Sikhism is absolutely hostile to Muslim. There is frequent reference to antagonism between Sikhs and Muslims. Both the communities of Sikhs and Muslims go on looting, thieving, robbing and murdering each other. Both the races are at daggers drawn.

Thus Novelist portrays the ethnic identity and harmony in Indian society being interrupted by communal conflict and ethnic violence. The entire story is woven round the communal riot between Hindus (including Sikhs) and Muslims. The novelist has elaborately discussed the difference in the concepts of religion in general and Sikh, Muslim, Hinduistic belief and Christianity in particular. Basically the story is developed on the communal clash between Sikh and Muslim in the wake of partition. Setting all these cultural conflicts and ethnic violence as glaring examples of devastating mankind and the world, Khushwant Singh probably wants to suggest eradication of such evil things at the cost of love and understanding within humanity.

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