

Triumph of Human Spirit in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan

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Date of Submission: 30-08-2020

Date of Acceptance: 08-09-2020

ABSTRACT: "Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark"-Tagore it is widely acknowledged fact that literature is a reflection of the society. It is the embodiment of all dimensions of human beings. And it also gives solutions to the problems that is forced by human beings. It is the vehicle for all human beings to develop the humanistic values. According to Oxford Dictionary humanism is a system of thought that consider that solving human problems with the help of reason is more important than religious life. All the humanists agree that people are the centers of their study. Humanism is the central motive behind all writings in Indian fiction. And the aim of this research paper is, to focuses on the humanistic values and its importance, in the novel Train to Pakistan written by Khushwant Singh. Khushwant Singh is an outstanding Indian English writer of human predicament. And he is widely known for his 1956 novel Train to Pakistan which is basically a partition novel dealing with humanism. During the partition of India in 1947, Hindus and Sikhs were made to move to India, and Muslims were forced into Pakistan, regardless of family history. Some families were displaced after many generations of living in one place or the other. The present study has been taken out with the main objective of exploring how human values helps a person to identify the distinguish between right and wrong. And this research article is an attempt to present the triumph of human spirit over the communal violence, the uncompromising prejudices existing between Hindus and Muslims.

Key words: humanism, communalism, partition, Hindus Muslims, prejudices.

INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh's name is bound to go down in Indian literary history as one of the finest historians and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observer and social critic. In July 2000, he was conferred the "Honest Man of the Year Award" by The Sulabh

International Social Service Organization for his courage and honesty in his "brilliant incisive writing". At the award ceremony, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh described him as a "humorous writer and incorrigible believer in human goodness with a devil-may-care attitude and a courageous mind". The Indian External Affairs Minister said that the secret of Khushwant Singh's success lay in his learning and discipline behind the "vener of superficiality".

Among the several works he published are a classic two-volume history of the Sikhs, several novels (the best known of which are Delhi, Train to Pakistan, and The Company of Women), and a number of translations and non-fiction books on Delhi, nature and current affairs. The Library of Congress has ninety-nine works on and by Khushwant Singh. His novels provide an Indian response, although a critical response, to the challenges of our time. Train to Pakistan is one of his best novels published in 1956. It recounts the partition of India in August 1947 through the perspective of Mano Majra, a fictional village. Train to Pakistan brought him recognition and wide acclaim. The novel won for him the Coveted Grove Press India Fiction Prize for the year 1956. This book is a highly acclaimed novel describing the tumultuous birth of Pakistan. The partition resulted in the Hindu- Muslim migration, and as the very large numbers moved, communal riots broke, property was burnt and looted, families were disrupted, millions were killed.

As a prolific, controversial and innovative writer Khushwant Singh has emerged a significant literary personality in post-colonial Indian English literature. He is always a distinguished writer with his writing about Indian manner, cultures, traditions, religious practices and many other aspects of the Indian society. He is a novelist of common people and common situations. Plots are built of material and incidents that are neither extraordinary nor heroic. He is said to have explored and highlighted the malfunction of the

social system without prejudice. For him, storytelling is deeply concerned with establishing a sense of community of people completely involved in each-other. He wrote with complete objectivity, with a strange mixture of beauty and sadness. Singh's works portrays middle-class characters, their sufferings, miserable conditions with the everyday reality of human life.

A study of his works shows that he is a writer of humanism with harsh social reality. According to Collins (2014) humanism is "the rejection of religion in favor of advancement of humanity by its own efforts". Humanism is always a victory for the total human understandings, feelings and values. Humanism implies devotion to the concern of mankind; it is an attitude of mind that concentrates upon the activities of man rather the world of nature or the so-called animal kingdom. It is a system of thought that rejects religious beliefs and centers on humans and their values, capacities and worth.

Literature plays a significant role in India's freedom struggle. With the passage of time, literature strengthened the growing idealism of people. But it also did something more. Besides inspiring people to make all kinds of sacrifices of country's liberalism, literature also portrays the harsh reality of that time, the sufferings, the miseries, the pains and problems of the people. During the struggle and aftermath of independence a number of Indian English novelists highlighted the struggle and the tragedy of partition in their works. Like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Tamas by Bhisham Sahani and a number of others deal partition as a main theme. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is the first comprehensive treatment of the partition in Indian literature in English, portrays the impact of the partition on a village community. Though Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is mainly concerned with the theme of partition but it strikes a strong note of humanism also. It demonstrates how love transcends communal prejudice and hatred. *Train to Pakistan* portrays a picture of social, political, emotional angles that existed at that time. It shows the religious and social differences between the Sikhs and the Muslims in an effective way. The novel begins with a reference to the summer of 1947 which was noted for its scorching heat and aimlessness and foreboding of ill omen;

"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.1)

The story of the book takes place during the partition in 1947 in a small border village Mano Majra situated close to the Sutlej River, one of the largest River in Punjab. Mano Majra is not of much significance, though both Hindus and Muslims were stabbing, spearing, clubbing each-other, when the division occurred. But here in this insignificant village, suddenly things change. The situations of the country deteriorated miserably in the wake of the partition. There were killings and rapes. The merciless killing of the Sikhs did not remain unconcerned. The Hindus and the Sikhs who have had lived for centuries were made into abandon their homes and flee towards the Sikhs and Hindu communities in the east. Some families were displaced after many generations of living one place or the other. Khushwant Singh vividly describes the tragic scene;

"By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people- Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs- were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of the northern Indian was in arms, in terror or in hiding". (2)

In this frenzy of chaos and violence is Mano Majra, one of the last remaining peaceful villages on the frontier. Mano Majra is a tiny place, it has only seventy families and Lala Ram Lal's is the only Hindu family, the others are Sikhs and Muslims. The novel begins with the murder of the moneylender Lala Ram Lal. A dacoit named Malli and his gang of robbers are the ones who kill Lala Ram Lal, but the inept police wrongly arrested two men Juggut 'Jugga' Singh and Iqbal Singh for this murder. Jugga, a local badmash who has a bad reputation but a good heart. He is in love with a Muslim girl Nooran, the daughter of a village Imam and a bitter enemy of Malli. Iqbal Singh is a social worker from Delhi who comes to Mano Majra in hopes of inspiring the locals to take political action in the new India, but he instead gets caught up in the confusion and violence of the frontier.

One morning, a 'ghost train' from Pakistan arrives in Mano Majra. There was something uneasy about it. The villagers don't know the train is full of dead Hindus and Sikhs until the police and military burn the bodies:

"The arrival of the ghost train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Majra. People stood on their roofs to see what was happening at the station". (82)

Hukum Chand, the magistrate and deputy commissioner of Mano Majra arrives at the station and gives the instructions to the inspector to be careful not to allow anybody to visit here. Through his character Khushwant Singh shows how much maligned Indian bureaucracy was itself caught between the hatred of a people and the bungling of politicians. It is interesting to hear from Hukum Chand more about he looked at partition and its impact. He was for getting the Muslims to go out peacefully if possible. He tells the inspector to contact the local Muslim refugee camp and arrange for the evacuation of the Mano Majra Muslims. Malli and his gang are hauled in, but as a part of Hukum Chand's plan to convince Mano Majra to evacuate its Muslims villagers, they are soon released. They are taken to the Sikh temple in the village, and stand by as the head constable implicates Iqbal and a group of Muslim dacoits in Lala Ram Lal's murder. After sending these ripples through the town. The head constable finishes by announcing that all Muslims in Mano Majra will be taken to a local refugee camp. These announcements, coupled with the arrival of the ghost train, split Mano Majra in half. Before the migration from Mano Majra, Khushwant Singh describes the pathetic condition of the villagers- "not many people slept in Mano Majra that night. They went from house to house- talking, crying, and swearing love and friendship, assuring each-other that this would soon be over..." (132). Muslims and Sikhs begin to look at one another suspiciously who have lived together from centuries yet feelings of brotherhood have not disappeared "Sikhs and Muslim villagers fell into each-other arms and wept like children" (135).

The next morning Imam tells Nooran they must leave. Nooran, who is with Jugga's child, visits to his house, talks to Jugga's mother and reveals that she is pregnant with Jugga's baby. But she is compelled to go to the refugee camp. Jugga's mother calms her down, and convince her that Jugga will find her wherever she is. At night the atmosphere in Mano Majra is grim, when Jugga and Iqbal reach Mano Majra, Jugga disappears to look for Nooran, hoping that she is waited for him in the woods. But very soon he finds that Nooran has been taken to the refugee camp and that she would be travelling on the train to Pakistan. He also comes to know the plan of the Hindu fanatics to blow up the train with dynamite as it passed the raid road bridge to Mano Majra.

A little after 11.00 p.m. men spread themselves out on both sides of the train tracks. They hear the train coming. 'A big man' climbs the steel span of the bridge; it is Jugga, though no one

recognize him. Jugga pulls out a small knife and slashes at the rope. The Hindu leader fires at him. Jugga clings it to the rope with his teeth and finally cut it to pieces. He saved his beloved as well as other Muslims but the engine of the coming train was almost on him. And the train goes over his body and went to Pakistan.

Khushwant Singh feels that liberal outlook with a pacifying approach and respect for one-another's beliefs, mutual trust and sharing of pleasure and pains can help in overcoming the man-made separation where individual will be treated as a human being not as a Hindu or Muslim. And through the character of Jugga, Khushwant Singh gave a great example of this love and humanity. Where Jugga sacrifices his life to save his neighbors and lovers. Jugga's action and his ability to single-handedly save the Mano Majra's Muslims is a proof that Iqbal's belief about sacrifices are wrong. Jugga's love for Nooran and his loyalty to his neighbors overpowers his own sense of self-preservation. Though Jugga dies without anyone knowing his sacrifice, it does have a purpose, and it has reverberating effects beyond Jugga's himself. For most of the novel and his life, Jugga is a dacoit in the eyes of his family, friends and neighbors. But he has in him enough of humanism, love and affection. Whatever he did, is free from religion, narrow-mindedness, it is his own choice, not imposed by anyone. However, the promising points which the novel offers are partition, sacrifice, love, humanism etc. it shows the victory of humanism or humanity over hatred and religious fanatic. And it is the human values which shapes the destiny of a man and it should be realized that these values are the best instrument to create the social harmony. As Gandhi ji said;

"There is only one cast, the cast of humanity and There is only one religion, the religion of love".

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