

Violence as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in “A Train to Pakistan”

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Abstract: *The critical analyses of the various representations of the partition violence attempted in the preceding section clearly reveal in the obsessive nature of the event of vivisection of India in 1947. The event and the concomitant unprecedented carnage witnessed by the subcontinent came as a shockingly ironic reward of the united fight for freedom. The partition fiction, therefore, is a brutally realistic account of the blood curdling violence.*

However, it would be injudicious to infer that the partition novels considered in the study are mere stories of the harrowing incidents of violence. Instead, they are, in essence, discerning insights into the complex human nature. What Harish Raizada observes of Khushwant Singh is equally true of all other Indo-English novelists whose fiction has treated the holocaust of partition, Rajada writes that Khushwant Singh turned to fiction “to let out his disenchantment with the long-cherished human values in the wake of inhuman bestial horrors and insane savage killings on both sides during the partition of the sub-continent between India and Pakistan in August 1947....”¹

INTRODUCTION

What Raizada seeks to emphasize is the understanding that partition writers have made serious artistic endeavour to expose human character which is overlaid by all kinds of superficial embellishments. If Khushwant Singh in **Train to Pakistan** unmasks the sordidness and savagery of human life, Manohar Malgonkar in **A Bend in the Ganges** exposes petty selfishness and hypocrisy of man in crisis. So is also the true essence of other novels like Chaman Nahal's **Azadi**, Raj Gill's **The Rape**, H. S. Gill's **The Ashes and Petals**, and Attia Hosain's **Sunlight on Broken Column**.

Train to Pakistan exclusively deals with the aftermath of partition. The story shows the religious and social differences between the Sikhs and the Muslims in an effective way. It severely criticises the attitude of the Hindu and Muslim political leaders that led to this tragic blood bath. Nehru's attitude towards the partition is severely attacked. The novel displays remarkable impartiality towards the warring communities. While reflecting on his “compulsion to write”, Khushwant Singh makes a very revealing observation that underlines that highly emotional, yet self-conscious constitution of his historical consciousness in the context of partition:

I had two books in my system which I wanted to get out. One was on the partition; the other on my community. The partition theme was born out of a sense of guilt that I had done nothing to save the lives of innocent people and had

behaved like a coward. Writing on the Sikhs was a calculated move.²

As is apparent from the above statement, the creative revisiting of the partition space in Khushwant Singh was motivated by the cathartic need of his disturbed psyche to relive the phenomena heroically. This explains his sympathetic portrayal and an overt identification with Jagga, whose action, as various critics agree,³ symbolise the heroic redemption of human values. Through him the author writes himself in this novel. The sense of guilt, in addition to encapsulating his sense of helplessness at the loss of human innocence and his identification with the human misery, also suggests the purging of the guilt through correct remembrance. All these factors: a sense of identification with human misery that was a part of his lived experience (what he calls my system; the confession of the guilt at his cowardice); and novel or creation as a site to purge that guilt of heroically betray a highly affective nature of his hysterical understanding. When coupled with his implied need for correct remembrance, this historical consciousness makes **Train to Pakistan** very self-conscious cathartic enterprise. The very conception of plot and characters, coupled with the general drift of their narrative tenors, in this novel, carries the impress of this consciousness.

Train to Pakistan is a conscious retrieval of the ‘syncretic’ truth of Indian history. Taking Mano Majra as a case-study of India in “microcosm”⁴ in the aftermath of partition, the writer shows how this syncretism inherent in the rural

socio-cultural space was vitiated by the forces that were essentially alien to its basic ethos. He identifies communalism as a malaise responsible for the ultimate breakdown of human values in Mano Majra, but very subtly insinuates its existence to the colonial institutions and system imperatives and not in Mano Majra history. This way he not only denies the validity of two-nation theory, but is also able to demonstrate communalism as a "false consciousness"⁵ leading to an insensate but temporary blood-orgy.

CONCLUSION:

Khushwant Singh's magnum opus *Train to Pakistan* is a historical novel. It is concerned with partition and it entertains all the essential ingredients of an excellent literary work. There is an interesting fusion of sex, humour, pain, agony and violence in this novel. An atmosphere of hate, violence, and religious bitterness was created among the different communities of India as a result of this unfortunate incident. Khushwant Singh has successfully depicted Sikh-Muslim antagonism. The novel does not pay concern to the chronological sequence in synthesizing the reality on a particular historical context. The novel becomes symbolic with the movement of trains. The scheduled movement of train signaling time for action, rest and sleep, becomes a symbol of despair, darkness, and destruction prevailing in India during the time of partition. The novel portrays the picture of the prevailing atmosphere of hatred and newly generated distrust among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs as a consequence. To portray the dilemma, Khushwant Singh criticizes both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists and establishes that man is basically animal in a frenzied mob. He highlights the destined journey of one vividly and powerfully. 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.

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