

Various Representations of Partition

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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, Raizada 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

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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.

One of the predominant qualities of **Train to Pakistan** is its stark realism, its absolute fidelity to the truth of life, its trenchant exposition of one of the most moving, even tragic, events of contemporary Indian history, the partition. It is also marked by its special naturalistic mores. The individual in Khushwant Singh’s fictional world is silhouetted against this vast, panoramic background, the great human catastrophe of the partition of India and the ghastly and inhuman events which followed it. Khushwant Singh’s art is revealed in not merely probing deep into the real but in transposing the actual into symbol and image. This art of realistic portrayal cannot be described merely as an exercise in the bookkeeping of existence; in effect, it is a creative endeavour of transcending the actual, asserting the value and- dignity of the individual, and finally, of expressing the tragic splendour of a man’s sacrifice for a woman of the ‘other’ religious community.

On the eve of the partition of the Indian subcontinent, millions of people from either side of the dividing boundary were on the way to seeking refuge and security. Millions of non-Muslims from Pakistan longed for a passage to India, a land of hope and peace, whereas millions of Muslims from India sought the road to Pakistan, the land of Islamic faith and promise. The train implies the movement of vast communities torn from their roots and areas of traditional growth to a new ‘Jerusalem.’ It indicates the harrowing processes of the change, the awful and ghastly experience of human beings involved in a historical, impersonal, and dehumanized process. The train suggests the fate of individuals, the destinies of the two newly formed nations, consequent upon a political decision, and the miseries, sufferings and privations which issue from it. The realization is paramount that the modern mechanistic, materialistic age has caused several destruction of humanistic values. The age of machines has led to a constantly increasing degree of dehumanization. Man divorced from nature and God, feels rootless, and alienated.

However, under this all too obvious representation of the trauma of partition and the resultant spate of violent carnage is revealed Khushwant Singh’s disenchantment with the intrinsic nobility of man. The

cultural heritage of a writer like Khushwant Singh had instilled into him an assuring belief in the inherent goodness man, but the reality of the situation proved matters otherwise. This brought about disillusionment and crisis of values in his life. He himself expressed his distressing inner conflict during that period of discontentment thus:

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country ... I had believed that we Indians were more concerned with matters of the spirit, while the rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. After the experience of the autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe to these views...⁶

It is this painful experience about the truth of human existence that is projected on to his novel as his reflections on human nature in crisis. Raizada aptly notes this fact when says: “Everything in his life upto this point qualified him for creating just this sort of book.”⁷

In **Train to Pakistan**, Khushwant Singh conceives of the communal discord as a moment of deviance, brutal darkness and sin. For him, it is a manifestation of *Kaliuga*. The ambience that incorporates this in the narrative is an accumulation of nocturnal activities, ghostly descriptions, animal images and natural calamity. He creates a heady and a relentless mixture of symbolic overtones and naturalistic details to capture the sense of both psychological and moral dislocation inherent in the event. The “ghostly train” (TTP, 94) carrying murdered and mutilated corpses, the “red tongues of flames leaping into black sky... [and] faint acrid smell of searing flesh “of the mass cremation that stills *Mano Majra* “ in a deathly silence”, (TTP,100) and “aroused an uneasy feelings” (TTP,97) in them, graphically builds up the moment of anomie. But the tone underlying the sub-text of the imagery also belies the author’s sense of outrage and resignation. And this is felt predominantly at the gut level. In a short, it throws him overboard in his balanced analysis of the situation, He is so carried away by the momentum of his own creation, i.e, the atmosphere he seeks to evoke, that it becomes an angry and melodramatic obsession with him. The anger seems to spill over into the next scene where he closes in on the mood of Hukam Chand through the symbolism of “geckos darting across from the wall” trying to get [the moth] fluttering between its little crocodile jaws”(TTP, 103).

Consequently, an unconscious slant tends to creep in his dramatization of the horror and its impact on the *Mono Majrians*. The pain of the whole humanity (the representation of which obviously is avowed motive of **Train to Pakistan** is, ironically, substituted by that

of a particular one, This is apparent in the following authorial observation within the same episode: "No one asked anyone else what the odour was. They all knew, they had known all the time. The answer was implicit in the fact that the train had come from Pakistan." (TTP,100)

This observation obviously associates the evil with the train and the train with Pakistan. It is this train from Pakistan that triggers the later events in the novel. Yet another train, once again from Pakistan, caps the communal divide. One again, the images building up the atmosphere are steeped in anger:

There was no doubt in anyone's mind what the train contained. They were sure that the soldiers would come for oil and wood. They had no more oil to spare and the wood they had left was too damp to burn. But the soldiers did not come. Instead a bulldozer arrived from somewhere. It began dragging its jaw into the ground just outside the station on the Mano Majra side. It went along, eating up the earth, chewing it, casting it aside. It did this for several hours, until there was a rectangular trench almost fifty yards long with mounds of earth on either side. Then it paused for a break... Then the bulldozer woke up again. It opened its jaws and ate up the earth it had thrown out before and vomited it into the trench till it was level with the ground. The place looked like the scar of a healed-up wound. Two soldiers were left to the guard the grave from the depredations of jackals and badgers. (TTP,166-67)

Though the conscious in the author seeks to counter these incidents by a train to Pakistan (which forms the closing episode of the novel) to show a similar breakdown of the significance, yet the difference between the two is obvious. Whereas the former envelops the village in "melancholy", (TTP, 97) the latter, through the self-sacrifice of Jugga, redeems it. In the first, the silence is "deathly" and evokes primordial fears, in the second; the silence of Jugga is a manifestation of moral conviction and faith that integrates. Unconsciously, the writer ends up putting upon a Sikh, one of his own communities, as the ultimate beholder of goodness.

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