

Presentation of Sex, Violence and Horror in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

Abstract

Khushwant Singh is India's top level writer, columnist and journalist. He is the founder- editor of Yojana, and editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, The National Herald and The Hindustan Times.

Khushwant Singh has handled the partition theme deftly, exploiting it both intellectually and emotionally. He has not questioned partition directly, but indirectly has criticised it severally. Partition means cutting one great nation into two halves, accelerating tension in every home and exploding into bloody riots, turning one –time friends into permanent foes, men into beasts ,seeking blood of their own near and dear on both sides of the newly created Indo-Pak border. Civil war, Communal riots, mass killings, sex, violence and horror burst in the wake of partition. Women, old and young were abducted, raped, mutilated and the victims were ordinary men and women. The present paper wants to examine Khushwant Singh's presentation of Sex, Violence and Horror in his *Train to Pakistan*.

Keywords: Violence, Communal Riots, Horror, Partition and Catastrophe.

Introduction

It is mesmerizing to scrutinize the literary work of a person who defines for himself, "I am not a nice man to know". (Not a Nice man to Know: p.5). This created a liking for him both as a man and as a writer. Khushwant Singh is India's top level writer, columnist and journalist. He is the founder- editor of Yojana, and editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, The National Herald and The Hindustan Times. He started his journey with the publication of *The Mark Of Vishnu and other Stories* (1950). After that, each and every publication proved out a milestone in his literary career. Next came *Train To Pakistan*(1956),*The voice of God and Other Stories*(1957), *I shall not Hear the Nightingale*(1959),*Ranjeet Singh*(1962), *History of the Sikhs*(1963), *Delhi*(1990),*The Company of Women*(1999) and autobiography *Truth, Love and a Little Malice*(2002). He was a member of Parliament from 1980 to 1986. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974, but returned the decoration in 1984 in protest against the storming of the Golden Temple by the Indian Army . In 2007, he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan.

Entitled originally Mano Majra, the novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) brought his recognition and wide acclaim. This won for him the Grove Press India Fiction Prize for the year 1956. This novel is marvellous feat containing perfect narrative sequences, aesthetically planned plot and characters full of life can be termed as the first major Indian English novel on partition.

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Aim of the Study

Partition was a political decision which had given to people the infinite miseries and sufferings. The aim of this study is to present a picture of the bestial Horror enacted on the Indo- Pakistan border region during the terror-haunted days of August 1947.



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Review of Literature

The study explores how Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* is a remark on the event of partition. K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri states:

It is indeed surprising that partition, unfathomably tragic and momentous event, has not stirred the creative imagination and urges 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 Anand, R.K Narayan, Raja Ram and Bhabani Bhattacharya- has concentrated upon it in any of his novels. In this regard, the western writers present a contrast to the Indian who seem to have been too dazed to treat recent history in detail, in their works.

S.K. Dubey has beautifully analysed 'Khushwant Singh's handling of the partition theme'. This study fills the gap in research on the partition literature of Indo-Pak.

The novel is divided into four parts (I) *Dacoity*, (II) *Kaliyug*, (III) *Mano Majra*, (IV) *Karma*. The first part of the novel '*Dacoity*' is an important beginning. A sense of horror and violence is created among the villagers in the first part of the novel and the readers receive the pioneer stroke of partition. On one heavy night in August, Mali, the leader of the gang, attacks on Ram Lal's house in *Mano Majra*. They break open door of the house, encounter two women and a seven years old boy and try to get the information of money-lender's whereabouts. The leader holds the old man and demands the keys of the safe and says by kicking him on the behind, "Where are the keys of the safe?" (10) Ram Lal replies, "You can take all jewellery, cash, account books. Don't kill anyone." (10) Then Ram Lal produced a wad of notes from his pocket and says, "take these, It is all I have in the house. All is yours...In the name of Guru, let me be." (10)

Then one of the men tore Ram Lal away from the leader and hit him full in face with the butt of his gun:

On the roof of his house, the money lender was beaten with butts of guns and spear handles and kicked and punched. He sat on his haunches, crying and spitting blood. Two of his teeth were smashed. But he would not hand over the keys of the safe. In sheer exasperation, one of the men lunged at the crouching figure with his spear. Ram Lal uttered a loud yell and collapsed on the floor with blood spurting from his belly. The men came out. One of them fired two shots in the air. The village was silenced. (10-11)

This hideous murder with dacoity creates a sense of violence and horror among the villagers. On their way back they fire shots in the air and drop bangles in the house of Juggut Singh, a dreaded criminal of the village. Thus, the dacoity shows that humanity itself has been robbed of and the world has been looted of its human values.

On the night of dacoity and murder of Lala Ramlal, Jugga is out in the field with Nooran, his

beloved. He returns to the village only to find the people gravely disturbed by the dacoity and the murder. The novelist shows the more intriguing aspect of Juggut Singh in the love making scene with Nooran, the daughter of Imam Baksh (the muslim priest). The novelist gives a pen- picture of the sex between Juggut Singh and Nooran: "Juggut Singh stretched out his hands over his head and behind him, groping; the girl dodged them. Juggut Singh started with the hand on his eyes and felt his way up from the arm to the shoulder and then on to the face. He caressed her cheeks, eyes and nose that his hands knew so well. He brought her down flat upon him limb to limb. The girl slapped him on the face...Juggut Singh crossed his arms behind the girl's back and crushed her till she could not talk or breathe. Every time she started to speak he tightened his arms around her and her words got stuck in her throat. She gave up. He stroked her hair and face. Juggut Singh's caresses became lustful...He bore upon her with his enormous weight. She could not struggle against Juggut Singh's brute force". (13-15) This love making and sex scene continue to cover four pages of the novel.

In the same part of the novel there is another sex scene between Hukum Chand, magistrate and deputy commissioner of the district and a teenager, Haseena Begum. Khushwant Singh describes her: "She was only a child and not very pretty, just young and unexploited." (30)

The young girl just stared at Hukum Chand with her large eyes: "Hukum Chand put his arms round her waist...He pulled her on to his lap and began to play with her hair... Hukum Chand stretched out his hand and put out the paraffin lamp. It went out with a loud hiss, leaving the two in utter darkness..." (31-32) This love making and sex scene continue to three four pages of the novel. The romantic tangle along with the dacoity in the house of money-lender Ram Lal by the mali gang, the flirtation of Hukum Chand with Haseena, take place at different locations in the village simultaneously and three streams of thought flow in the novel at the same time; to which Shahane says:

The three scenes taking place almost simultaneously to the refrain of the railway engine's whistle demonstrate the three-fold mode of operation of the principle of contrast inherent in Singh's art of fiction. Dacoity is contrasted with love and a spiritual love is differentiated from sheer physical passion. The act of dacoity is conceived in a world of growing materialism...Jugga's genuine involvement with Nooran is based on strong emotion, whereas Hukum Chand's association with Haseena though delicate and ambivalent, is initially a transitory superficial and casual relationship. (81)

Soon after the sex scene of Hukum Chand and Haseena, the novelist presents a horror scene: "From *Mano Majra* came sounds of people

shouting and the agitated barking of dogs...two shots rang out and silenced the barking and shouting.”(32)

The morning after the dacoity the Mano Majra railway station is more crowded than usual. The trains also present scene of horror “they were crowded with Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan or with muslims from India. People perched on the roofs with their legs dangling, or on bedsteads wedged in between the bogies.”(34) Again in this part of the novel, the novelist, depicting the violence scene, narrates the story of four Sikh Sardars on a killing spree in a jeep alongside a mile-long column of muslim refugees walking on the road. “Without warning they opened fire with their stenguns. Four Stenguns! God alone knows how many they killed.”(73)

The second part of the novel ‘Kalyug’ also contains the scenes of horror, violence and death: “The train which symbolized life and action in the pre-partition days represents death and disaster after the partition.” (Dubey, 54) The routine choirs of Mano Majra are churned into bits by an untimely arrived of a train from Pakistan –a ghost train.

One morning, a train from Pakistan halted at Mano Majra railway station. At first glance it had the look of the trains in the days of peace. No one sat on the roof. No one clung between the bogies...It had a ghostly quality... 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)

The ghost train is full of dead bodies with not a single person alive in it. The magistrate, alarmed at the sight of train load of corpses, is frightened by its violence and its magnitude. As K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri rightly comments:

The entire picture is, indeed, very terrible. It unfolds the horrible drama of communal violence –the sinking of human values in the mire of communal frenzy.(72)

The ghost train is the first cause of worry which is increased by the collection of kerosene oil and firewood from each of village inhabitants through the village lambardar, Banta Singh on the order of police for burning the bodies which the train brought from Pakistan. Khushwant Singh describes the bizzare scene of cremation thus:

The northern horizon, which had turned a bluish grey, showed orange again. The orange turned into copper and then into a luminous russet. Red tongues of flame leaped into the black sky. A soft breeze began to blow towards the village .It brought the smell of burning Kerosene, of the wood...The village was stilled in a deadly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odour was...(88)

In the third part, ‘Mano Majra’,the reader is horrified when he sees the villagers wiping off the tears from their faces and turning back homes at the

time of parting of the muslims from Mano Majra as to what would happen next.It is also horrible to look at mali’s gang unyoking the bullocks, looting the carts and driving the cows and buffaloes away. It also produces panic and horror in the hearts of Mano Majrans.

In the last part ‘Karma’, Mano Majrans along with the readers are horrified when the train loads of people come over to Mano Majra.“They had no more oil to spare and the wood they had left was too damp to burn...a bulldozer arrived from somewhere ...The villagers had seen the trench being filled with corpses and this went on all day till sunset...The place looked like a scar of a healed up wound.”(152)The horror was too terrible to be forgotten. Singh recreates its impact on the mind of the village inhabitants. He writes , “The day’s events were not likely to be forgotten in sleep. Many could not sleep at all. Others slept frightfully...They sobbed in their sleep and their beards were moist with tears(154)The river Sutlej is flooded with corpses, through which Singh shows the over flowing cruel violence during partition-swollen, flooded, as if never to end.

Now, Hukum Chand gives the release order of Jugga from the jail on the fateful night of the Muslim refugees leaving Mano Majra for Pakistan. After his release, he too is informed of the plan to attack the train heading for Pakistan. And also informed of Nooran, with his child in her womb, was supposed to board the same train. He decides to prevent the attack, even at the risk of his life. He reaches the bridge and starts to slash the rope with small KIRPAN in the face of a volley of shots fired at him by the communalists intent on derailing the train. Finally, he cuts the rope in shreds, delinks it with the explosive and the train passes off the bridge safely to Pakistan. “The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan.”(190) Pala Prasad Rao says that the passion of one man , saved hundreds of innocent people . He further says, “At a time when the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia, the men of religion and the political leadership failed to act, Jugga proved his mettle.”(40)

Conclusion

Thus, to conclude this novel, we can say that the novelist brings out forcefully that love in man is as deeply rooted as the urge for violence. Love is an antidote to violence and this point is brought out suggestively. Khushwant Singh has shown how love transforms a criminal into a humanist, into a crusader against violence and communalism, and seeks his fulfilment in saving the life of his love. As K.R.S. Iyenger rightly says:“The simple uncalculating love for a woman asserts itself, averting the catastrophe.”(29)

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