Chapter II

Train to Pakistan
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TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

Partition of India has been resented by the common people of the subcontinent. The resentment has found more succinct expression in literature consisting of fiction, verses, essays and plays than in any other medium of expression. The creative authors and artists of India have sharply reacted against Partition and have termed it as the sordid act of the politicians. The Partition has divided the subcontinent into three states, but has failed so far to break up the historically developed composite and syncretic culture of the subcontinent. The literatures of all the three states still have been contributing to strengthen the composite and syncretic culture and civilization of the Indian subcontinent.

"The problem of how the historical sense and reality enter into the sphere of art is important in any long-term and lasting assessment of the achievement of Indo-Anglian writers." (Shahane, Mind, 30)

Literary writing is a harmonious blending of the past with the present. It is both compelling and challenging for a creative writer to incorporate critically the legacy of history, as a reference point for the present as well as to reinterpret and re-enact past experience. Dr. Shahane states:

The problem of how the historical sense and reality enter into the sphere of art is important .... This process enables it to achieve wider dimensions of universality; literature can no longer be considered in isolation from its social implications, cultural and moral values, and racial ethos. The historical setting of Indo-Anglian fiction is important because it is an integral part of its cultural ethos and vision. Khushwant Singh's novels
demonstrates this process of a historical reality and a cultural ethos finding expression in the art of fiction and thereby endeavoring to present the unified vision of man and his milieu. (Shahane, Mind, 30)

Art contests reality, but it does not avoid it. Indeed, it is in this creative contest of art and reality that the aesthetic interpretation of the artist is articulated. Ultimately, and specifically in the context of historical and socio-political discourse, the true significance of historical fiction lies in its aesthetic interpretation of salient historical and socio-political themes.

Train to Pakistan is not just a political novel but a social one. It portrays a politics-polluted society, pawned by the bureaucrats for their personal and private ends, under the pretext of executing the so-called policies of the so-called Government. Raizada compares the novel with other works on the theme of partition and describes it to be “the most forceful and exquisite of the creative works born out of the agonized torments and travails of body and spirit endured by the sacred soil of the five rivers.” (Novelists, 112) It is certain that “Politics, and the major events shape individual lives, and how individuals react to these events, have always been of interest to the literary imagination, since the Greek and Roman epics and the Mahabharatha and, no doubt, before hand.” (Dooley, 30)

Train to Pakistan was originally entitled Mano Majra (1956). Mano Majra is a name of a place which is the center of action in the sequence of events leading to the final catastrophe. The change is from the static to the dynamic. Dr. Shahane is of the opinion that “the change of the title of the novel from Mano Majra to Train to Pakistan is in keeping with the theme of the novel. Whereas Mano Majra suggests static, Train to Pakistan implies change.” (Shahane, 68)
It is an undeniable fact that India with Pakistan, as part of it, flourished in many aspects. The essence of humanity could be found only in India and not in any other countries. People lived for centuries in a peaceful and congenial atmosphere. But after the “blood baptized Independence” enmity prevailed everywhere India. “Khushwant Singh’s picture of Indian society in *Train to Pakistan* is like the state of Eden before and after the fall. Symbolic Eden is Mano Majra and the date of the Fall is summer of ‘47.’” (Girdhari, 32)

A novel deficient in humour may lack readability. *Train to Pakistan* is not replete with humour and wit but, Khushwant Singh’s rather lively sense of humour prevails in the novel that is hardly ever cold and prosaic. In fact, humour is a part of his genius though it is not always sunny and genial. In almost all his novels, his targets are the oddities and eccentricities of the situation he presents and the follies and imperfections of the characters he portrays.

*Train to Pakistan* is a minor classic in the Post-Independence Indian English fiction. With its “bold, brutal and unrelenting realism” (Raizada, 101), it tears off mask of hypocrisy and exposes the sordidness and savagery of human life. The harrowing incidents at the time of Partition in 1947 had shaken him to his roots. It was the Art that came to his rescue. Only through this medium his subdued emotions found an outlet. The novel becomes a substitute gratification, in the sense that it implies Khushwant Singh’s optimistic and affirmative view of life, his enduring faith in the values of love and humanity and the unconquerable spirit of man against a sordid background of wickedness and savagery.
The story runs around a tiny village named Mano Majra where the people – Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs have been living together for centuries in peace. When the whole of India is in the turmoil, this village alone remains undisturbed by the communal riots that occur during the partition of Pakistan from India. About ten million people – Hindus from Pakistan and Muslims from India – are in flight. Communal disturbances and ruthless killings claim a million. Only Mano Majra, this small village, is free from communal frenzy and fratricidal strife. One August night, Malli, a dacoit, and his gang, enter Mano Majra and demand Ram Lal’s treasures. Ram Lal, a money lender, refuses, and is murdered. The gang leaves dropping a few bangles in the house of Juggut Singh, who is also known as Jugga. Jugga, who has served several jail terms on many charges, is at that time out in the fields. He was warned not to leave his house after sunset, but the call of Nooran, his beloved, the Muslim weaver’s daughter, is too compelling for him to abide by the constraints laid on him by the police. Jugga and Nooran return to the village to find the people greatly disturbed by the dacoity and the murder of Ram Lal. Almost at the same time, Hukum Chand, the Divisional Commissioner, who has arrived earlier at the Officer’s Rest Home, is engaged in a sordid affair with Haseena, a teen-age prostitute. While engaged in his voluptuous activities, hears the noise of gunshots and voices of the Mano Majrans. He swears loudly and leaves the girl in haste. The next day, policemen arrive at Mano Majra railway station to conduct an enquiry into the murder of Ram Lal. By the same train arrives Iqbal Singh, a Western-educated youth, who has been deputed by the People’s party to work among the common folk. The Westernized young man goes over to the village Gurudwara and is welcomed by the hospitable Meet Singh, the Sikh priest. He is admired by Meet Singh and the village Lambardar. But the police arrests Iqbal. Both Iqbal and Juggut Singh are held by the police
on the charges of complicity in Ram Lal’s murder. Malli and his gang, the real murderers, are also arrested, but they are later released. The police inspector suspects Iqbal to be a Muslim and in order to convince himself, has him stripped to make sure that he had been circumcised in accordance with Muslim practice.

Events move fast, and the fate of individuals in Mano Majra is decisively affected by the catastrophic events of the partition. The arrival of the ghost train filled with corpses at Mano Majra from Pakistan “created a commotion”. The dark clouds of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries. Yet feelings of brotherliness have not disappeared, and they meet for consultation in a scene that is both intensely human and touching. Madness has invaded Mano Majra, in spite of the benevolent nature of Mano Majrans. Muslims are removed to a refugee camp at Chundunnagar, later to be transported to Pakistan. Nooran, who is carrying Jugga’s child in her womb, visits his mother, but is almost compelled to go to the refugee camp. Hindu fanatics vow revenge upon Muslims for what the Muslims have done to the Hindus in Pakistan. Hukum Chand learns that Haseena too would be on the train which is scheduled to carry Muslim refugees from the Chundunnagar camp to Pakistan. Jugga and Iqbal are both released at this crucial stage. Juggut Singh goes to Mano Majra only to find that Nooran has been taken to the refugee camp and that she would be traveling on the train to Pakistan. He also learns of the plot of the Hindu fanatics to blow up the train with dynamite as it passes the railroad bridge at Mano Majra. Jugga climbs the steel spans of the bridge and begins to slash at the ropes connecting the explosive material with a sharp instrument, a Kirpan. The leader of the Hindu saboteur fires at him, but Jugga clings to the rope with his hands and cuts it to pieces. The engine of the approaching train “went over him, and went on to Pakistan.” (Train, 207)
Singh paints a cruelly honest picture of various classes of Indian society and charts their reaction to the blood-bath. The police are corrupt, crude and simple. They deal brutally and effectively with dacoity; they are helpless before communal fury. The old Magistrate, Hukum Chand is clever, corrupt and lecherous. He buys the favours of a young prostitute and goes to bed drunk. He is well-meaning within limits, cunning, but totally incapable of withstanding the tide of communal murder. The Sikh bhai Meet Singh gets on well with the Muslims but lacks the will-power to thwart the fanaticism of the Sikh soldiers who preach revenge.

The two central characters Iqbal and Juggut are in a special category. Though they are both Sikhs, they are to some extent outsiders to Mano Majra, Juggut is the local budmash (bad man) on parole, and Iqbal is the young Communist intellectual from Delhi who has been educated in England. Juggut, the most vivid character in the book is a gigantic muscular peasant driven to crime by his passionate nature rather than by greed for money. He is an adventurer who has found dacoity more stimulating than farming. Shunning marriage, he is in the middle of a furtive passionate love affair with Nooran the daughter of the blind Muslim mullah.

Iqbal who despises religious and communal differences comes to the village to preach social revolution. Both are caught, and their true natures are revealed, in the outbreak of communal killing. Both, Iqbal and Juggut Singh are arrested on trumped-up charges and are in prison until the situation of menace leads the magistrate to order their release in the hope that they will help to prevent further catastrophe. Iqbal proves unequal to the task. Fear hastens him to re-claim his Sikhism so that he can be protected by his co-religionists. Intellectual convictions are of little use when he is faced with the reality
of human passions. Juggut in contrast redeems a life of dacoity by sacrificing it for love for his Muslim mistress and so prevents a massacre of the trainload of passengers on the way to Pakistan. Ironically, passionate love can cross the communal boundaries and rise above religious fanaticism. Iqbal’s intellectual Communism cannot do so.

So massive a subject, so dreadful a catastrophe as the events which overtook India in 1947 can scarcely be dealt with so effectively. Khushwant Singh uses the tiny village of Mano Majra as a microcosm of vivisected India. The power of the novel lies in his vivid re-creation of the life of the village before and after the beginning of the great killings. In this graphic re-creation, climate and geography play their part and Singh reveals implicitly how religion, race and climate are fused in one cultural whole. Religion – one element in the culture – simply dictates, in Singh’s novel, what people wear, what they eat and won’t eat. There are however no discussions of Hindu philosophy, of Sikhism or of Islam. Sikh, Muslim and Hindu co-exist happily enough, not treading too much on one another’s toes, avoiding the obvious traps of inter-marriage. The differences only become tragic and destructive when politics and nationalism get out of control. Officials, villagers, soldiers, are all too limited in imagination to prevent the bloodshed. The small men are swallowed up in the holocaust. Singh is cynical about the Indian leaders in Delhi.

While narrating this story Khushwant Singh satirizes many of the actions of man. He focuses on matters like religion, superstition, greed, love, etc. In the very beginning of the novel he satirises the superstitious belief regarding God that people have. Khushwant Singh very clearly brings out that the world is replete with people who have committed sin in their lives. “People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins. Some of them had good reasons to feel that they had sinned.” (09)
Khushwant Singh brings out the inhumanistic attitude of man who fights in the name of religion. Even people who had lived for centuries together peacefully exposed the beastly nature within themselves when it came to religion. "Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped." (09)

The author brings out the hypocrisy of man by pointing out that when the latter is faced with a serious problem or a dire need, he forgets his age-old religion and start praying Gods of various shapes and kinds newly found. "This is a three-foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keekar tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the deo to which all the villagers – Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or the pseudo-Christian – repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing." (10)

Singh portrays the character of Malli to bring out the mercenary and greedy nature of man. Malli and his gang loot Ram Lal and finally murder him for the need of money. Further when the ladies of Ram Lal's house shout for help, not a single soul comes for their rescue. Everyone stays in his house praying for his own life. It is a satire on the eccentric attitude of man and the fear that prevails in every one. "The women in the courtyard heard the cry and started shrieking, "Dakoo! dakoo!" The dogs barked all round. But not a villager stirred from his house." (18)

Singh ironically comments on the acts of the politicians who talk and promise to do different things, but when they assume their authoritative position they forget every thing and fail to keep the promises they made before election. Khushwant Singh portrays the politicians by making use of a simile with a satirical touch where the politicians are compared to cranes which stand 'on one leg like a yogi doing penance; as soon as a fish comes near – hurrup.' (31)
Through the character Hukum Chand the Magistrate, Khushwant Singh brings out the inner nature of the higher officials who fail to perform their duties sincerely. Being a Magistrate he is expected to be honest and conscious of his duties, but he neither work conscientiously nor let others work. “You talk rashly like a child. It will get you into trouble one day. Your principle should be to see every thing and say nothing. The world changes so rapidly that if you want to get on you cannot afford to align yourself with any person or point of view. Even if you feel strongly about some thing, learn to keep silent.” (31)

This is surely an extremely sensible attitude on the part of an Indian bureaucrat, particularly in view of the great compelling provocations of the nerve-wracking period of the partition of India. It anticipates, and sets the tone of, future events in the created world of Train to Pakistan. From a sociopolitical point of view, the distrust, rivalry, and mutually implied contempt between old, seasoned bureaucrats and newly crowned power-conscious politicians, which are some of the significant aspects of growing democratic institutions in India, are very well brought out in the portrayal of Hukum Chand and the sub inspector. For instance, Hukum Chand’s ideas, attitudes and actions set into motion forces which lead to the almost inevitable climax of the novel. The internal tensions of democracy provide Khushwant Singh with fruitful areas for the portrayal of character and situation. The police force in the Punjab suffered from several failings and weaknesses: inefficiency, corruption, unscrupulousness, and greed. Singh rightly concentrates on, and exploits the weaknesses of such motivations. His presentation of the bureaucratic postures in India recalls Charles Dickens’ bitter satirizing of the bureaucratic position in contemporary England.
Khushwant Singh satirises the Muslim male-dominated community in which women occupy a secondary position only. “We Hindus never raise our hands to strike women, but these Muslims have no respect for the weaker sex.” (31)

Not a single character escapes the view of Khushwant Singh. Singh throws light on the prevailing illiteracy and ignorance of the people who, like animals, stay contended with matters that help them to survive. No external issues bother them. The Inspector says to Hukum Chand, “I am sure no one in Mano Majra even knows that the British have left and the country is divided into Pakistan and Hindustan. Some of them know about Gandhi but I doubt if anyone has ever heard of Jinnah.” (33)

As far as India is concerned, sex is something surreptitious. Discussing it is considered a taboo. The young children are never let to know about it unless they come to know by themselves. Khushwant Singh points out how matured men play on the ignorance of the young and initiate them into sexual activities. Haseena Begum, the dancer girl and a young prostitute, who is brought to quench the sexual thirst of Hukum Chand is only sixteen. The threadbare manner of picturising the very beastly and sensual approach to sex in the character of Hukum Chand is both nauseating and disturbing. “Hukum Chand put a glass of whisky to the girl’s lips. “Drink a little. Just a sip for my sake,” he pleaded. The girl stood impassively without opening her mouth. The old woman spoke again. “Government, she knows nothing about drink. She is hardly sixteen and completely innocent. She has never been near a man before, I have reared her for your honour’s pleasure.” (31)

Khushwant Singh makes a dig at the loss of ethical values in Christians. “That is why they have no morals. The sahibs and their wives go about with other sahibs and their
wives. That is not good, is it?” (49) Again Iqbal speaks of moral and money thus: “Morality, .... is a matter of money poor people cannot afford to have morals.” (49)

Commenting on the increasing population in India, Khushwant Singh mocks at the politicians who spend huge amount on planning to put up industries and promote agriculture. Instead measures could have been taken to check the increase in population which Khushwant Singh thinks sarcastically is “impossible in the land of Kama Sutra, the home of phallic worship and the son cult?” (58)

People in rural India concentrated only on their livelihood and nothing else. They were not ready to look into the upheavals and turmoils brewing around. The novelist emphasizes that the sorry state of the people who were not even aware of the fact that they have got freedom nor knew the value of freedom. Independence meant little or nothing to these people. They even did not realise that it was a step forward and that all they needed to do was to take the next step and turn the make-believe political freedom into a real economic one. “Well, Babuji,” began the Muslim. “Tell us something. What is happening in the world? What is all this about Pakistan and Hindustan?”(61) “We live in this little village and know nothing,” the lambardar put in. “Babuji, tell us, why did the English leave?” (61)

Khushwant Singh criticizes some of the Indians who feel safe and secure in the hands of the British and consider themselves to be slaves and regard that freedom is only for the educated. “Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be the slaves of the educated Indians - or the Pakistanis.” (62) Khushwant Singh, on the other hand, also throws light on the politicians who are always after positions and mercenary in character. “If you want freedom to mean something for
you – the peasants and workers – you have to get together and fight. Get the bania Congress government out. Get rid of the princes and the landlords and freedom will mean for you just what you think it should. More land, more buffaloes, no debts.” (63) It is really a sarcastic comment made by the author on the rustics.

Through the character Iqbal, Khushwant Singh brings out the fact that the British exploited India for their own vested interests. A subtle dig at the British thus: “I have lived in their country many years. They are nice as human beings. Politically they are the world’s biggest four-twenties. They would not have spread their domain all over the world if they had been honest.” (64)

The corrupt nature of the policemen and the faith people have in them is highlighted in a satirical vein. The police whom people should hold in esteem are not so because of their corrupt nature. Iqbal is arrested for the murder of Ram Lal and when the police men take him, he very furiously says, “I would rather trust you than the police in this free country of ours.” (68) The policemen who arrest Iqbal feel that ‘arresting a social worker was a blunder and a likely source of trouble.’ (74) Khushwant Singh brings out the customary practice of the policemen to file cases not genuine. “Some sort of case would have to be made up against him. That was always a tricky thing to do to the educated people.” (74) “But Punjabi policemen were not the sort who admitted making mistakes. They would trump up some sort of charge: vagrancy, obstructing officers in doing their duty, or some such thing. He would fight them tooth and nail.” (74)

When the heat of the riots begins to raise, Iqbal and Juggut Singh are arrested and Hukum Chand, the magistrate who should be truthful to his duties fail to do so by asking the sub-inspector to cook up information about Iqbal without making any serious
enquiries. “Fill in the warrant of arrest correctly. Name: Mohammed Iqbal, son of Mohammed something-or-other, or just father unknown. Caste: Mussulman. Occupation: Muslim League worker.” (81) Khushwant Singh is never afraid in bringing out the facts he had witnessed. When all the Muslim policemen were disarmed, they fled and started to support the Muslims and indulged in antisocial activities. Describing this through his characters Khushwant Singh very openly comments on the evil intentions of the Muslims and that one can never trust them. “Muslims are like that. You can never trust them.” (82)

It is a must that all the convicts or all the accused should be treated equally. But the treatment of the accused differs according to status in the police station and this type of treatment or partiality is not only seen in the police station, but also in many other organizations. Khushwant Singh very clearly brings out this practice in his novel, thus:

With Iqbal it was different. His handcuffs were removed with apologies. A chair, a table, and a charpoy were put in his cell. The head constable collected all the daily newspapers and magazines, English and Urdu that he could find and left them in the cell. Iqbal's food was served on a brass plate and a small pitcher and a glass tumbler were put on the table beside his charpoy. Jugga was given no furniture in his cell. His food was literally flung at him and he ate his chappatties out of his hand. A constable poured water on to his cupped palm through the iron bars. Jugga's bed was the hard cement floor. (87)

It is really disgusting and disgraceful to see how convicts are treated with a racial difference even if they have committed the same offence. Singh exposes this in an ironic way.
The difference in treatment did not surprise Iqbal. In a country which had accepted caste distinctions for many centuries, inequality had become an inborn mental concept. If caste was abolished by legislation, it came up in other forms of class distinction. In thoroughly westernized circles like that of the civil servants in the government secretariats in Delhi, places for parking cars were marked according to seniority, and certain entrances to offices were reserved for higher officials. Lavatories were graded according to rank and labelled *senior officers, junior officers, clerks and stenographers and other ranks*. With a mental make-up so thoroughly sectionalized, grading according to their social status people who were charged or convicted of the same offence did not appear incongruous.

Iqbal was A-class. Jugga was the rock-bottom C. (87-88)

Likewise when Iqbal and Juggut Singh are arrested and taken to prison, Khushwant Singh gives a beautiful, realistic picture of the police station with a touch of sarcasm. "The prisoners were escorted through an arched gateway which had *welcome* painted on it in large letters. They were first taken to the reporting room. Just above the table was an old framed picture of King George VI with a placard stating in Urdu, *bribery is a crime*. On another wall was pasted a coloured portrait of Gandhi torn from a calendar. Beneath it was a motto written in English, honesty is the best policy." (86)

Khushwant Singh introduces Iqbal, the Social Party worker, as a representative of that class of educated Indians who are great dreamers. But their dreams remain unfulfilled because they are more concerned with social applause than with their own convictions. The inner nature of Iqbal and people like him is clearly brought to light:
It occurred to him that he had hardly slept for three days. He wondered if this be considered a “sacrifice”. It was possible. He must find some way of sending word to the party. Then, perhaps .... He fell asleep with visions of banner headlines announcing his arrest, his release, his triumphant emergence as a leader. (88-89)

Singh’s satire is directed with even greater force against the useless idealism of such individuals like Iqbal Singh who hope to change the others and yet cannot understand any of them. They ignore the depth of religious tradition and feeling to the extent that by removing the surname “Singh” and by removing his beard he is mistaken for a dangerous Muslim agent. The satire intensifies Iqbal’s sense of rational propriety outraged by Juggut’s violence and obscenity, and finally we see him finding excuses for his cowardly inaction.

Iqbal is used as a vehicle for satire too. His confusion at the queer code of the Punjab – admiration for the “he-man” (nar admi) – in the light of the savage dacoits’ attack on the village puts the code in a satirical light. Even in his semi-drunken interior monologue at the end of the novel, Iqbal expounds a satirical view of Indian religion and culture (a view often heard in Indian intellectual circles):

India is constipated with a lot of humbug. Take religion. For the Hindu, it means little besides caste and cow – protection. For the Muslim, circumcision and kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and hatred of the Muslim. For the Christian, Hinduism with a sola topee. For the Parsi, fire-worship and feeding vultures. Ethics, which should be the kernel of a religious code, has been carefully removed. Take philosophy, about which there is so much hoo-ha. It is just muddle-headedness masquerading as mysticism. (195-196)
Singh’s view on marriages is yet another thing to be noticed. He ridicules with a touch of blended humour and sarcasm how the youths in the Punjab viewed the institution of marriage. All wanted virgins. A few, more broad-minded than the rest, were willing to consider widows, but only if they had not been deflowered. “All demanded women who were good at h.h.a., or household affairs. To the advanced and the charitable, c. & d. (caste and dowry) were no bar.” (88). Not many asked for photographs of their prospective wives. Beauty, they recognised, was only skin-deep. “Most wanted to ‘correspond with horoscope’. Astronomical harmony was the one guarantee of happiness.” (88)

As per the orders received from Hukum Chand, the sub-inspector releases Malli and his gang and tries to change the whole case of Ram Lal’s murder. He makes arrangements and tries to make the people believe that a dacoity gang led by Sultana, who had already left for Pakistan, had committed the murder. This throws light on the corrupt nature of the policemen and the higher officials.

Love is always kept in high esteem in Indian literature. It is always shown in a positive note and as a holistic and pure one. But Singh realistically brings out the fact that the intention of true love is sex and that sex is a part of true love. He attacks the negative attitude of others towards love and also shows how caste and religion play a vital role in turning men against love. Though the love between Juggut Singh and Nooran, the Muslim weaver’s daughter seems to be one of mere sexual attraction, it is really a pure one, which we are able to comprehend only at the end of the novel. When all the Muslims including Nooran are asked to vacate the village, Nooran pleads to Jugga’s mother to let her know Jugga’s whereabouts. But Jugga’s mother turns her out: “Get out you bitch!
The old woman hissed, You, a Muslim weaver’s daughter, marry a Sikh peasant! Get out, or I will go and tell your father and the whole village. Go to Pakistan! Leave my Jugga alone.” (52) Later when Jugga’s mother comes to know that Nooran is carrying the baby of Juggut Singh, she consoles Nooran and says, “He will hurry for his own sake. If he .... He will get you if he wants a wife. Have no fear.” (153)

**Train to Pakistan** concentrates on a village Mano Majra, and how the winds of communalism and bloody reprisal blowing all over the country affect this village too. It shows how peace is disturbed by the fundamentalist forces in connivance with the government machineries and how the personal love of Hukum Chand for Haseena and Jugga for Nooran asserts itself and saves the train to Pakistan from being ambushed.

Khushwant Singh reveals a sound historical sense like Manohar Malgonkar in all his novels. Both **Train to Pakistan** and Malgonkar’s **A Bend in the Ganges** are successful experiments in artistically fusing the personal and historical perspectives in a fictional guise.

The novel is a sensitive and realistic picturisation of the trauma of Partition that gave birth to two political boundaries – India and Pakistan. It seemed as if the two countries were destined to live with an air of perpetual suspicion and enmity culminating in a profuse and prolonged bleeding in which ten million people took to flight and almost one million lost their lives.

No doubt political freedom brought a long awaited moment of joy in this country. But miscalculation and lack of foresight on the part of the leaders turned this glorious moment into the bloodiest chapter of Indian history.
It is through the pattern of contrast between pre-partition and post-partition scenario that Khushwant Singh best illustrates the tragedy of partition and indirectly suggests the short sightedness of Indian leadership who failed to foresee the consequence of division and to handle the situation even after Churchill’s forecast of blood-bath. Communal discord was never a feature of Indian rural scene but it was engineered first by the British Government under the divide-and-rule policy and then by the nationalist leaders, though unintentionally.

The first phase of the novel shows how calm, placid and indifferent to the greatest political event in a nation’s life is the life at Mano Majra. As the Lambardar questions, “But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs that the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes.” (62) Freedom means for the villagers only when it brings ‘more land, more buffaloes’. Otherwise it hardly appeals to them. As a Muslim says, “we were slaves of the English, now we will be the slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis.” (62) They cannot welcome freedom at the cost of mass destruction. The Lambardar expresses the feelings of the common man, when he says: “The only ones who enjoy freedom are thieves, robbers and cut throats.”, and goes on to add “We were better off under the British. At least there was security.” (64)

The seed of ‘religional’ suspicion inherent in the heterogeneous social structure of the village lifts its head when the people of Mano Majra come to know the truth behind the ‘Ghost Train’: “When it was discovered that the train had brought a full load of corpses, a heavy brooding silence descended on the village…. Everyone felt his neighbour’s hand against him and thought of finding friends and allies.” (137)
Under Hukum Chand’s game plan, Jugga and Iqbal the social worker, are kept behind the bars while the real culprits are released in Mano Majra and the villagers are asked about Sultana Budmash and Iqbal Singh who is declared a member of Muslim league. In fact the murder of Ram Lal is given a communal colour. The modus operandi of the police here sheds light on the true face of the administration at the lower level. The people have nothing to say, but any way the obnoxious design of the bureaucracy is realised as the narrator says: “The head constable’s visit had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a part of butter.” (141)

One morning the Muslims of Mano Majra are forced to evacuate by the Pakistan soldiers. The news that they will be taken to Pakistan comes as a surprise to the Lambardar and the other Sikhs. But both the Sikhs and Muslims are helpless. A Muslim officer orders them to leave their cattle, furniture and other moveable property which cannot be accommodated in their trucks. The Lambardar is entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the cattle and goods left behind by the villagers. But he refuses to do so and says that property spoils relation. This pious attitude of the Lambardar and Meet Singh receives a scornful rebuff from a Sikh officer. “You are quite right, Bhaiji, there is some danger of being misunderstood. One should never touch another’s property; one should never look at another’s woman. One should just let others take one’s goods and sleep with one’s sisters. The only way people like you will understand anything is by being sent to Pakistan; have your sisters and mothers raped in front of you, ....” (157)

This amply displays the general mood prevailing among the soldiers. The whole atmosphere is filled with a reactionary and vindictive temperament. The situation is well echoed in Malgonkar’s A Bend in the Ganges: “Every citizen was caught up in the
holocaust. No one could remain aloof; .... The administration, the police, even the armed forces were caught up in the blaze of hatred.” (325-326) In this situation even an army officer looks for criminals like Malli and his gang, who can do what they cannot do in their uniform. Malli and his men are given the responsibility of looking after the left over property of the Muslims of Mano Majra; and subsequently they plunder.

In fact the Partition plunged India into a blood-bath and sparked off civil riots. But all this is given a hint of and not directly shown as the sample village Mano Majra has witnessed no communal riots, no act of bloody repraisal. By and large, they are still committed to peace and brotherhood. But this humanity and sanity are regarded as a sign of cowardice by the Sikh youths who come to the gurudwara at night to provoke the fire of repraisal. “Do you know how many train loads of dead Sikhs and Hindus have come over? Do you know of the massacres in Rawalpindi and Multan, Gujranwala and Sheikhupura?” What are you doing about it? You just eat and sleep and call yourselves Sikhs – the Brave Sikhs: the martial Class!” (170)

He continues to whip up emotion with his vituperative speech full of rhetorical questions and punch. “You expect the government to do anything? A government consisting of cowardly bania money lenders. Do the Mussalmans in Pakistan apply for permission when they rape your sisters? Do they apply for permission when they stop trains and kill everyone, old, young, women and children? You want the government to do something. That is great! Shabash! Bravo!” (171)

When the Lambaradar asks what they can do, he promptly says: “For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussalmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two..... For each train load of dead they send over, send two across....” (171)
Obviously they were guided by the maxim ‘tit for tat’ in a wrong perspective. Meet Singh’s weak protest, “What bravery is there in killing unarmed innocent people?” (172) yields little result. In this blood curdling situation a man like Meet Singh is the curse of his country.

They plan to kill them with swords and spears and to fire indiscriminately at the windows of the train so that it carries only the dead. To project abject helplessness of administration in the wake of universal madness is an important motif of the novelist. It is well described by Hukum Chand who himself is a rake and his character is an indictment against the bureaucracy.

Yes, Inspector Sahib, you and I am going to get nothing out of this except a bad name. What can we do? Everyone has gone trigger-happy. People empty their rifle magazines into densely packed train, motor convoys, columns of marching refugees, as if they were squirting red water at the Holi festival; it is a bloody Holi. What sense is there in going to a place where bullets fly? The bullet does not pause and consider ‘This is Hukum Chand; I must not touch him’ Nor does a bullet have a name written on it saying’ Sent by so-and-so…. (179)

When the conspiracy to sabotage the train to Pakistan is revealed to Hukum Chand, he is shocked; and he desperately looks for ways and means to save it. But the inspector informs him that they can do nothing. If they are not taken to Pakistan ‘the whole camp may be destroyed’ by the ‘mobs of twenty to thirty thousand around villagers thirsting for blood.’ (181) If they are taken to Pakistan, there is the danger of inevitable ambush. In such a situation when the Magistrate fails, the lover prevails over
the situation. It is his interest in Haseena, a Muslim prostitute, that brings about the release of Jugga and Iqbal. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly observed that 'even in this universal madness, humanity or the simple uncalculating love of a man for a woman asserts itself and saves the situation.' (27)

Accordingly they are released and brought to Mano Majra that fateful evening. The sub-inspector deliberately instigates Jugga against Mali by informing him that Mali has been the cause of the evacuation of the Muslims from Mano Majra and that he has plundered them. But it is not the fire of revenge that propels Jugga to save the train at the cost of his life. His immediate concern is directed towards Nooran; and the danger to the train means danger to her life. He manages to get at the rope and slash it away. Though he is shot down he gives a safe passage to the train.

The climax is exciting but it looks theatrical like a typical Indian film with the only difference that the hero here, though victorious, sacrifices his life. However the dramatic effect is well realised and the reader feels satisfied and relieved.

The ultimate optimism of the novelist is shown at the end where virtue and love transcends over vice and hatred even in this utter chaos. Interestingly the crusader is not the politician, not the administrator or the army personnel, not even a social and political worker like Iqbal Singh but a robber, self-confessed budmash. The plan to sabotage the train is known to everyone. But only Jugga rises to the occasion. Implicit in this preference is Khushwant Singh's anger against the power-hungry leaders of national movement who could celebrate 'the baptism of freedom' with blood bath. He lends credibility to his feeling by making Hukum Chand, who is the part of the government and a legacy of the colonial rule, rail against national leaders.
What were the people in Delhi doing? Making fine speeches in the assembly! Loudspeakers magnifying their egos; lovely looking foreign women in the visitors’ galleries in breathless admiration. ‘He is a great man, this Mr. Nehru of yours... Wasn’t that a wonderful thing to say?’

Long ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge. (201)

The character of Iqbal Singh, though, seems to be a loose string in the novel. He serves to expose the pretense and hypocrite of ‘armchair variety’ of social and political workers.

Khushwant Singh, like Malgonkar, has taken to task the British rulers and short-sighted national leaders afflicted with sudden blindness and loss of nerves for exploding this horrendous catastrophe.

Train to Pakistan is a valuable social and political document and a highly readable fiction that keeps the readers engrossed. As a piece of fiction Train to Pakistan is cleverly contrived and articulative of the pity and horror involved in the partition tragedy. The third person omniscient narrative technique helps the novelist dive into the minds of characters and presents his candid views on the different shades of this tragedy with precision and objectivity.

The element of satire is omnipresent in Singh’s work although it is always tempered by romantic realism. Respect for the peacefully co-existing Sikh-Muslim community of Mano Majra is modified by Singh’s revelation of the accepted corruption of the law, the casual brutality of the police, ignorance, superstition and illiteracy. The dacoits are the heroes and the villains of the village. The villagers have a simple code of their own: it is good to be true to your “salt”, and most other actions, violent and greedy, are condoned. Out of this ignorance and superstition grow communal violence.
Since a major part of the action in the novel takes place in the gurudwara, Bhai Meet Singh’s character can be regarded as essential. He, in appearance and manner, is shown as a typical granthi (priest) of a village gurudwara:

He was short, fat and hairy .... And he was untidy. He wore his turban only when reading the scripture. Otherwise, he went about with his long hair tied in a lose knot held by a little wooden comb, combing his long beard with his fingers. Almost half of the hair was scattered on the nape of his neck. He seldom wore a shirt and his only garment – a pair of shorts was always greasy with dirt. (96)

The Granthi’s portrait, though graphic and representative in character, is far from being a sympathetic one. It does not inspire respect or affection. A peasant turned priest, he has taken to religion as an escape from work – “an easy way of earning bread with the offerings at the Gurudwara.” (95) Except for a few Sikh prayers which he has learnt by heart, he is ill-equipped for the challenging job. He is neither learned in Sikh scriptures nor is he like the class he represents, fully acquainted with the glorious traditions of the diversified Sikh history. The ill-informed, superstitious minded man that the Bhai is, Juggut Singh finds it rather difficult to cajole a prayer from him in order to thwart the heinous strategy of the communalists. His words to Juggut Singh reveals apparently: “You never came to the gurudwara any other time. Now when the scripture is resting and people are asleep you want me to read the Guru’s word – it is not proper .... What have you to do with meaning? It is just the Guru’s word.” (198-199)

The obstinate Bhai does mumble out a prayer, but not without commotion. The novelist has used him as a metaphor to satirize the rustic Sikh granthis in particular,
and Indian priestly class in general, which, feeds the teeming millions in India on the glib talk about spirituality and other worldliness, with a mere parrot-like recitation to an accompaniment of rhythmic chanting of hymns and holy verses from the scriptures. The dogged insistence of the priestly class on ritualism hampers the all-round growth of the religious minded but gullible masses who remain steeped in ignorance and fatalism. Highly deficient in the power of persuasion, these priests cut a sorry figure when confronted with a crisis like the one Bhai Meet Singh has to face. He is silenced in the duel of rhetoric with the ‘leader’ of the city-bred Sikh youths. Inflated with the bloated notions of racial chauvinism and religious bigotry, and consumed by the fire of ethnic hatred and reprisal, the young leader exploits the religious-mindedness and rustic simplicity of the congregation and, to meet Singh’s chagrin, incites it to violence. He makes an impassioned appeal to the racial superiority of the congregation: “The Sikh are the chosen of God. Victory be to our God.” (177) – as if there were many Gods! Unable to utter a word more Meet Singh relapses in to silence and impotent fury.

The novelist seems to enjoy Bhai’s humiliation. The priest’s helplessness lies in his lack of courage; his failure to uphold the dignity of the Guru’s house; and his lack of will to sacrifice himself to preserve the sanctity of the gurudwara. He symbolizes the helplessness of the priestly class in India where religion is seldom separated from politics. Not withstanding his deficiencies and inadequacies as a priest, Meet Singh is not without virtues of the class he represents: open-heartedness, warmth, instinctive cordiality, religious-mindedness and humility. A friend to all, irrespective of their caste, creed or religion, he lives upto his name. Though a Sikh by faith, he is a votary of humanism which forbids discrimination between man and man on ethnic or religious
grounds. This is the message of the great Gurus and this is the Gospel he is trying to preach as a priest. If Juggut Singh is a metaphor to highlight the glorious Sikh tradition of heroic action and sacrifice, Meet Singh is the very embodiment of the Sikh tradition of piety, purity, religious tolerance and brotherhood.

The novelist has explored yet another facet of Sikh ethos: Sikh militancy. It is a means of defence against religious persecution, ethnic extermination or external aggression, or militancy. It is used as an excuse to fan the flames of communal hatred or to realise religious fundamentalism, racial chauvinism and political adventurism. It tends to taint the human psyche. Sikh militancy came into being as a reaction against Muslim racial-chauvinism and fanaticism. The Sikh Gurus, who stood up in defence of their faith, had to suffer persecution at the hands of the then Mughal emperors of India. The successive martyrdoms of the Gurus steeled the nerves of the Sikhs whose hurt psyche led them to the path of militancy. The pacifist Sikh was metamorphosed into a militant Khalsa by the militant Guru, Gobind Singh, who wanted to raise an army of soldier-saints for the preservation of righteousness.

Ever since, it has become a house-hold proverb with the Sikhs. Whether it is vengeance or a desire to preserve their ethnic and religious identity, the Sikhs came to develop a militant character. Khushwant Singh has used Malli and the self-styled Sikh leader as a metaphor to suggest the militant trait of Sikh ethos. Both the characters represent the instinctive vengefulness of the hot-blooded Sikh youths who must avenge the wrongs done to them whether by an individual, a class or a community.

Khushwant Singh highlights the revenge-motif in the novel and the iconoclast stance of the “Monsters of the society”, but he also knows that the world is not monopolized
by monsters only. There are also angels. "As a realist, he faces the monsters, exposes them, ridicules them, and makes them the targets of his rapier thrusts and biting irony. As a humanist, he realizes and acknowledges the principle that man will supersede all the monsters and establish the supremacy of the moral law. Man is the crowning glory of creation, and, though he is partly beast, he is also partly angel. In moments of crisis, the angel in man will triumph over the beast in him. This is indeed the moral triumph of man so forcefully demonstrated in *Train to Pakistan.*" (Shahane, Mind, 150-51)

Partition had a tremendous effect on the people in India and Pakistan. It adversely affected the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The communities which lived in amity for centuries became enemies overnight. Mutual suspicion and hatred became the order of the day. The novel thus becomes an unforgettable experience. It brings out the fact that senseless killing, looting and raping will not take us anywhere and the ideal thing is to live in perfect amity irrespective of the caste and creed to which we belong.