Chapter II
TRAIN TO PAKISTAN: KHUSHWANT SINGH

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) deals with and intensively focuses on the cataclysmically historic event of the partition of India in 1947 and all that was engendered in its wake – violence, bloodshed, carnage and chaos. However, this is geographically localised to the imaginary yet representative village of Mano Majra. The novel is steeped in lucidity and poignancy in such large measure that the reader is transported to the place and era (in a wider context) very much in the manner of an eyewitness, to the extreme point of empathy, reliving "real events" (though imaginary only with respect to the fictitious locale) in all the horror and madness that engulfed the subcontinent.

The sombre tone and note of the novel, with all its lurking danger is foreshadowed right at the outset quite broodingly in the "mere" description of the weather. The author's rendition of such details carries and conveys a highly ominous note, especially of vital significance in the larger context that later ensues. But to get back to the beginning it is best to quote the text. The author's description goes thus:

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.¹

Thus it is quite evident that even nature is imparted a hostile dimension in its personification (insofar as it is perceived – subjectively of course – by the village residents). The "record" hot and long summer assumed tortuous, ominous, and
menacing proportions in the simple minds of the people, particularly the poor common man or masses as represented more clearly as the novel progresses.

*Train to Pakistan* is, as already indicated, drenched in realism. Considering the Partition setting, one is likely to conclude that the novel is replete with blood and gore — the blood and gore that drove a schism, still unhealed between Hindus and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on the other, tearing asunder in a very short period the strong bonds of love and peace forged over the centuries. This was a time when, history tells us, they had confronted misfortune and the unjust oppression of British colonial rule for more than two hundred years. Historically and ironically, previously bearing the injustice and matter-of-fact highhandedness of colonial rulers (though there had been a large scale uprising in 1857), at the end of the novel, some of the villagers become thirsty for the blood of one another. However, in *Train to Pakistan* the events are not steeped in factual historical background to familiarize the reader. It is taken as given, and rightly so, that the horrific result of the partition along with all the wedges that it drove between two communities, is well known, especially as the work was published in 1956. In this context it would be relevant to quote K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri, who state the following:

> The partition ushered in a period of inhuman violence. *Train to Pakistan* portrays the life of the frontier between India and Pakistan that had become the scene of rioting and bloodshed. The communal harmony between Muslims and Sikhs, existing for centuries was shattered by a series of tragic events.²

This state of affairs was due to the fact that though the British had finally left, they bequeathed to the powers that be (along with their subjects) the policy of
divide and rule, which, initially crept, and later lodged firmly into the psyche of practically all and sundry.

But to return to the proper formalist perspective initially the case of Mano Majra is unique – frozen-in-time with respect to absence of communalism in such light.

Though Mano Majra, at this point only knows of it secondhand, it is still alarming to them. But strangely, the unglipped and thus directly unfelt frenzied atrocities, though highly disturbing events, are taken in a state of passivity. This passivity is the outcome of colonial subjugation of the psyche, where looming and later transfer of power seems, at least apparently, not to be a step forward. Instead, it is psychologically linked with the delayed rains. The weather, mayhem and carnage are thus viewed as punishment for the villagers’ sins, an act of God, making logical response impossible.

But rather than diverge, let us take a salient point: the life of the simple people, plot-wise, revolves largely at the outset (as well as later) on the passing of two morning and evening trains - their only contact with the outside world.

Now to briefly summarise, *Train to Pakistan*, essential for the purpose of foregrounding and analysis. Initially, the novel’s atmosphere and ambience is of religious divide drenched in communal violence. The book is divided into four progressive parts: ‘Dacoity,’ ‘Kalyug,’ ‘Mano Majra,’ and ‘Karma’ respectively, each of the nature of progression, the last finally building up to a dramatic climax. Based on the socio-religio-psychological reality on the ground at the time of partition with all its ragingly rampant communal frenzy in all its horror, it is profound yet objective indictment of predominantly two communities at both the
receiving and giving end of mindless violence - of Sikhs and Muslims. So, more than just of literary value, it is also a valuable social document of our times in a deep historical sense. Now that the digression is complete, on to relating a brief summary of the novel.

The time is 1947 against the frozen-in-time microcosm of the tiny sleepy village of Mano Majra – frozen in time because intercommunal and intracommunal amity and harmony (along religious lines primarily) has, so far, bypassed the hamlet. This is strange as it is a border village of newly independent India with strategic geographic importance, due to its railway station, which regulates the innocent, ignorant villagers’ lives. The larger backdrop of genocide and mass migration on both sides of the border has, at last surfacially, in the beginning left Mano Majra untouched - communal peace and amity prevail on an “incomprehensible level” against the blood and gore backdrop of the microcosm that is the subcontinent. But the torrents of hatred due to be inevitably sown are foreshadowed through the use of powerful symbols (to be explicated towards the conclusion of the analysis).

The cycle of violence and hatred is set in motion with the murder and robbery of moneylender Ram Lal by dacoit Malli and his gang. The dacoit throws bangles across the wall of notorious badmash Jugga to both insult and challenge him, the bangles meant to signify his “womanly weakness and cowardice”, not actually true. However, Jugga is secretly out with his love Nooran, a Muslim girl, daughter of weaver and Mullah Imam Baksh. But Jugga has heard the shots fired by the gang. However, he cannot endanger Nooran. When he finally does return to Mano Majra, he is met with a sense of great alarm on the part of the villagers.
upon the gory incident. As he is a repeat offender, he is arrested for the murder and robbery, lacking on alibi. He cannot compromise Nooran.

At the very same time as Jugga is making love to Nooran, Hukum Chand, the corrupt, basely lewd magistrate of the area, is about to form a liaison with Haseena, a Muslim teenage prostitute. But the gunshots disrupt his pleasure as an “inconvenience”. He is forced to attend, at least ostensibly, to duty almost in synchronicity. Iqbal, a culturally alien youth (due to Western education and leftist indoctrination), reaches Mano Majra by train and begins preaching a socialism of sorts to the villagers, exhorting a countryside revolution. The authorities quickly gauge him as a troublemaker and swiftly arrest him, charging him practically for sedition as a “Muslim League Worker,” a label which easily fits his first name, it being common to all three chief communities. However, Meet Singh, the illiterate village Granthi has befriended him before his arrest.

A trainload of Sikh and Hindu corpses from Pakistan soon arrives. Wildfire panic spreads through Mano Majra, it already being present by now latently, but now having the real essence of “deeds of blood”. Sikhs and Muslims begin to view each other suspiciously – the sundering of traditional bonds forged down the ages has begun. Gruesome horror stories of Muslim atrocities begin to prejudice some, a weapon used by some fanatics, who are instigated, finally, by a young Sikh soldier to take revenge. By this time the powers that be have decided to move the villagers’ Muslims allegedly into a refugee camp, they actually being bound for Pakistan. The parting between the two communities is extremely tearful, steeped in pathos and poignancy.

Nooran is at her wits’ end frantically – she is carrying Jugga’s child. She
confesses to Jugga’s mother, hoping with the strength of love, that Jugga will come for her (he is still in jail). Soon the Muslims are put on the train to Pakistan. Besides Nooran, Haseena, the magistrate’s fancy, is also on the “ill-fated train”. Hukum Chand though to a large extent responsible, sees the atrocity due in all its horrendous magnitude and scope. So he releases Jugga, the latter bound to learn of the genocide premeditated. Jugga takes Granthi Meet Singh’s blessing of the Guru’s word. Courageous to the core, he repeatedly slashes at the rope meant to derail the train amidst numerous bullets of the armymen colluding with the fanatics and dacoits. He dies but not before he has saved the train and its passengers, and his beloved Nooran, the impetus of this heroic sacrifice. Love in all its power reigns supreme and Jugga attains an almost saintly nobility in his last mortal act. Thus he has washed off and washed away bad *Karma* and gasped good *Karma* and, in his ignorant though dynamic way, affirmed love as the only universal religion as well as defied in body and spirit colonialism and postcolonialism and the communal divide it engendered. It is important to mention here, more relevant details of the narrative have been covered side by side in the succeeding analysis - which, is a humble attempt to probe minutely the breadth and scope of the novel. The summary shows as R.K. Dhawan observes that:

> It was terrible time when all human values sank deep into inhumanly passion of communal violence. The trains were halted and unfortunate passengers were ruthlessly butchered. Men, women and children were indiscriminately victims of mad communal frenzy; they were molested and killed by the armed bands of men. The novel depicts the fateful journey of one such train vividly and powerfully.³
The novel opens on a sad and sombre note in the summer of 1947 perceived as inordinately hot and dry. The active plot revolves, of course, around the tiny village, it being markedly influenced by and related to, as already stated, the two trains - Mano Majra's only claim, possibly, to the map. The morning train from Delhi to Lahore and the evening train from Lahore to Delhi halt at Mano Majro:

“Before day break, the mail train rushes through on its way to Lahore, and as it approaches the bridge, the driver invariably blows two long blasts of the whistle. In an instant, all Mano Majra comes awake... By the time the 10:30 morning passenger train from Delhi comes in, life in Mano Majra is settled down to its dull daily routine... As the midday express goes by Mano Majra stops to rest... When the evening passenger from Lahore comes in, every one gets to work again”. (pp. 4-5)

So, the trains form a vital, yet strangely tenuous but integral link naturally affecting the poor, simple villagers’ workday. With respect to the two major communities, the Sikhs who are the landlords and the Muslims, their tenants, the former, therefore, being socio-economically better off.

Once the introductory atmosphere is laid, the story progresses with the brutal robbery and murder of the moneylender, Ram Lal. The author graphically describes this:

On the roof of his house, the moneylender 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 his safe. In sheer exasperation, one of the man 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. (p.10)

Juggut Singh (Jugga) is arrested on suspicious grounds, as he was absent from his home. He is a convenient bureaucratic target for purposes of arrest and detention because he is the sole local badmash with a dus number (number ten) status. As such, his movement is legally curtailed during the evening he being required not to leave his home.

However, in actual fact he was nowhere near the crime-scene, but with his beloved Nooran - a teenage Muslim girl. She is the Maulvi’s daughter, her father’s name being Imam Baksh. However, he refuses to disclose this to the police to avoid complications - social and major in nature.

The actual perpetrators of the dacoity are Malli and his gang. They even throw a bundle of bangle across the wall of Jugga’s house – an insult to his toughness and manhood for not joining them in the dacoity. To quote the text:

“The spearman dug a package from his clothes and tossed it over the wall. There was a muffled sound of breaking glass in the courtyard. “O Juggia,” he called in falsetto voice, “Juggia!” He winked at his companions. “Wear these bangles, Juggia. Wear these bangles and put henna on your palms.” (p.10)

The bangles are naturally a symbol of womanishness or more accurately cowardice.

The Mano Majra residents, largely illiterate and ignorant as they are of the outside world have very vague notions about Partition - the newly formed nation of Pakistan and India’s independence. They cannot comprehend life without
British rule, it not affecting really their lives in any way. This is highly indicative of their insularity. In fact, Imam Baksh is the sole literate native.

On the very next day after dacoity an oddball character - Iqbal - arrives by train on the scene. His name common to all three communities makes each view him as their own. Meet Singh offers him shelter at the Gurudwara, which he accepts, there being no other alternative accommodation. So he suddenly learns that he is in the “boondocks.”

Hukum Chand, a lustful and corrupt magistrate arrives on the day of the dacoity. When busy with a prostitute, he even hears the gunshots. It is at this time that he issues blank arrest warrants for Jugga and Iqbal. As per the subinspector’s briefing Iqbal, psychologically of an alien background and educated, has been exhorting villagers in a leftist manner. So the police frames him as a Muslim League Worker, the ‘proof’ being his circumcised penis. The manner in which he is “proven” to be a Muslim and thereby by assumption, a Muslim League Worker is illustrated in all the high handedness of postcolonial authority and misuse of power in the following quote:

The subinspector came in and without bothering to examine the shirt ordered: "Take off your pajamas!"... Iqbal loosened the knot in the chord.... He stepped out of the pajamas to let the policemen examine them. "No that is not necessary." Broke in the subinspector. "I have seen all I wanted to see ... you say you are a social worker. What is your business in Mano Majra?" "I was sent by my party," [the] People’s Party of India ... Cherisher of the poor, it is all right. He says he has been sent by the People’s Party. But I am sure he is a Muslim Leaguer. They are much the same ..." (pp.63-64).
Such authoritarianism aptly and cogently reveals the postcolonial psyche of the powers-that-be. This strikingly shows that the brown sahibs are just as unjust as the white sahibs. Their only concern is to keep their papers in order and squelch aspersion, controversy, irrespective of the unjust consequences the common lot – Jugga or Iqbal or even the complete jurisdictional populace – have to bear. But the insular bubble bursts when a ‘ghost train’ arrives from Lahore carrying Hindu and Sikh corpses:

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. No one was balanced on the footboards. But somehow it was different. There was something uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality ... The arrival of the ghost train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Majra. (pp.77-78)

Naturally this sets the ominous tone and gives us a hint of the villagers’ disturbed state. This is underscored by the manner in which the authorities quickly swing into action. So, the railway station is rapidly sealed and the bodies are ‘secretly’ burned and buried. But the rains dampen the horrific scene, yet the crime is still officially inexistent – no one wants to rock the boat. But the smoke fumes confirm the villagers’ worst fear and suspicion, chilling the very marrow of their bones.

The existence of Pakistan and communal atrocities is now of concrete nature and dimension. They also learn of ‘ghost trains’ with Muslim corpses going to Pakistan. But, even at this juncture, communal amity is not upset to the point of retaliation. Instead, there is a hazy daze and subsequent attempt to grasp
the horror. At a lower level, the ingrained peace and harmony are punctured somewhat. This is aptly illustrated in the text as follows:

"I have heard," said Imam Baksh, slowly combing his beard with his fingers, "that there have been many incidents with trains". The word "incident" aroused an uneasy feeling in the audience "yes, lots of incidents have been heard of," Meet Singh agreed after a while. (p.81)

The ‘incidents’, quite an innocuous term, as reflected in this exchange gives birth to a jagged edge of confusion – the outside world has finally arrived at Mano Majra’s doorstep. Through passing refugees ‘real’ news of communal mass-murder across the border reaches the villagers’ ears – in Shekhopura, Gujranwala, Lahore and other parts. In tandem the village Muslims are trucked off ostensibly (with only what they can carry) to refugee camps. The parting of the two communities is highly emotional and peaceful. Unknown to the simple poor villagers is the fact that they are bound for Pakistan on the next train.

A young Sikh soldier instigates some of the villagers to derail the train with a taut stretched rope and kill all for revenge. By this time Iqbal and Jugga have been released. Iqbal, pointedly, is released with a Sikh identity – he being such in truth. Even Malli and his gang, the real perpetrators of the dacoity, were released beforehand.

At this point the situation is ugly and totally out of control, a fact which Hukum Chand and the subinspector want to wash their hands of. Hukum Chand believes that it is remotely possible that Iqbal may try to prevent what seems doomed to follow. Jugga the dynamic man, may intervene. The train as well as
the chain of events is set in motion. Some of the villagers, with the Indian police colluding, are bent upon and ready for revenge.

Iqbal as already predicted proves a coffeeshop communist. He simply leaves the village – his own life being dearer to him than his arm chair ideals. But Jugga without revealing his intentions, takes the blessings of the Guru through Meet Singh. The prayer is relevant of course to the Sikh religion, but also has universality. It is especially relevant to the mettle that Jugga is made of. This part goes thus:

By thought and deed be judged forsooth,
For God is True and dispenseth Truth.
There the elect his court adorn,
And God himself their actions honors. (pp.173-174)

So, Jugga even has, at least in his own simple mind, the blessings of the Guru, perhaps for the first time in his life. “Spiritually armed” thus, Jugga is more than now ready for his mission on the railway bridge spanning the river. At the crucial, critical moment he cuts with many knife strokes the rope meant to derail the train; he is met by bullets and thus death. The high drama of the climax is worth quoting:

There was volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the center as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan. (p.181)

Jugga, thus successfully has saved his love Nooran and all else on the train. And the train passes on to Pakistan. Courageous by nature, he has finally attained nobility, making him the hero of the novel.
Train to Pakistan erupts with vivid portrayal of characters, depiction of community and locale against the volatile background of Independence and Partition and all that was spawned in its wake – the divide-and-rule legacy culminating in communal massacre and carnage. Even the all powerful rulers. The brown sahibs cannot escape its impact. In the words of R.K. Dhawan:

The sight of geckos pouncing on a moth and catching it fluttering is symbolic and genocide (since there is mass killing of Hindus and Muslims), a common feature of Partition. It points to the extermination of human values under the garb of religious fanaticism. Even the magistrate’s fear of spending the night all alone in his room is symbolic of terror and apprehension leading to insecurity and indecision.*

In the light of the above points, the novel is most of all a barbed commentary on the colonial or rather postcolonial psyche, which is, by and large all-pervasive and common to both the ruled in the passive sense and the rulers in the active, unjust sense, largely to the point of extremity. There is ample evidence that the psyche is mass-colonised. Insofar as the residents of Mano Majra are concerned, Independence and Partition are mere elusive wisps of the wind – having no bearing on their lives. The passivity is thus unfathomable from a modern viewpoint if we forget history and historical perspective. Hukum Chand ‘wears peculiarly postcolonial shoes’, no different, probably, from those of typical white sahibs who preceded him. He thus relegated the commoners, or we may say subjects, to brutes and fools who deserve no better than his boot or, for the select few that he directly exploits, his largesse. This largesse’s source is, of course, corruption. His dormant conscience, when it surfaces, is repressed by drink and refuge in prostitutes. Teenaged Haseena, a Muslim, is a case in point. Thus, even
when he awakens to the fact that Haseena is on the train due to be derailed and the passengers massacred, he chooses not to act. But the ghostly memory of his dead daughter (who dies at approximately the then current age of Haseena), conjoined as it is with young Haseena, does momentarily haunt him as illustrated in the following extract:

Hukum Chand stroked the girl’s hair. His daughter would have been sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen, if she had lived. But he had no feeling of guilt, only a vague sense of fulfillment. He did not want to sleep with the girl, or make love to her, or even to kiss her on the lips and feel her on the lips and feel her body. He simply wanted her to sleep in his lap with her head resting on his chest. (p.102)

This illustrates that conscience-wise Hukum Chand is largely comatose. As such, as the above quote makes clear he thus tries to absolve himself at the conscious level, deliberately taking pride in his social status and related achievements enabling himself to function officially well at most times – the inner voice not too upsetting.

After Hukum Chand, the subinspector is a man of the world – the man who insulates the magistrate from blame, should things go wrong. At the same time, naturally wily as the second cog in the postcolonial machine, he knows how to protect himself. As a gatherer and user of intelligence, he must be accorded the status of par excellence. As an extractor of information, he knows or gauges all weak spots – even tough Jugga, habitual of defying authority (in and out of detention as he is), relents to naming the real dacoits. In the end everyone relents. It only depends upon the means. To quote the text:
“Then Jugga must know who the dacoits were ...?” “I do not know, who the dacoits were, all I know is that I was not with them” ... The constables closed round Juggut Singh and started slapping him and kicking him with their thick boots. Jugga sat down on his haunches, covering his head with his arms. (p. 57)

Iqbal, in the native Indian locale, sticks out like a sore thumb. He has no real idea or understanding of the genuine values and needs of the culture he has inherited by simple ethnicity and race. As an ‘activist’ of The People’s Party of India (apparently of leftist orientation), as well as environmentally western in every aspect, he is simply an educated fool without the strength of his convictions – pure paper.

Jugga proves the most innately powerful character, despite being a fatalist, though of extremely violent temperament. Even though illiterate, his raw, wild animalism shines haughtily forth – as in the beating of Malli from behind the bars of his cell. The description of this incident is highly dramatic and reflects his temperament:

Jugga’s hands shot through the bars and gripped Malli by the hair protruding from the back of his turban. Malli’s turban fell off. Jugga yelled murderously and with a jerk brought Malli’s head crashing against the bars. He shook Malli as a terrier shakes a piece of rag from side to side, forward and backward, smashing his head repeatedly against the bars. Each jerk was accompanied by abuse: “This to rape your mother. This your sister. This your daughter. This for your mother again. And this ... and this”. (p.115)

So, it is quite evident that he is truly of the Sikh code of honour. Though having a history of dacoity behind him, his rural ethics make it unthinkable to rob
and murder his village brethren. It is a different matter though that he is initially framed for the dacoity. But in his last defiant and desperate act he transcends colonialism and almost achieves sainthood.

The administration, chiefly embodied by Hukum Chand and the subinspector, takes communal sides carrying down the British policy of 'look the other way and always save your own skin', even though the situation is out of hand due to their own deliberate bungling.

The journey from India to Pakistan as well as from Pakistan to India during and after Partition was so fraught with danger known and unknown, that it sickens the imagination. The rampant violence and atrocities are still mind numbing, apparently without reason; women are abducted, raped and killed. Even children were not spared. The merciless tide of inhumanity unleashed is aptly stated by R.K. Dhawan:

No doubt the most important historical event of our age, as evident from the writings of Indo-English novelists was the partition of the sub-continent. The English in 1947 left the country bag and baggage, after dividing it into two parts. The religious and political differences between Hindus and Muslims, which climaxed with this event led to widespread disturbances causing destruction of the human life on a scale unprecedented in the recent history of the subcontinent.5

Dhawan's appraisal can be said to be subdued though it is based in truth. However, one must not forget, therefore, that the riots of 1947 were of a veritable maelstrom, which engulfed the sub-continent on a hitherto unparalleled and unprecedented scale in both scope and magnitude. This is the reality which the British as colonizers and partitioners cannot realistically deny in the moral sense.
Nor can their postcolonial successors be absolved of their abdication of responsibility.

The critics accord pride of place to *Train to Pakistan* for its unflinching realism in Indian English writing. Illustratively, according to S. Ravindranathan and R.K. Jacob: *Train to Pakistan* is realistic. It transcends the actual history ... and finally expresses the tragic splendor of a man's [courageous] sacrifice. To return to the immediate focus the manner in which the peaceful village of Mano Majra is slowly but surely drawn into the bigotry and hatred speaks volumes of the deft plot unavailing. The dramatic 'punch ending' shows that no one is powerless – action, however locally and personally motivated, can be a rung to nobility, no matter personal past history.

Mano Majra is atypical at the outset – communal amity, by than a rare phenomenon, being its strong point. The most moving social aspect of this village is its suspended animation. But, as foreshadowed from the very beginning, it cannot escape the winds of change. Commenting on the partition in general and the work in particular R.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri observe:

Deo, the local deity, was the symbol of communal harmony in the village. But 1947 was not like other times; it was different in character. The situation of the country deteriorated miserably in wake of the partition. There were killings and rapes. Evil dominated the scene. The violence that started in Calcutta swept the country and tortured people.

This type of grisliness, which mutates into a maelstrom, finds indirect references in the work initially, but finally becomes full- blown even in suspended animation.
Mano Majra just before stunning climax – mindless atrocity is premeditated, though aborted by Jugga.

Contextually speaking, Khushwant Singh lucidly depicts the situation and circumstances in the village both before and after the violent dragon of communal violence rears its ugly, divisive head. At the risk of repetition, yet important and pertinent here, the vast illiterate majority, psychologically insulated as they are, are surprised to learn that the country has been divided into two, yet their colonial mindset passivity results in incomprehension of those that turn the wheel of evil – the new rulers (though brown) of communal violence in both the newly created nations of India and Pakistan. This state of affairs does not sink into their collective social-cum-societal psyche insofar as the operational dynamics of the corrupt administration (historically, even those at the helm) is concerned. One can easily equate such passivity, mixed to the very core as it is with typical Indian fatalism – one is born to bear the yoke and suffer, it being the will of God, be one Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. But the second-hand news, which initially is, unaffecting due to fatalism, does become a major disturbing factor and the seed of divisiveness leading to hatred and connected violence, is sown.

The authorities – Hukum Chand and the subinspector and their minions – exercise direct power as well as augmented power by controlling information and manipulating the facts as well as continual cover-ups, the final being the gruesome “ghost train” with its haunting cargo of Hindu and Sikh corpses. The fact that Hukum Chand is morally bankrupt and his subordinate, the subinspector, a wheeler-dealer in applying official policy (no matter how vicious and
misdirected), makes it easy for them to view retaliation as justified. The subinspector puts the cards on the table in an exchange with Hukum Chand thus:

“They say that is the only way to stop killings on the other side. Man for man, woman for woman, child for child. But we Hindus are not like that. We cannot really play this stabbing game. When it comes to an open fight, we can be a match for any people”.

(p.19)

The last part, about preferring an open fight, however, shows that he is still somewhat of a human being with a sense of honour reflected in a personal-cum-religious code. On the other hand since he is an essential cog in the postcolonial machine, he serves it for the most part unquestioningly and with impunity.

Mano Majra occupies the centre-stage of the backdrop at the sub-continental level. Yet the author has still brilliantly given it its very own distinctness of local colour which is nevertheless an imprint of the Punjabi village lot and scene prevalent at the time.

The only major events of daily living at Mano Majra are the two passenger trains, which stop there - the villagers’ only tenuous and misty connection with the world beyond. The goods trains are also important but less so as they do not mark time as impactfully and distinctly in the sleepy village. The trains are a significant associational link for the populace, which punctures briefly, everyday, their insular isolation (which they would probably view more as seclusion if they bothered to consider at all) with all its peaceful amity. The trains and station represent change and are pivotal to the plot. To quote the text:

Mano Majra has always been known for its railway station. Since the bridge has only one track, the station has many sidings where
less important trains can wait, to make way for the more important.

(p.3)

The author had originally titled the novel *Mano Majra* but quite aptly later changed it to the more dramatic, hard hitting *Train to Pakistan*, drenched as it is in symbolic meaning. The seething (though locally gradual) change and thus the inexorable march of time which cataclysmic events necessitate, are all part and parcel of it. Such is the law – however immoral – of political and administrative expediency, particularly postcolonial along with all that it engenders and entails. The emotive religio-social turbulence comes to a head in the finely drawn finale, which really strikingly makes clear the postcolonial mind mould, yet defied by the illiterate, but dynamic, Jugga. The events quickly build up to a head during and at the time of the last train to Pakistan to pass through Mano Majra. At this crucial juncture in particular and even in general throughout the novel, the title of the work in particular is naturally closely linked inextricably to the simple, hard lives of the villagers as well as the operators of the power-machine - the last being Hukum Chand and the subinspector who misuse and abuse their authority for their own vested interests without compunction. As such the train places a significantly indispensable role – becoming a powerfully personified character and personality, no matter that it is made of iron and imparted with mechanical motion. Its imprinting on the plot and narrative, as already clear, is naturally major in both essence and quality. Along with passengers and news, the trains are ultimately harbingers of violence, destruction, death and irreversible divisiveness – an ironic, potent symbol in the very character of its change. In this light R. K. Dhawan avers:
The train no doubt is a major symbol. The trains announce to the villagers the time of the day and help regulate their lives. Not that many trains stop at Mano Majra. The trains are symbolic of time progress change all of which have bypassed this sleepy village. Then one day comes the “ghost train” with its load of dead, and we know that Mano Majra has at last caught up with the winds of destruction which are blowing across the land.8

Train to Pakistan is a scathing criticism of the postcolonial psyche in its finely etched character portrayals. It indicts all three communities – Hindu, Sikh and Muslims – as all indulged in the mindless mayhem and carnage. Khushwant Singh states forthrightly that “the fact is both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped” (p.1). Yet this particular commentary is dispassionate. But the impassioned characters, actions and reactions unfold, highly dramatically, through the action and particular personal involvement of important individuals with the inescapable postcolonial psyche – ruled or rulers. This is evident when the lambardar calmly states, “We were better off under the British. At least there was security.” (p.49). This is finely in tune with passivity with respect to the former – the ruled. The exceptions are the passionately violent Jugga, the lascivious and corrupt Hukum Chand, his subordinate the subinspector, the alien Iqbal, Haseena, the cheeky prostitute and the love impelled Nooran (Jugga’s beloved). All of these are central to the plot as are Imam Buksh (the Mullah) and Meet Singh (the Granthi). To a lesser extent the lambardar and the young vengeance driven Sikh soldier are also of vital significance insofar as pivotal narrative background goes. However, Meet Singh and Imam Baksh lack the power of action, in its real essence; ultimately, though with some mild protest, they bow before the corrupt, violent authorities. The
tornado of time finally sows its seeds of mindless hatred and indiscriminate revenge in Mano Majra.

Khushwant Singh must be applauded for never losing the voice of objectivity despite the turbulent setting of partition. Instead he allows the narrative's pathos and poignancy to unwind through the characters and events. The beauty of *Train to Pakistan* lies in it capturing the very ethos of partition and post-colonialism in all the essence of its tragic realism. This is clearly illustrated in emotions and the related plight of the people innumerable times, as in fear of life, sense of loss, the pervasive misery of the downtrodden, and the corrupt apathy of the authorities – all in finely engraved vignettes, carrying rare imprints of realism, which grip the reader firmly and strongly transporting him or her to the era.

The weather in all its symbolism, sometimes violent, is closely tied into the minds of the characters. This is an unavoidable major factor in the rural setting. K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri comments on the importance of this symbol entwined as it is with the lives of the inhabitants:

The details of the monsoon, increasing the tempo of life and death are suggestive of the inhuman acts done by the people as a result of communal violence. There was no peace anywhere. The general burning down of the corpses in Pakistan left many skulls lying about. The train from the other side of the border was believed to have witnessed the scene of death of more than a thousand. Hukum Chand was horrified to think about the brutality on the frontiers. He realised that retaliation must follow. The crash of lightening and thunder symbolized murder and looting of the people after the partition.
So, the weather along with the trains takes on a virulently violent personality of its own, scaring even the souls of the most apathetic (Hukum Chand) who yet chooses to retreat into further immoral apathy – an inhuman face of the postcolonial bureaucracy that he embodies.

The vagaries of seasons and the river (directly linked to the river of time) foreshadow symbolically the catastrophe to follow. The late monsoons do not cleanse but confuse, alarm, impel and disturb the rise of the river’s water level.

To quote the text:

While the men sighed and groaned, the rain fell in a steady downpour and the Sutlej continued to rise. It spread on either side of the central piers which normally contained the winter channel, and joined the pools round the other piers into one broad stream. It stretched right across the bridge, licking the dam which separated it from the fields of Mano Majra. (p. 139)

At this point the change of events is only shadowily indicated.

Mano Majra’s frozen-in-time circumstances and connected collective mindset cannot be ignored as it has weighty importance. To quote the text:

“... 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 any one has ever heard of Jinnah.” (p. 22)

The peace of the novel is shattered right at the outset with the looting and brutal murder of the moneylender Ram Lal at the hands of dacoit Malli and his gang. Of course this brutality is not communal at this stage. But the fact that the authorities later release the whole gang to wash their hands of the affair, paints a vivid picture and is a pointer to the fact that even peaceful, harmonious Mano
Majra cannot escape the mayhem wrought by Partition. K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri observes:

Even the hearts of the people, who were entrusted with the task of maintaining law and order, were burning with the fire of communal hatred. The magistrates and the police were indulging in ruthless cruelties in both Pakistan and India. Psychologically even the saviours were ironically affected by the furious winds of change and destruction.¹⁰

The sweeping, enveloping and engulfing vortex thus even biased the guardians against the opposite communities – the authorities (law enforcers) were transformed from protectors against inhumanity to perpetrators of inhumanity. Hukum Chand cannot entirely escape the responsibility of misexercising his power – all for self-aggrandisement and lust fulfillment and corruption. He is a virtual nawab who milks the miserable poor without any qualms. Within this context his pervasive debauchery is of special significance and stands out in the following passage:

The girl got up and went to the table. She stretched out her hand to take the money; Hukum Chand withdrew his and put the note on his heart. He grinned lecherously. The girl looked at her companions for help. Hukum Chand put the note on the table. Before she could reach it he picked it and again put it on his chest. The grin on his face became broader. The girl turned back to join the others. Hukum Chand held out the note for the third time. “Go to the Government,” pleaded the old woman. The girl turned obediently and went to the magistrate. Hukum Chand put his arm round her waist. (pp.28-29)
He, in actual fact, epitomises the postcolonial psyche of apathetic exploitation of both the ignorant and innocent poor – as did the white sahibs who preceded him – treating the common people with the boot of gruesome, soul-scarring psychological brutality, brutalising those at the major receiving brunt.

The sick colonial (or postcolonial if you will) mentality is the juggernaut that releases till then apparently unsown (but strongly in the form of pent-up communal hatred) divisive seeds that form part of the climax. The yoke is the seal of power, the trappings of authority its shining wire wherein the practitioner, merely due to social status, can occupy the 'moral high ground'.

Insofar as conscience goes, Iqbal is just a slightly better specimen of humanity than Hukum Chand, his paper principles evaporating once the climax is near, the whirlwind of enveloping hatred and the expected carnage of the train’s Muslim passengers being something he chooses to withdraw from. How ironic that he represents the People’s Party of India, entrusted by the high command (possibly also armchair comrades) to enlighten and exhort the people as per leftist ideology. The aftereffects of the Partition are finely drawn by the author, the character being portrayed with great force and intensity, all amidst the true spirit of the post-Independence and post-Partition backdrop. The horrendous tragedy vividly and realistically depicted makes it one of the greatest novels of all times on the Partition. Timeless in essence and quality – the reason why even today it has not lost its appeal.

As already stated, the looting and murder of Ram Lal is a prelude to what follows in the till then peaceful Mano Majra. The forceful wheel of the violence unleashed at the end is directly connected to the premeditated mass murder
(though aborted by fiery Jugga) at the end, as the dacoits are also part of it. The callous way, the communal forces fire at Jugga when he is hacking and slashing away at the rope meant to derail the train is graphically described. He is repeatedly fired up, is injured badly in the process, but still clings to the rope with hands and chin. With steely determination, he continues his hacking away with his uninjured right hand, inspired as he is by the force of love - in the end even biting away at the rope with his teeth. The metal-beast rolls quickly almost on him. A volley of shots follows; Jugga shivers and collapses, his weight snapping the last strand as he falls to his heroic death. The last line of the text here is especially relevant, it being in the form of a crescendo insofar as the final part of the climax goes and is worth quoting: “The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan” (p.181).

In the opening itself the mulling lull of subcontinent-wide violence (only secondhand news in Mano Majra) is described very aptly by the subinspector to the magistrate, specifically with respect to the frozen-in-time microcosm that the village is. The subinspector reports, “We have escaped it so far, sir, convoys of Sikhs and Hindu refugees from Pakistan have come through and some Muslims have gone out, but we have had no incidents so far”.(p.19) The calm, the uneasiness on the part of the authorities herein is indistinct yet, nevertheless faintly visible pointer to the situation deteriorating and possibly even exploding later on in the sleepy hamlet. Continuing in the same vein, the subinspector further details the dismal state of affairs, “You haven’t had convoys of dead Sikhs this side of the frontier. They have been coming through Amritsar. Not one person living! There has been killing over there.” (p.19)
However, at this point, though seething under the surface, no untoward communal incident has occurred in Mano Majra, yet there is a tension in the air. But ‘Kalyug’ takes a decisive turn with the arrival of the “ghost train” with its grisly human cargo - Kalyug being symbolically painted by Singh as the machine era of turbulence where even cosmetic law ceases to exist. This breakdown and its scale are reflected in the words of a villager: Harey Ram, Harey Ram. Fifteen hundred innocent people! What else is Kalyug? There is darkness over the land. This is only one spot on the frontier…” (p.97)

The “ghost train” panic grips and spreads like wildfire with its impending sense of doom. Kalyug performs its bloody dance in symbolically true fashion as Shyam M. Asnani comments:

The sudden arrival of a train-load of corpses of Hindus and Sikhs plunders the tranquility of the village, inflame the communal frenzy of Sikhs, creates a commotion, fear, suspicion and violence and mass-madness in the air. Muslims and Sikhs, who had lived together, for centuries, are now furiously engrossed in a fratricidal conflict. The gruesome sense of violence that turned the Punjab into a wasteland, has been vividly described. The dead bodies are burnt like rubbish heaps, and ironically, the fuel (kerosene and firewood) is provided by the poor innocent village folk.11

Thus we can see that the torrential tornado from a “mysterious nowhere” shatters and breaks asunder the village’s peace and harmony turning all, incomprehensibly, topsy-turvy in its violent wake. The previously unthinkable, unbreakable bonds develop sudden sweltering fissures. Amity begins to decay, slowly at first but later quickly builds up to a maddening tempo, which however, just seethes under the paper-thin surface. To put it mildly, some members of the
two principal communities - Sikhs and Muslims - ache to grip the others' throats. However, this is a dazed, latent state of confused emotions, most suitably applicable and evident to Iqbal - the man without a religious identity in the minds of the villagers – till Meet Singh delicately and pointingly refers to him as ‘Iqbal Singh’. This scene harbours major importance. To paraphrase the text, upon finally being released from jail. Iqbal joins the prayers in the Gurudwara, by now mostly packed with refugees. They all look at him strangely and whisper among themselves. What Meet Singh says after the prayer is over, though apparently innocuous is of major importance. He immediately addresses Iqbal thus:

“Sat Sri Akal, Iqbal Singhji. I am glad you are back. You must be hungry.” Iqbal realized that Meet Singh had deliberately mentioned his surname. He could feel the tension relax. Some of the men turned around and said “Sat Sri Akal”. (p.166)

The tension is thus obviously punctured in the manner of a pin piercing a hot air balloon. Independence and Partition, the two links of a gory chain of course destroyed the dreams, hopes and aspirations of many an individual and family, historically speaking. To be more precise, it tore asunder many a community, decimating the social fabric beyond recognition. This aspect unwinds poignantly and with soul-felt pathos in *Train to Pakistan*. The anguish of separation between life long brethren is muted, yet still soul-scourching in its intensity, even though the pain of chief characters like Imam Baksh, is restrained due to the sudden circumstances. The chasm between ruled and rulers is all the more glaring in the latter’s apathetic rapaciousness - postcolonial autocracy stamping on postcolonial subjects. The brutal feudal game of arbitrary power play carries on under the brown sahibs, perhaps in more inhuman form, from
which may well emerge the still looming question whether the authorities know the colour of their own skin.

Now to examine the train as a symbol - initially routine - formalistically. The 'iron horse', to borrow a phrase of the nascent industrial era, is a predictable regulating and measuring mechanism of time for the simple villagers, almost psychologically tied in its essence to the circadian rhythm crucial to all agrarian communities, much like the circular seasons. But later the striking difference in the changed scenario of Independence and Partition are the still as yet hazy two nation states of India and Pakistan – the border traversed by the metal beast. In the case of Mano Majrans, even the very word 'Partition' initially draws a blank but later jolts them out of their state of suspended animation. The facts of the situation which finally come to the fore in their till then simple lives when the Muslims are due to be packed off to what is euphemistically referred to a refugee camp. It is pertinent here to illustrate from the text in the words of wise Imam Baksh:

"What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers". Imam Baksh broke down. Meet Singh clasped him in his arms and began to sob. Several of the people started crying quietly and blowing their noses. (p.126)

So finally the anguish of separation the simple villagers must deal with face to face, they obviously being emotionally unprepared for this. This is obvious in the agonizingly tearful scene – under which a latent, palpable pervasive cruelty breads. However, this last aspect has still not taken hold of most of the villagers' hearts and minds but will inevitably follow. In the light of
all the above the simple villagers are finally forced to confront Partition in a highly grisly form with the arrival of the "ghost train". But even then, at first this does not come immediately to the fore. Yet there is something obviously amiss.

To quote the author:

At first glance it had the look of trains in the days of peace. No one sat on the roofs. No one clung between the bogies. No one was balanced on the footboards. But somehow, it was different. There was something uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality. (pp.77-78)

Not even the lewd and power-drunk Hukum Chand can escape the horror of the gruesome cargo it carries. Possibly, for the first time he seeks the comfort of enveloping protective human warmth without his habitual drug of sex, trying to seek solace in the presence and touch of Haseena. But the brown sahib is still bent upon being a walking corpse emotionally. His persona, though showing cracks, is largely still functional. True to form, he turns a blind eye to the remnants of self-repressed conscience, preferring to retreat into liquor - smothered sleep at night and the consolation of his worldly success during the day - a 'pucca sahib' indeed. The cover-up by burning the bodies, somewhat aborted by the rains, finally confirms the villagers' worst fears and suspicions - a tinderbox which finally lights the fires of religio-communal hatred, the young zealot Sikh soldier being the fiery catalyst, leading to the unstoppable, relentless, inexorable out-of-control situation that follows, finally having built up to a head.

On the part of the authorities, immorality is carried to the point of amorality, even though Hukum Chand and his minions are responsible in their 'efficient' burgling to serve their own nefarious ends. They have added poison to
the already virulent brew by releasing guilty Malli and his gang beforehand, all
despicable specimens of the human race.

The “ghost train” by now is due to give birth to another ‘reverse ghost
train’ on the other side of the border – an eye for an eye, the law of the savages
and barbarians, all the more ironical as it carries an ‘official seal’. Malli and his
cohorts are stationed at the important bridge just for blood and gore and loot as
well - in league with Sikh soldiers and some Sikh villagers who have lit flaming
communal passions. Finally is active violence born in and among Mano Majrans,
the train a mass sacrificial corpse embodying the tide of subjectified time - with
respect to the ravages wrought on the soul and psyche, just waiting to pass its
blood curdling judgement on those that differ and are different as well. The
prelude to the premeditated carnage, that is the readiness of those who have been
communally inflamed, is shown in the preparation of the would-be attackers who
hide themselves near the railway bridge:

A good distance from the embarkment, behind a thick cluster of
pampas…men had spread themselves on either side of the railway
line...as one of the signals came down. The whispering stopped.
The men got up and took their positions...Then they shifted to the
rope... If the train was fast it might cut many people in two like a
knife slicing cucumbers. They shuddered. (pp.179-180)

It would be pertinent now to concentrate on what happens just before the
situation has taken a horridly gruesome turn. Once Hukum Chand and his cogs in
the postcolonial machine put in motion the Muslims’ deportation, they (Muslims)
start behaving like drowning men grasping for straws. However, Imam Baksh, a
wise man of brotherhood and peace, has spiritual strength, though emasculated in
a worldly sense at this point. Therefore, he finally resigns himself to the turn of events calmly in which there is a muted sadness as well:

If we have to go, we better pack up our beddings and belongings. It will take us more than one night to clear out of homes it has taken our fathers and grandfathers hundreds of years to make”.

(p.127)

Illiterate Meet Singh, on the other hand, is by contrast a mere mechanical priest. In this sense he is of the fatalist passive mould, quite often merely aping ineffectually the true universal religiosity of Imam Baksh.

But when the events have taken such a violence-laden twist, most Mano Majra Muslims begin to see even the unglimped and certainly inexperienced, phantom of Pakistan as an idyllic haven with ‘true brethren’; yet at the same time the pain of loss and being uprooted, still may be said to linger deep down, at least before the final break becomes inevitable. In this light Gobind Prasad Shrma contends:

The deeprooted love and affection one community bore for the other in the village could not be shaken off by them, so easily. So when the government went to evacuate the Muslim for safety and send them to Pakistan, the Sikhs reassure them with tears in their eyes. As the village lambardar says. “This is your village as much as ours”.

This is more aptly illustrated by Khushwant Singh the narrator himself thus:

There was no time to make arrangements. There was no time even to say good-by. Truck engines were started. Pathan soldiers rounded up the Muslims drove them back to the carts for a brief minute or two and then onto the trucks. In the confusion of the
rain, mud and soldiers herding the peasants about with the muzzles of their sten guns sticking their backs, the villagers saw little of each other. All they could do was to shout their last farewells from the trucks. (pp.136-137)

The speedy deportation speaks volumes equally of the postcolonial boot on both sides, the opposing inimical parties collaborating for the purpose of communal divide which is by this time geographic as well. The fact that the Pakistani soldiers insult and verbally abuse their own community members in collusion with the Indian soldiers, shows that the nation, though divided, still carries on the legacy of divide and rule at both micro and macro levels.

The immediate fallout is glaringly evident in treacherous Malli and his gang being deputed to look after Muslims’ property and belongings till their ‘return’ - a euphemistic parody indeed of official word making and wordiness. To quote the text:

The officer told the villagers that he had decided to appoint Malli, custodian of the evacuated Muslims’ property. Anyone interfering with him or his men would be shot. Malli's gang and refugees then unyoked the bullocks, looted the carts and drove the cows and buffaloes away. (p.137)

The inevitable result, which even a blind man could see, is that Malli and his gang let loose all the cattle and loot the rest. They even burn down some Muslim homes. No one intervenes or even considers doing so. This order of Hukum Chand proves very significant with respect to speeding up the pace and final outcome of the novel. R.K. Dhawan praises this act and justifies it on the following grounds:
This was surely an extremely sensible attitude on the part of an Indian bureaucrat, particularly in view of great compelling provocations of the nerve-wrecking period of the partition of India. It anticipates, and sets the tone of, future events in the created world of *Train to Pakistan*, since Hukam Chand's ideas, attitudes and actions set into motion forces which lead to the almost inevitable climax of the novel.\textsuperscript{13}

However, the present researcher is of the view that insofar as this particular order's morality goes, Hukum Chand simply may be more concerned, as usual, with avoiding a blemish on his record. As already alerted, it is the authorities' 'management' that has fuelled the fire of the violence in the air. But it must be granted that Hukum Chand towards the end does, to a limited extent, prove himself a human being of flesh and blood. One of the compelling reasons for this is his relationship with Haseena, to whom he becomes somewhat emotionally attached. The larger issues of the expected train ambush-cum-slaughter conjoined as it becomes with Haseena since she will be a passenger on it has a staggering emotional effect upon him. Shyam M. Asnani's observation is rather relevant in this regard:

He knows it well that he is just unable to protect the train of Muslim refugees due to sundry reasons, beyond his powers. Much though he has a feel for the girl Haseena, he just can not desist the terrorist band from stopping the trains and butchering its Muslim passengers.\textsuperscript{14}

Hatred takes roots and flowers in the minds of some, certainly not all individuals. However, Hukum Chand is decided, mainly due to his own selfish
reasons which are however also mixed up with a small amount of decency, to avoid bloodshed in Mano Majra at all costs. He thus tells the subinspector:

“If possible, get the Muslims go out peacefully. Nobody really benefits by bloodshed. Bad characters will get all the loot and government will blame us for killing. No, Inspector Sahib, whatever our views – and God also knows what I would have done to these Pakistanis if I were not a government servant – we must let there be any killing or destruction of property.” (p.21)

The Sikh officer’s rhetoric to sway people to the cause of revenge is quite persuasive as exemplified in his sarcastic rebuttal of Meet Singh’s meek opposition to violence. When Meet Singh pleads the cause of love, brotherhood and peace, the Sikh officer demands that the primitive harsh law of ‘justice’ be invoked.

“One should never touch another’s property; one should never look at another’s woman. One should first 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 over to Pakistan: have your sisters and mothers raped in front of you, your clothes taken off, and be sent back with a kick and spit on your behinds”. (p.135)

This fiery outburst is of course connected to the carnage of the times, rooted as it is in the rampant exploitation, abuse, rapes, murders and butchery in the manner of animals.

Jugga’s dynamic “courage in saving the innocents from the blind wrath of vengeance is the only major redeeming factor in the work – he becomes the sharif badmash who in valour occupies in sacrificial death the moral ground. In defiance of collective communal wrath, he is transformed to a powerful symbol of
love-cum-humanity, love of Nooran being the impelling and compelling force of his act which finally gives him a stature and aura of the action sinner turned action moral hero of, indeed, saintly proportions. As Shyam M. Asnani observes:

Jugga – a burly No.10 Badmash thus redeems himself by saving the lives of thousands of Muslims in a stirring climax. His act of love and sacrifice as a young and brilliant critic points out, “is silhouetted against the backdrop of hatred and violence, towers above communal differences and lends a quiver and meaning to the general aimlessness of life in the partition days”. 15

Though Jugga emerges finally as the brightly shining hero, and, as already mentioned, is integral and pivotal to the plot, he is nevertheless not the protagonist. It can however be safely argued that in the strictly regular or particularly traditional sense, there is no protagonist as such as the novel has a fairly vast gallery of characters, some, of course being centripetal. Instead, the total narrative forms a well-knit unreeling of plot of which all action is the hub. The tempo is initially shown as steeped in passivity insofar as most of the villagers’ general outlook is concerned. But the pace in Karma rapidly escalates with the previously unanticipated calamity pulling all into its vortex:

All that morning, people sat in their homes and stared despondently through their open doors. They saw Malli’s men and the refugees ransack Muslims’ houses. They saw Sikh soldiers come and go if on their beats. They heard the piteous lowing of cattle as they were beaten and dragged along. They heard the loud cackle of hens and roosters silenced by the slash of the knife. But they did nothing but sit and sigh. (p.139)

Till this point, despite the gathering whirlwind, fatalism is still the major factor in most of the villagers’ lives and psyches. But of course though beneath the wheel
they are ‘destined to remain’ as per their own ideas, they cannot escape its effect in all its shattering aspects.

The most prominent denizens of the primrose path - with respect to violent proclivities - are Jugga and his sworn enemy Malli. Iqbal is merely a puppet without a sting once he has been in jail – his cowardice, expected after all, reeks of his fickle-mindedness. He is no longer the indoctrinated vassal of his out-of-touch and out-of-tune political masters. But he has nowhere to go to and by means becomes his own master – his soul searching for solace in ignominious retreat. This point is illustrated by the following:

He (Iqbal) wished he could get out of this place... He would pick up his things from Mano Majra and catch the first train... He cursed his luck for having name like Iqbal... If only he could get out to Delhi and to civilization! (p.164)

Perhaps, the prominent presence of the trains compelled Khushwant Singh to title this novel as *Train to Pakistan*. In this light R.K.Dhawan comments:

Mano Majra was the small rural world where Sikhs and Muslims had lived together in peace for generations, but that small world had been invaded by the larger world of India – Pakistan division or Sikh-Muslim conflict. The symbol of this invasion was the train carrying the dead from Pakistan to India. The machine had taken hold of men and had succeeded in dehumanizing him.\(^{16}\)

So, symbolically the train is closely associated with and allied to the Partition theme. The train, as it initially is the source of news and later as the bearer of horrible tidings in the form of corpses brings home in flashy form finally the reality of partition’s horror to the sleepy village.
The novel clearly describes and embodies the period of rapacious violence unleashed with the malevolent infection of repulsive religio-communal hatred, a knee-jerk Pavlovian reaction after conditioning the turbulent emotions to a salivating fever pitch which affects all in its cyclonic upsurge of violence. As an interpretation of postcolonialism from the somewhat removed and safer perspective of modern times, Shyam M. Ashnani is of the following opinion:

A postcolonial reading of *Train to Pakistan* underscores its “Resistance to history” in a peculiar way. One finds a shift from a mere glorification of the past to an interpretation of the recent colonial regime. In *Train to Pakistan* a hint at disillusionment regarding postcolonial milieu is made. The horror accompanying the transfer of population as a sequel to Independence and Partition of India has been effectively handled by Khushwant Singh.17

Shyam M. Ashnani thus hits the nail on the head in stating cogently that the postcolonial impact of the Partition has left pervasive, unhealed scars on both sides of the border as well as community divide.

As evidently clear by now the Partition and the recently postcolonial setting of *Train to Pakistan* exude the great tragedy of communal violence and inhumanity on the part of both the communities and on both sides of the divide. Historically more than fifty thousand people were murdered. Others died of malnutrition and/or disease and some were the victims of those merely in the ‘game’ for the loot.

*Train to Pakistan* is a towering literary as well as socio-politico-historical document which, even in the new millennium, has stood the test of time. Thoroughly psyche-brutalizing graphic events which dominate throughout the novel in episodic yet coherently connected form, convey how easy it is to sow the
seeds of communal discord and subsequent mindless enmity with vested manoeuvring on the part of the authorities, they treating the common folk as subhumans or even animals, but actually revealing their own obscene epicurean animalism – all part of the Macaulayan syndrome of postcolonialism where only the skin colour of the sahibs has changed. The burra (big) white sahibs have simply abdicated - dislodged by nature’s immutable law of change in favour of the brown sahibs. But the latter are “more whiter than the whites”, pejoratively speaking.

The “mighty-whitey” is no different from, or is perhaps worse than his foreign predecessors. So the result is the “burra brownie”, a state of affairs still appallingly widespread fifty-seven years after Independence, though now much more refined in its sinister aspect.

To concentrate on the sinister, the whole tragedy of Train to Pakistan is rooted in malevolence-imbued foreshadowing and symbolism where the opposing trains - nature gone askew in its usually rhythmic cercadia and the machine – regularity of the trains literally bearing death – are juxtaposed, in the seismically rhythmic chance of foreshadowed destruction and almost total annihilation of civilized human values.

The trains are, of course, a compelling symbol of time, contrasting sharply and in razor–like manner with the dance hunt of the geckos preying upon insects. Such stark contests in images, vividly pictured as they are in the interplay of light and shadow, lend the work a rare stabbing quality in which, it can be said, animism is present under the surface as an eruptive undercurrent. Yet, this analyzing aspect does nowhere detract from the stoney realism of the author's
narration of events through his gallery of widely differing major characters. This is because the personified weather in all its unwinding fatalism and inextricably connected passivity is presented dispassionately as given. The panoramic theme in all its soul-piercing facets is yet compactly contained, the author nowhere intruding his own intrusive commentary essay, the bane of many writers down the ages when dealing with such a delicate subject.

To take a few cases of character in point, the deep rooted feature-cum-factor of fatalism is underscored by the trains which are mostly on time, enclosed within their own animistic influences, which mark the routine initially, but later throw everything askew, making all individuals out-of-joint – a result of the "secretly burnt" corpses and "secretly buried" corpses subsequently. The gorily tragic circumstances are on such a massive scale that even Hukum Chand, the cynic of cynics, though having accepted death, however terrifying to his eat-and-be-merry life philosophy, as inevitable, is shaken to the core of the remnants of his self-repressed humanity. Previously always blasé about crushing all underfoot as long as paperwork is in order, he is maniacally jerked to the point of morbid confrontation with mass murder in which associational guilt makes him lose his own vain bureaucratic – necessarily postcolonial – face in front of his very own face. Even his down the years trusted antidote of liquor, heaven-cum-haven, amidst the ever-accompanying brew of raw illicit sex, cannot quell nor calm the re-surfaced conscience. Yet, true to colonial conditioning he cannot take direct action in the spirit of Independence to prevent the likely train massacre but rather must rely on *badmash* Jugga to possibly save the atrocious situation. So, even at the end, he eludes official responsibility and betrays himself again, resultantly
losing face in front of his own mirror once more. But he does yet discover the ever-present spark of humanity innate within.

Against this very background and foreground too, is the symbol of nature as a Fury, wrecking peace and amity by the river throwing up floating corpses in plain view, which mostly shock and incense, breaking out of the surface to reveal the mindless grisly deeds done in the name of organized religion. All the aforesaid aspects, natural as well as human constitute a strangely single pendulum swinging to a picturesque thundering crescendo of brutal, brutalizing violence of an unparalleled scale and are finely attuned to the setting in all its scorching realism of body, mind, soul and spirit.

The novel does contain passing references to the atrocities committed by both sides for factual grounding, a factor which is a vital narrative tool for realism, but these secondhand events affect the locale only when the “evil” wheel of the communal juggernaut has advanced to the edges. This, in itself, is incisive commentary on both the misinformation and disinformation campaign built upon denial of information, especially illustrative of insular, insulated Mano Majra – but even today there are “Mano Majras” – a scathing indictment of both past and present postcolonial psyche with its army of rulers and subjects of ruled.

Nooran stands out as a young girl who dares to cross religio-caste lines in her romanticism, as does her lusty violent lover Jugga. They both are the link which affirms the larger humanity of the novel wherein the bond of love transcends not only parochially narrow and stunted postcolonialism but gives us a sense of hope that, may be even in this twisted, venomous world, there is a higher ideal, perhaps, the higher moral law.
The fact that nature is personified to the extent of taking on vibrant, violent character, which imprints scathingly on individuals and related events, is the direct outcome of the animistic quality that it is imbued with in its raw intensity and powerful rage – finding finally an outlet, a torrential release in the climax. This juxtaposition is extremely deftly handled as it is directly linked, both subconsciously and consciously with the rapid flow of the characters’ thoughts and consequent actions. With respect to individual actions, Jugga is the finest paradigm of conflict with society with a brutal face and facade as well. In this context S. Ravindranathan and R.K. Jacob contend:

The novel juxtaposes systems against the individual. Khushwant Singh’s irony manifests itself here with ruthless bitterness. Jugga, though condemned by a society as criminal and irreligious person – in brief an anti-hero – succeeds in achieving what the Deputy Commissioner, Iqbal Singh, Meet Singh and others fail to accomplish.¹⁸

The novel is marked in all its varied aspects by apt balance and control. Such balance and control is to be lauded as despite these seemingly meandering symbols, the narrative nowhere loses its taut, well-knit structure, giving it an impression of effortlessness.

The volatility of emotions when they finally reach the point of no return is echoed in the weather and natural life symbols in all its iridescent vitality; the reverse is also the case, the two being in mirror-like juxtaposition. The natural elements foreshadow in an intense, assiduously crafted way the situation building up to such a head that those caught up in the psycho-social and psycho-societal internecine mesh, spawned by Independence linked to Partition – which in turn is linked to the dance of Faust incarnate – cannot escape the horror of communal
hatred and its concomitant divisive forces. This speaks volumes of the Macaulayan postcolonial mind-mould and the puppetry successfully exercised by both the white sahibs and their successors, the burra brown sahibs.

Postcolonialism and fatalism necessarily support and buttress one another. But fatalism is not necessarily passivity. In this respect Jugga and the subinspector are vital beings, though on opposite sides of the fence. The latter, of course, has the seal of authority and, as already stated, is an essential cog in the postcolonial machine. Thus it is no accident that the author views Kalyug as the machine era of inhumanity. But deep down, even the subinspector, a vital man, a shrewd operator as well, has a sense of humanity despite his brutality imposed upon him by the job. He speaks passionately of revenge – an eye for an eye etc. In comparison to Hukum Chand, he has no surreal memory-demons to confront, as he is an action man. Thus he performs his postcolonial duties without experiencing major qualms. Comparatively, Hukum Chand's slimy cerebrality – a direct outgrowth of the scheming colonial behind-the-scenes mindset – does not purge his tortured mind. The fact that he has to always maintain a harsh persona at all times in front of his subjects further perverts his already scarred psyche – which, at the end, cannot reconcile to the gruesomeness of internecine massacres. He is thus haunted by his own soul-shadow – the curse of postcolonial power and its brutal deeds has a firm grip upon him.

Imam Baksh is a truly venerable wise man who speaks the truth of brotherhood and ahimsa (non-violence). But the postcolonial tentacle amidst the setting of Partition leaves him a lone silenced voice in the wilderness. The fact
that Nooran, Imam Buksh’s daughter, is involved with Jugga underscores that love is the primary truth and end in itself.

Fatalism is a constant common thread insofar as various characters’ psyches are concerned. But whether it takes an active or passive form, differs from character to character, the postcolonial edifice notwithstanding. As the adage goes ["invaders (colonizers) may come invaders may go but India will endure"]). But the moot point is which will endure or has endured in a hammered-in psyche ever rife with divisive differences since time immemorial with its simmering psycho-historical baggage. It is precisely psycho-historical baggage that enabled and enables the colonizers and postcolonizers to divide and rule shamefully, even till date. Postcolonialism (or rather neocolonialism in today’s context) is all the more malevolently sinister as it operates on an implicit level which creeps on to the national consciousness insidiously. Postcolonialism is an arm of neo-colonialism. The former is simply its racial, ethnic and geographical part. All this, though not directly focused on in the novel in its enveloping width, nevertheless raises this disturbing question: do we need another Independence struggle? But that would be going outside the major ambit of Train to Pakistan, though its roots are certainly there.

To conclude, in Train to Pakistan, Khushwant Singh has captured the true essence of the volatile powder keg that tore asunder “timeless bonds” of brotherhood and amity, drove an “irrevocable” wedge between communities, and firmly planted violence and hatred in their psyches, on an unparalleled scale in the subcontinent’s history. All this is captured in the pure realism of the master craftsman who has spun an objective yarn of the blood-bathed era that embodied
partition in man’s inhumanity to man, or rather, humankind’s inhumanity to humankind. Last but not least, the tense style and fluency of lower case English (technically) which is actually of a very high level when judged even by world standards, makes it a truly gripping narrative which yet possesses a universal incisiveness of social and societal commentary. All in all, it is truly a timeless piece of literature and will survive further ravages of the relentless, ubiquitous cascade of Chronos’ perennial sandgrain.
References:

1. Khushwant Singh: *Train to Pakistan*, 1956 (New Delhi: Time Books International rpt. 1981) p.1 (All subsequent references to the novel are to this edition and have been indicated by page nos. in parentheses).


3. Ibid. p. 64.


10. Ibid. p.69.


18. Ibid. p.27.