Chapter V
Theme of Partition
There are novels such as Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, Raj Gills' *The Rape*, Chamal Nahal's *Azadi* and *Ashes and Petals* by H.S. Gill which deal with the theme of partition. But none of them present the horror of partition like *Train to Pakistan* which is brutally realistic novel on the political hatred and evidence of mass passious of Sikh Hindus and Muslims in the days following the partition of India. In the prefatory note Khushwant Singh writes:

"Sikh, Hindu, Muslim – The religious and social differences between these three forms the basis of this story and the two communities which figure most prominently are the Muslims and the Sikhs. The Sikhs, who emerged as a separate religious community in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the intention of bringing the Hindus and Muslims together, became militantly anti-Muslim after severe persecution by Muslim
rulers. Their faith and way of life have much in common with both their parent communities.”¹

In this novel Khushwant Singh is not concerned with the decision for the partition of India whether it is good or bad. He is concerned with the massacre of humanity and disintegration of values. His aim is to describe the mass massacre of both Muslims and Hindus for no fault of their own. How these innocent people suffered for a political decision taken by the great political leaders who had no foresight of the horrible consequences. Mahatma Gandhi who was unwilling to nod the proposal of a partition of mother India expressed the hope that goodwill and brotherhood would continue even after the partition:

“Whether they decided to part or stay together, they must do so with good will and understanding. He could never be a party to anything which meant humiliation or loss of self respect for anyone.”²
Train to Pakistan begins with the exchange of population from India to Pakistan and vice-versa. The very title of the novel Train to Pakistan refers to this theme. V.A. Shahane while commenting on the symbolic significance of this train writes in detail:

"On the eve of the partition of the Indian subcontinent, millions of people from either side of the dividing boundary line were on the way, seeking refuge and security, millions of non-Muslims from Pakistan longed for a passage to India, a land of hope and peace, whereas millions of Muslims from India sought the road to Pakistan, the land of Islamic faith and promise. Thus the train implies the movement of vast communities torn from their roots and areas of traditional growth to a new 'Jerusalem'. It indicates the harrowing processes of this change, the awful and ghastly experience of human beings involved in a historical, impersonal and
The train symbolizes life and all activities of villagers in Mano Majra associated with the arrival and departure of railway trains. The trains which carry goods and men, start carrying the dead bodies from Pakistan to India and vice versa. Hence the train is a symbol of both life and death. It is in the process of this exchange that a severe riot started in both sides at several places. The Hindus and Muslims who were living as brothers and fought against the Britishers for freedom became enemies of each other:

"The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. From Calcutta the riots spread north and east and west: to
Hindus: to Bihar, where Hindus massacred Muslims."

Gandhiji, who agreed for the partition of India, had never thought of the exchange of population which naturally meant massacre, he says:

"This idea, the question of exchange of population has never crossed my mind. It is unthinkable and impracticable. Every province is of every Indian, be he Hindu Muslim or of any faith. It would be otherwise even if Pakistan came in full. For me any such thing would spell bankruptcy of Indian wisdom or statesmanship, or both. The logical consequence of any such step is too dreadful to contemplate."

Mano Majra a village where Muslims and Sikhs live as brothers is a symbol of India. The novelist describes as:

"It has only three brick buildings one of which is the home of the money lenders Lala Ram Lal. The other two
are the Sikh temple and the mosque. The three brick buildings enclose a triangular common with a large peepul tree in the middle."⁶

There is a perfect unity in the village. There are only seventy families in which Ram Lal’s family is only Hindu family otherwise all other are Sikh and Muslim families. However the Hindu goddess is worshipped by all and hence this goddess is a source of harmony and unity:

"But there is one object that all Mano Majrans even Lala Ram Lal Venerate. 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 Psendo - Christian repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing."⁷

The partition was a great national tragedy. It is unfortunate that there was not much literary response and expression of this great tragedy in Indian literature. World
literature remained almost untouched. The partition was such a live scene that a writer had nothing to invent. There is a crowd of world writers on the two World wars but almost negligible on this great event. Bhawani Bhattacharya, another leading Indian novelist in English rightly says:

"The tragedies of partition have been beyond anything that a writer could invent. But where is the creative expression of all these happenings? It would be somewhat odd to say that the writers have been to dazed by recent history to make it their material. In contrast the two world wars are adequately reflected in the best literature of the West. The writers have lived through history undazed."\(^8\)

However, Khushwant Singh is the first creative writer to make this horror of partition, the theme of his novel **Train to Pakistan**. He seems to opine that the partition of India was the greatest historical blunder which the makes of India
committed by agreeing to the proposal of dividing India. In each joint family brothers are always separated from one another dividing land, house and other properties but they continue to live as neighbours, sympathetic to each other in need and crisis. But the way India was divided and the population exchanged and in process the mass killings are unthinkable in the history of a nation. Brothers turned demons, thirsty of each other's blood. There was a complete chaos and darkness, a situation Arnold paints in the poem, Paradis Beach:

"And we are here as on a darkling plain swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, where ignorant armies clash by night."

The image of "where ignorant armies clash by night" is pregnant with poetic utterance and it can be applied to the situation of Mano Majra where Sikhs and Muslims killed one another as if they were complete aliens to each other, fighting
and killing one another in dark night. Bhola, a Tonga wallah hints at what happens where there is no human touch:

"When the mobs attack they don’t wait to find out who you are. Hindus or Muslims; they kill."\(^9\)

"The riots had become a rout. By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, on in hinding."\(^10\)

In an intimate conversation with Hukum Chand, the Magistrate, the Inspector describes how human beings have lost all traits to humanity and strangling human values like dark clouds engulfing the sun. Men have lost tolerance and turned revengeful. Violence has pervaded the whole air, when Hukum Chand sadly informs the inspector how Sikhs have
retaliated by killing Muslims going to Pakistan by train, the inspector most thoughtfully says:

“They say, that is the only way to stop killing on the other side. Man for man, woman for woman, child for child.”

The Inspector blames the Gandhi caps in Delhi who took a decision to divide the nation and is unmindful of the horrible reality on the ground. They are comfortable in the bungalows while the innocent people are massacred. They are more worried about their selfish political ends than the unity of India:

“What is happening on the other side in Pakistan does not matter to them? They have not lost their homes and belongings, they haven’t had their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters raped and murdered in the streets. Did your honour hear what the Muslim mobs did to Hindus and Sikh refugees in the market places at
Sheikhpura and Gujranwala? Pakistan police and the army took parts in the killings. Not a soul was left alive. Women killed their own children and jumped into wells that filled to the brim with corpses."

_Train to Pakistan_ on deeper levels deals with a clash not of good and evil but between two evil forces determined to finish each other. Indians were one while fighting the English for independence. They fought, sacrificed and died with each other but at the moment of partition, turned evils. As V.A. Swahane writes:

"The basic human and social tension in _Train to Pakistan_ arises out of the interaction of two forces. Forces of division operate in the communities of Mano Majra – a microcosm of rural India. _Train to Pakistan_ presents rural Punjab with its religious and caste divisions, which result in alienation, alternating with
forces of union which result in alienation, alternating with forces of union which result in amity.”

Khushwant Singh does not discuss the political compulsions of India’s partition but from the character’s views it seems he does not feel comfortable at the kind of freedom India got at a very heavy price. To a question of Iqbal on freedom the lambardar after a longer silence says:

“Freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Shahib, will get the jobs the English had; will we get more lands or more buffaloes?”

For simple people like the lambardar or the Muslims freedom means peace, security, comfortable bread and more land. The lambardar echoes the general opinion of the public whose history is short and simple. He is horrified at the madness of people turning into violence:
"The winds of destruction are blowing across the land. All we hear is killing, kill. The ones who enjoy freedom are thieves robbers and cut throats." Then he added calmly. "We were better off under the British. At least there was security."15

The madness of men takes its physical shape with the arrival of the ghost train from Pakistan carrying the corpses of Hindus mostly Sikhs. All the activities of Mano Majra cease as dead and gossipings in fear and apprehensions are there. It is not the train that usually came and the activities started at the platform. No one is seen sitting on the roof, none clinging between the bogies and none balancing on the foot boards. "There was something, uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality."16 The reactions of Hukum Chand speak of the atmosphere at the arrival of the ghost train full with corpses:

"Within couple of hours, all his emotions were dead, and he watched corpses of men and women and children"
being dragged out, with as little interest as if they had been trunks or beddings."^{17}

Later Hukum Chand recalls the scene of horror he had seen in the ghost train. The scene shows with what emotional involvement and sincerity Khushwant Singh has photographed with his pen:

"There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shucks had just then become voiceless. Some of them did not have a scratch on their bodies. There were bodies crammed against the far and wall of the compartment, looking in terror at the empty windows through which, must have come shots, spears and spikes. There were lavatories jammed with corpses of youngmen who had muscled their way to comparative safety."^{18}
Even in Delhi published in 1989, Khushwant Singh describes the havoc of Hindu Muslim riot and mass killings in which man's identity is lost.

"The problem was to find out who was Muslim and who was not. As soon as the Mussalmans of Delhi heard what had happened in Karnal and Ambala and Amritsar and Jalandhar, they burnt their red fez caps and furry Jinnah topees and started wearing Gandhi caps instead. They shaved off their beards, gave up wearing Sherwani coats, loose pyjamash and learnt to tie dhoti round their waists." 19

The Muslims are being flushed out, their properties are being taken over and their homes occupied. They are fleeing in hundreds of thousands to Pakistan. 20

Train to Pakistan is also a novel of revenge dealing with man for man and woman for woman. The Hindus and Sikhs plan to send a train to Pakistan with the dead bodies of
Muslims. The ghost train has changed the psychology of the Hindus and Sikhs of Mano Majra. “Everyone felt his neighbour’s hand against him and thought of finding friends and allies.”

The Sikh refugees who came alive by other routes narrated the harrowing tales of atrocities on Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. Ramlal, the moneylender was killed by Malli and his gang but it was rumoured that he was killed by Muslims. The trains loaded with corpses continue to arrive at Mano Majra and hence Fars of safety of Muslims also increase. The Muslims are advised to shift to refugee camps from where they will be sent to Pakistan by trains. The monolithic family concept starts breaking. Human relationships develop cracks. The Muslims who are born and brought up at a place are forced to vacate. The scene becomes pathetic when Imam Baksha with tears in his eyes says:
"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." 

Nooran, the daughter of Imam Baksh is too emotional to understand why she is asked to shift to the refugee camp. She simply repeats. "I will not go to Pakistan."

Investigations reach at the extreme to take revenge against the Muslims. Malli and Jugga sent to jail for the murder of Ramlal is released to kill Muslims refugees from Chundun nugger camp. The boy is moving from place to place to prepare the revengers. It again speaks of the naked dance of evil passions:

"The train is due to leave chundunnagar after midnight. It will have no lights, not even on the engine. We will post people with flash lights along the track every
hundred yards. Each one will give signal to the next person as the train passes him... People with swords and spears will be right at the bridge to deal with those that fall off the roof of the train. They will have to be killed or thrown into the river. Men with guns will be a few yards up the track and will shoot at the windows.”

Hukum Chand, the Magistrate who wanted the safe passages of the Mulsim becomes partial out of the complete helplessness:

“What am I to do?” he wailed. “The whole world has gone mad. Let it go mad! What does it matter if another thousand get killed? We will get a bulldozer and bury them as we did the others. We may not even need the bulldozer if this time it is going to be on the river. Just throw the corpses in the water.”

The police become helpless spectators because of the increasing crowds of mad people determined to kill Muslims;
“There are mobs of twenty to thirty thousand armed villagers thirsting for blood.” Hukum Chand thinks Mano Majra has become a lunatic asylum where no one is safe:

“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. No, inspector Sahib, the only thing a sane person can do in a lunatic asylum is to pretend that he is mad as the others and at first opportunity seal the walls and get out.”

Meet Singh comments that in such times save words are not listened and people do whatever they likd. He says to Iqbal:

“Who listens to an old bhai? These are bad times, Iqbal Singh Ji, very bad times. There is no faith or religion. All one can do is to crouch in a safe corner till the storm blows over.”
Train to Pakistan exposes what is called unity in diversity which comes to nothing at the critical moment. It is a country where the fanaties rule the society; where the good lack convictions while the evils have a naked dance. Mano Majra, the village turns into a battle ground characterized by intolerance and revenge. Khushwant Singh writes:

"India is constipated with a humbling. Take religion, for Hindu, it means little besides caste and cow protection. For the Muslims circumcision and kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and hatred of the Muslims. For the Christian, Hinduism with a sola topee. For the Parso, fire worship and feeding vultures. Ethics, which should be the Kernel of a religious code, has been carefully removed."\(^{29}\)

It is meaningful to note that while trains coming from Pakistan were full of corpses, the train going from Mano Majra to Pakistan passes off undamaged due to the heroic self sacrifice of a Sikh known as Jugga Budmash. The aim of the
novelist however, isn't to highlight this aspect but to describe how the Indian Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs who lived as brothers before independence turned blood thirsty of one another.

"I shall not Hear the Nightingale" is a novel more complex than Train to Pakistan. In this novel there is a beautiful fusion of three levels of theme Political, religions and sexual. It is because of this blending that this novel may be called a metaphysical novel in which both materialism and spiritualism along with contrary experiences of loyalty to the British rulers and revolutionary spirit of nationalism have been fused. On political level the novel deals with the powerful nationalist feelings and the loyalty to the British Government during the Quit India Movement of 1942-43. Significantly both these contrary feelings are in the same family. The father Buta Singh, a magistrate is loyal to the British government while his son Sher Singh is a revolutionary.
Sher Singh, the son of Buta Singh, is seen preparing himself to be rought and tough as he has to fight with and fire at the British rulers. He tries to be had and heartless. Sher Singh is in conflict between his love for his country and his love for his father who will prove to be disloyal once it is discovered that his son is a terrorist:

"Mr. Taylor had been particularly good to his father whom he trusted more than any other officer in the district, that trust would be lost for ever. His father's career in service and hopes of recognition for what he was doing for the war would be dashed."

Khushwant Singh while presenting the Sikh family of Buta Singh does not go into the details of the Quit India Movement. He doesn't describe those people who contributed much, or who were hanged for their heroic actions, he simply describes the conflict and action of a particular family which
has been loyal to the Britishers but in which there is a young man who is a revolutionary.

Sher Singh becomes a student's leader, unfurling the S.V.C.'s black flag with silver sabers crossing on it, he gives political speech which speaks of the political trend of the country at the time:

"Those who sacrifice the interests of the mother land for foreign countries are our enemy No. 1. They have been rightly named as the Kaun nashts destroyers of the race... There are also people who want to cut off the limbs of Mother India and make another state of Pakistan, They too are our enemies."\(^31\)

Buta Singh who is worried about his position and prestige and extension of his service, wants his son to reveal everything but his mother says that if he does so he would be committing a greater crime. However, Sher Singh is released unconditionally keeping in view the position of the family.
The general opinion about *I shall not Hear the Nightingale* is that it does not portray the complexity of the struggle for Indian independence. It narrates the story of a Sikh family only and not a story of the national struggle. R.K. Dhawan rightly says:

"Whereas *Train to Pakistan* is a powerful exposition of one of the most moving and violent events of contemporary Indian history, *I shall not Hear the Nightingale* treats Indian nationalism in a most detached and critical manner."\(^{32}\)

V.A. Shahane observes truly also:

*I shall not Hear the Nightingale* is not truly a political novel since its politics lacks immediacy of interest deep involvements with and commitment to a political philosophy or even to modes of action.\(^{33}\)

The three members of the family, Buta Singh, his son Sher Singh and wife Sabhrai represent three different modes
of life and attitude. The Father stands for loyalty to the British Raj, the son represents the protest against the British rule and his mother is a guiding force for both and is essentially a spiritualist. The fourth trand in the family is represented by Sher Singh’s wife whose role is an important part which is the fulfillment of sexual hunger rejecting ethics and morality. Khushwant Singh’s treatment of sex in *I shall not Hear the Nightingale* is more artistic than what we find in his later novel *Delhi* and in *The Company of Women*.

While dealing with love and sex, Khushwant Singh takes up some general issues like situation in India and Western countries. Almost like D.H. Laurence Khushwant Singh is deeply concerned with the consequences of the unfulfilled sex. To Lawrence sex is the transmitter of life and suppression of sex is devil. Like D.H. Lawrence, Khushwant Singh thinks there is no relation between sexual fulfillment and morality or fidelity. In Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* the wife is
very much loyal to her handicapped husband but for the fulfillment of her sexual urge she goes to another person. Khushwant Singh almost defends Champak's love affairs with Madan. The third level of the theme of the novel is spiritual highlighted through the Character of Sabhrai. Thus the novelist's evaluation of experience is multifaceted and multidimensional and comprises social, political, moral and religious strands.
REFERENCES


