CHAPTER III

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Social realism constitutes social attitudes and behaviour of communities and their interrelations. A novelist's immediate object is to look into the realities of social life of a particular period to create an illusion of reality. Social realism may be both normative, i.e. what it ought to be, and cognitive, i.e. what it is. Most social situations, in one way or another, involve both these types of meanings. Khushwant Singh's novels present the image of India, her fields, her flora and fauna, her people, their customs and festivals, their culture and life style in their full colour and blossom. We find in his novels a vivid picture of our country, land, people and milieu. He is a novelist whose roots are in rural social life. He has lived in India and abroad and assimilated his experiences and transformed them artistically.

The fictional world of Khushwant Singh aims of synthesizing clashing cultures. It is concerned with sufferings generated by horrowing perils of grim existence perpetuated by socio-political, historical and attitudinal accidents. Khushwant Singh has seriously tried to understand and appreciate the Indian scenes and social conditions.
through Independence, Partition and its aftermath.

The scene of *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is laid in India on the eve of the partition in 1947. About ten million people — Hindus (from Pakistan) and Muslims (from India) — are in fight, and, in large-scale communal disturbances and killings, nearly a million are dead. Only Mano Majra, a small village, is mostly free from communal frenzy and fratricidal strife. Sikhs and Muslims have lived in Mano Majra for centuries, and their relationship have been friendly. The novelist describes the disastrous impact on each communities of Mano Majra. He gives an account of the victim village:

Mano Majra is a tiny place. It has only three brick buildings, one of which is the home of the money-lender Lala Ramlal. The other two are the Sikh temple and mosque ... there are only about seventy families in Mano Majra, and Lala Ramlal's is the only Hindu family. The other are Sikhs or Muslims, about equal in number.¹

On an August night, Malli, a dacoit gangester, and his gang, enter Mano Majra and demand Ramlal's treasures. The money-lender, refuses, and is murdered. The gang leaves the village dropping a few bangles in the house of Juggat Singh (Jugga), who has served several jail terms on many charges.

Jugga was required not to leave his house after

sunset, but the call of Nooran, his beloved, the Muslim weaver's daughter, is too compelling for him to abide by the restrictive rules of the police. Jugga and Nooran return to the village only find the people gravely disturbed by the dacoity and the murder of Ramlal. Almost at the same time, Hukum Chand, the Divisional Commissioner, who has arrived earlier at the Officer's Rest Home, is engaged in a sordid affair with Haseena, a teen-aged prostitute. He tries to take liberties with her, hears the noise of gunshots and voices of Mano Majrans, swears loudly and then leaves the girl. The next day, policemen arrive at Mano Majra railway station to conduct an inquiry into the murder of Ramlal. By the same train arrives Iqbal Singh, a western-educated youth, who has been deputed by the people's party to work among the common folk. This Westernized young man goes to the village Gurudwara and is welcomed by the hospitable Meet Singh, the Sikh priest. He is admired by Meet Singh and the village Lambardar. He is, however, arrested by the police through a misunderstanding. Iqbal and Jagga are both held by the police on charges of complicity in Ramlal's murder, though no proceedings are started against them. Malli and his gang, the real murderers, are also arrested, but they are later released.

Events move fast, and the fate of individuals in Mano Majra is decisively affected by the catastrophic events of the partition. The arrival of the ghost train filled with corpses at Mano Majra from Pakistan creates a commotion.
The dark clouds of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together brotherly for centuries. Yet feelings of brotherliness have not disappeared, and they meet for consultation in a scene that is both intensely human and touching. Madness, however, invades Mano Majra too, in spite of the benevolent character of Mano Majrans. Muslims are evacuated to a refugee camp at Chundunnagger, later to be transported to Pakistan. Nooran, who is with Jugga's child, visits his mother but is almost compelled to go to the refugee camp. Hindu fanatics now revenge upon Muslims for what Muslims have done to Hindus in Pakistan. They incite the Sikhs to take revenge upon Muslims:

Do you know how many train loads of dead Sikhs and Hindus have come over? Do you know of the Massacres in Rawalpindi and Multan, Gujranwala and Sheikhopura? What are you doing about it? You just eat and sleep and call yourselves Sikhs — the brave Sikhs! the martial class.  

Hukum Chand learns that Haseena too would be on the train which is scheduled to carry Muslim refugees from the Chundunnagger camp to Pakistan. Jugga and Iqbal are both released at this crucial stage. Jugga goes to Mano Majra only to find that Nooran has been taken to the refugee camp and that she would be travelling on the train to Pakistan. He also learns of the plot of the Hindu fanatics to blow up the train with dynamites as it passes the railroad bridge at Mano Majra. Jugga climbs the steel spans of the bridge and

2. Ibid., p. 171.
begins to slash at the rope connecting the explosive material with his Kirpan. The leader of the Hindu saboteurs fires at him, but Jugga clings to the rope with his hands and cuts it to pieces. "The engine was almost on him". Thus the train went over him, and went on to Pakistan.  

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* was the first novel in English on the Partition and in many ways, it remains the best. A close study of the novel from different angles will reveal the elements of social ethos. The tone of *Train to Pakistan* reflects much of the cynicism, fear and horror of human savagery generated by communal massacres that resulted from the forcible splitting of the subcontinent. Although a number of novelists have portrayed the living scene and experience of the moment in a variety of ways, Khushwant Singh was the first Indian novelist in English to write about the horror and holocaust of partition with great artistic concern in *Train to Pakistan*. It is not a partition but what it got associated with and what it became symbolic of that attracted the attention of the writer.

The theme of love constitutes the major theme of *Train to Pakistan*. Singh sees India securing its independence in blood and grief and in circumstances that call for heroism, self-sacrifice, loyalty and physical courage. He describes the impact of partition with pitiless realism of description. The swift tempo of the narrative

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3. Ibid., p. 207.
carries the reader along.

Many trains during that terrible time were halted by armed bands of men who systematically killed unfortunate men, women and children passengers. Khushwant Singh builds a powerful series of episodes around the tragic journey by such trains. Every episode is vividly alive, and though the characters are two-dimensional they pulsate with life. The finale of the novel is as magnanimous and heroic as it is expected to be. This train to Pakistan is not stopped, nor are its passengers massacred.

Jugga is capable of the act of courageous self-sacrifice that saves a trainload of refugees from massacre. He foils the plans of his bloodthirsty comrades by cutting off the rope. The train went over him, thus saving his beloved Nooran who went to Pakistan. The genuine love of this young Sikh towards the Muslim girl saves the lives of thousands of refugees going to Pakistan. Singh thus proves that love alone can save mankind, not the mad wrath of the Sikhs or the Muslims thirsting for each other's blood, nor the impotent prayers and ideals of well-meaning men like Meet Singh and Iqbal Singh.

First Singh shows Mano Majra as a village inhabited by people of different religious faiths. Peaceful co-existence of the peace-loving people seems to be the hallmark of the place. But the novelist significantly opens his novel with the description of an event of dacoity to throw light on the forthcoming disturbance and disorderliness.
This prepares the minds of the reader to receive the abrupt charge around which the subsequent development of the novel revolves. Events move fast and the arrival of the train creates a commotion. This arrival of the ghost train makes the villagers tense and anxious and suspicious of some impending evil visiting the village. It is under guarded secrecy that the train load of corpses of Sikhs and Hindus from Pakistan are burnt, under the supervision of Hukum Chand. But the gory scene haunts the memory of the magistrate.

There was a man holding his intestines, with an expression in his eyes which said: "Look what I have got!" There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if there shrieks had just then become voiceless. Some of them did not have a scratch on their bodies. There were bodies crammed against the far end 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 young men who had muscled their way to comparative safety. And all the nauseating smell of putrefying flesh, faeces and urine... The most vivid picture was that of an old peasant with a long white beard; he did not look dead at all. He sat jammed between rolls of bedding on the upper rack meant for luggage, looking pensively at the scene below him. A thin crimson line of coagulated blood ran from his ear on to his beard.4

4. Train to Pakistan, p. 102.
Through this description the novelist has tried to emphasize not only the act of brutality but also the instinct of barbarism let loose by the decisions taken by the politicians. Fear and suspicion arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together friendly for centuries. Crisis arises at this point as the present situation deteriorates still further and Muslims of Mano Majra are evacuated to be transported to Pakistan by a train late at night. Sikh refugees from Pakistan arrive at Mano Majra and throw the Mano Majran Shikhs into confusion. They plot to destroy the Muslims in the train. Under the circumstances man becomes more animal than social. The two lizards staring at each other with their shiny ego black eyes and emitting little rasping noises stand for Hindu-Muslim enmity. The feuding lizards are beautifully contrasted with the pleasure-loving Hukum Chand, the symbol of Government, as he carefully makes his toilet to spend the evening with a prostitute.

Though all the characters are drawn in sharp outline, Hukum Chand is the most arresting. Married to an unattractive and illiterate women, he looks for love and sex elsewhere, but he is not immoral. He accepts gifts and obliges friends, but he is not corrupt. Though he takes the law into his own hands and does all what he pleases, he is not unjust. The government machinery has broken down and with hardly any resources at his disposal he is required to safeguard life and property. He goes about his business
with the conviction that the only absolute truth is death, the rest does not really matter. When he learns of the Sikhs' plan to kill the Muslim evacuees, he cries out in an important rage:

What am I to do? ... 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. What a few hundred out of four hundred million anyway? An epidemic takes ten times the number and no one even bothers.  

Through the portrayal of Hukum Chand, Khushwant Singh has shown how the much maligned Indian bureaucracy was itself caught between the hatred of a people and bungling of politicians.

Iqbal criticises the government and the leaders who are responsible for such violence and inhumanity and their lack of concern for the aftermath of the decision of partition. He himself falls a victim to the biased and selfish police officers like Hukum Chand, the magistrate and the sub-inspector's idiosyncrasies. He speaks of the unjust, unwise and unscrupulous methods adopted by the police authority who are supposed to carry the legacy of the old bureaucratic set-up. This part of the story concerning

5. Ibid., p. 178.
Iqbal may be called the sub-plot as it propels the main plot still further. Iqbal seems to be an 'armchair intellectual' who reflects on various modes of action, but at the climactic moment in the novel he finds even sacrifice redundant and prefers self-preservation, withdrawal and indifference instead. As K.C. Belliappa writes: "He [Iqbal] is a 'social' man whose 'human' side is played down by the novelist to suit his own predilections." 6

Iqbal seems to be the mouthpiece of the novelist. He shows his criticism and protest against the Government and the present morality. He finds that morality is a matter of conscience:

Morality, Meet Singhji, is a matter of money. Poor people cannot afford to have morals. So they have religion. Our first problem is to get people more food, clothing, comfort. That can only be done by stopping exploitation by the rich, and establishing landlords. And that can only be done by changing the government. 7

This concept fits in with the thought of Khushwant Singh as primarily a sociological novelist and realist. He tries to rise above the religion of communities to find conscience and ideal morality in all human beings. The scene of action and confrontation between the two forces — of bureaucracy and its challenges — is Mano Majra, the Principal protagonist

7. Train to Pakistan, p. 49.
in this drama of agonizing death and pulsating life. The town is more important than any single character in the novel.

Imam Baksh and Bhaiji Meet Singh, the religious heads of Mano Majra, in spite of their honest desires to maintain amity among the people, irrespective of diverse religious faiths, prove to be imbecile, ineffective and inert instruments, unable to control the overpowering spate of the communal disharmony thrust upon them and the village. Meet Singh says: "All one can do is to crouch in a safe corner till the storm blows over." 8 His attitude shows the way politics breaks the back and spirit of religion and makes the nobility lie low till the forces of insanity and violence have exhausted themselves in senseless destruction.

Apart from the Jugga-Nooran episode, the novelist introduces another important romantic strand in the novel. It is the affair between Hukum Chand, the deputy commissioner, and Haseena, who is young enough to be his daughter. These are the two love relationships that contribute towards the denouement of the novel. Hukum Chand is keen to get the Muslims out of Mano Majra and Chundunnagger to safety. He therefore orders the Muslims of Chundunnagger and Mano Majra to evacuate. But it is Haseena, the teenaged prostitute who explodes the fallacy of being a Hindu or a

8. Ibid., p. 192.
Muslim. She is a singer, and she says: "Singers are neither Hindu nor Muslim in that way. All communities come to hear me." 

The magistrate is uncomfortable about his own role as a bureaucrat and the custodian of law. The ruminations of Hukum Chand reflect the pathetic breakdown of law and order and the total disruption of administrative power structure in the face of the overpowering forces of anarchy, disorder and chaos. The impact of the heinous scene of mass death and termination of life is so intense on him that he becomes alienated and listless. He thus presents a pitiable picture of the state and the fate of the individual in its statelessness.

Towards the concluding part of the novel, Juggat Singh is found concentrating all his attention and energy to snap off the rope fastened overhead very tightly designed to destroy the lives of the hundreds of people sitting on the roof of the Pakistan-bond train. While the avengers, his bloodthirsty-comrades, tie the rope "stiff as a shaft steel" and wait the coming of the train in tense anticipation, jugga sneaks in the cover of darkness and climbs the steel span of the bridge. He ignores his own safety in utter defiance of the frantic fury of the Sikhs desirous of wrecking vengeance upon the Muslims. An uproarious clamour forbidding him to climb up the steel span is heard from the

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9. Ibid., p. 122.
10. Ibid., p. 206.
furious and resentful mob. But the warning falls on deaf ears and Jugga keeps on slashing off the rope:

He went at it with the knife, and then with his teeth. The engine was almost on him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan.

The crisis of the novel is thus resolved. A thoroughbred villain known more as a notorious fellow than a soft-hearted lover, Jugga makes a remarkable self-sacrifice for the sake of love. His action seems to be vibrant with his genuine love for the Muslim girl who at that time is in the family way. Thus the theme of love between Jugga, the Sikh ruffian and Nooran, a Muslim girl constitutes the major theme of the novel. But it should be borne in mind that it was not only the spirit of love that emboldens him to endanger his own life, but also his affection for his unborn child — an urge for perpetuating his own race — that inspires him to such a noble self-sacrifice.

Before the last scene of the novel, there are three atrocious scenes and these three brief episodes convey the nightmarish holocaust of India for more effectively than the other descriptions in the novel. Hukum Chand the Magistrate recollects three acquaintances who made their tryst with barbaric destiny on the independence day. There was Hukum Chand's colleague, Prem Singh, who had gone back

11. Ibid., p. 207.
to fetch his wife's jewellery from Lahore and was murdered outside a hotel. Then there was Sundari, the daughter of Hukum Chand's orderly who "made her tryst with destiny on the road to Gujranwala". The mob raped her and her husband was stripped and castrated before her eyes. And then there was Sunder Singh and his family on the train to India. He shot his children and wife when he and his family were stranded without food and drink in an unbearably hot, crowded train and when there was not even urine left to drink. He was about to put a bullet through his head when the train began to move on; "He heaped out the corpses of his wife and children and came along to India." While the first scene presents a farce, the other two the pathos of the unwanted, and open humiliation, disfigurement and destruction of life.

Train to Pakistan was originally entitled Mano Majra (1956). The change in the title seems to be the result of deep thought, and not just a matter of chance or casual choice. The change is from the static to the dynamic. Mano Majra, the name of a village, is a fixed point in space, whereas the train is a symbol of movement. The train signifies groups or multitudes of people who are heading for various destinations. It indicates the harrowing processes of this change, the awful and ghastly experience of human beings involved in a historical, impersonal, and dehumanised process. It also suggests the fate of individuals, the

13. Ibid., p. 204.
destinies of the two newly formed nations, consequent upon a political decision and the miseries, sufferings and privations which issue from it. The train is also a symbol of the machine age, an era dominated by science and technology. Man divorced from nature and God, feels rootless and alienated. This rootlessness of man is also symbolized by the train in *Train to Pakistan*. The association of Mano Majra, a village on the Indian side in the Punjab, with the train (which connected it with Lahore, the capital of the undivided Punjab before partition) may also be said to represent a confrontation between the innocent, ignorant farmer and the impersonal machine age.

Mano Majra is "very conscious of trains".14 Whereas express trains do not halt at Mano Majra, two passenger trains running between Lahore and Delhi stop there, and shunting goods wagons spend a considerable time, and the whistling and puffing of engines fill the atmosphere of the village. The train is the symbol of society involved in movement and also of an uprooted community. All the activities of the villagers of Mano Majra are closely associated with the arrival and departure of railway trains. Before daybreak the morning mail train to Lahore from Delhi blows its whistles loudly to awaken Mano Majra. Then the Muslim mullah and the Sikh priest call their followers to prayer. The next train, the ten-thirty passenger train from Delhi, finds all Mano Majrans at work-men in the fields and

women in the kitchen. The midday express passes by when Mano Majrans are at rest. The evening passenger train again finds Mano Majra active at work. When the goods train steams in, they say to each other, "There is the goods train". 15 It gives them the signal for sleep and rest. Then "Life at Mano Majra is stilled, save for the dogs barking at the trains that pass in the night. It had always been so until the summer of 1947." 16

Thus the train symbolizes life and action, but it also stands for death and disaster. The scene of the train from Pakistan, which brings in countless corpses to Mano Majra, is awful and heartrending. The setting and appearance of the train are in tune with its funeral atmosphere. A normal train has a bright headlight, whereas this extraordinary train from Pakistan had no headlight. It was a symbol of darkness and death.

Khushwant Singh gives a minute description of the life of Mano Majrans. "The arrival of the ghost train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Majra. People stood on their roofs to see what was happening at the station." 17 The village and the lambardar, the petty village employee were all puzzled by the odd appearance of the train and its sinister, ominous nature. They were later asked to carry firewood and kerosene to the spot and the

15. Ibid., p. 13.
17. Ibid., p. 94.
mystery deepened. Everyone expected something to happen:

Red tongues of flame leaped into the black sky. A soft breeze began to blow towards the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene, then of wood. And then – a faint acrid smell of searing flesh.

The village was stilled in a deathly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odor was. They all knew. They had known it all the time. The answer was implicit in the fact that the train had come from Pakistan.

That evening, for the first time in the memory of Mano Majra, Imam Baksh's sonorous cry did not rise to the heavens to proclaim the glory of God. 18

And then from across the railway line a thousand bodies were committed to the earth, and a heavy buldozer was used to bury the dead. "The train had disappeared as mysteriously as it had come. The station was deserted. The soldier's tents were soaked with water and looked depressing. There was no smouldering fire nor smoke. In fact, there was no sign of life – or death. Still people watched; Perhaps there would be another train with more corpses!" 19 The dehumanization of life is demonstrated through this cold, massive and mechanical burial.

Singh's art of portraying atmospheric effects is amply shown in scenes of the trains from Pakistan. Near the train long lines of bats flew across noiselessly. Crows

19. Ibid., p. 137.
began to caw in their sleep. The Koel's shrill cry bursts through a clump of trees. The recurrent use of the words "ghost" and "ghostly" forms part of the accentuation of experience and expression. Adjectives in the novel are filled with subtle meaning and single nouns like little "drops" contain oceans of meanings.

Train to Pakistan has an almost conventional structural pattern. The novel is a realistic novel. But the synthesis of reality and value judgement is one of its remarkable qualities. Edwin Muir would describe Train to Pakistan as a novel of action and character and, in part, as a dramatic novel. According to Muir, the dramatic novel is 'limited in Space and free in Time' whereas a novel of Character and action is 'limited in Time and free in Space'.

Train to Pakistan alternates between the dramatic novel and the novel of character, between growth in space and movement in time and, therefore, simultaneously develops both these dimensions. The exploration of the human world and its related values in Train to Pakistan is more profound and more moving than perhaps the most erudite and expert commentary on aspects of the twentieth-century civilization.

Khushwant Singh's novels are both theme-oriented as well as character-oriented. Consequently, his novels are studies of themes as well as characters. His first novel, Train to Pakistan and his last novel Delhi depict the growth

and development of the two places i.e. Mano Majra and Delhi, respectively, in various circumstances through time. Since he is preoccupied with fixing of the protagonists, he develops the situation and background accordingly. His second novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, reads more like a character study and is autobiographical in nature. It is based on Singh's past, coloured by a process of imaginative gestation.

In an interview given to Dom Moraes, Khushwant Singh said that "he would prefer to be in India now as a novelist, than anywhere else." 21 By India he means mainly the villages where there is so much material. This indicates Singh's preference for Indian themes. He further elaborates his point of view:

... from that point of view, this sort of country is far preferable to England, say. The London novelists write city novels, sex and sorrow and a lot of psychology for padding novels about a certain way of life. In a country like India one has the material of life itself. 22

But right from Mano Majra, though still depending on Indian themes, Khushwant Singh seems to impart an imaginative aura to real-life characters, although the starting point in his novels is always plot and not character. To quote Nancy Hale, "The illusion of life is best rendered when it is

22. Ibid., p. 47.
supported by a framework of purpose which in the novel is called theme". 23

Singh's themes are from various spheres of Indian life, the land, the village, the people, caste, classes, the joint family and rural as well as urban living. The novelist, writes Henry James in his essay on "The Art of Fiction", creates an 'illusion' or 'direct impression' of life with which he competes to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle, either in action or through words spoken by the characters or both. 24 Sometimes characters can be used to make quite explicit ideas the writer wishes to bring out. The main theme in a good novel is nevertheless an integral part of the action and should not need too much obvious verbal comments. The more intimate the theme is with our immediate concern the greater is its effect and impact on the reader's mind. Thus the theme arises from the general characteristics of the age and contributes something distinctive to life.

The three points that particularly draw our attention in Singh's fictional world, are: the reality with which the Indian novelist must compete is one of incredible kaleidoscopic diversity and socio-metaphysical

complexity; and, the special quality of the Indian novel is likely to derive from the special qualities of Indian life and of the 'immense sensibility' of Indian experience; and the authenticity of Indian mind and experience comes only from experience of life; love; and truth. 25

This Indian reality, it would seem, begins with the conventional images of a venerable, wise, spiritual, unsophisticated Mother India, a land of contrasts and paradoxes, of old and new, of dust-bowl plain and strangling jungle, of public worship and public defecation, of poverty and the parade of riches, of caste, festival and the interminable rituals of birth, marriage and cremation, of bullock carts and glass bangles, of confusion, mystery and religious lore - a land where non-violence is preached and violence practised. Yet it must be remembered that there is illusion as well reality in this image of India.

It is noteworthy that the novel Train to Pakistan begins with this image, as the following opening lines of the novel show: "The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. ...No one could remember when the monsoon had been so late. ...There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins." 26 Singh fares better and more artistically in Train to Pakistan. Although he explains that: "Monsoon is not another word for rain. As its original Arabic name indicates, it is a season.

26. Train to Pakistan, p. 9.
There is a summer as well as a winter monsoon."²⁷ This is a prelude to three pages of relevant description which serves to build up atmosphere, to define the villagers' primal relationship with their environment, and to exploit pathetic fallacy, in keeping with the novel's violent theme.

The plot of *Train to Pakistan* is partly pathetic and partly punitive. In the pathetic plot, a sympathetic protagonist is shown undergoing misfortunes through no particular falling of his own. The protagonist's suffering and misfortunes make him a pathetic being. Jugga's will, of course, is not weak, but his thinking is naive, and he suffers quietly and heroically. It is through suffering and sacrifice that his lost soul is reclaimed, and in this context he seems to be a character emerging from, and growing in, the area of pathetic plot. He also has an apparent affinity with the hero-villains of the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, with many inevitable deviations. The reader's responses to Jugga, as to these hero-villains, would be curiously mixed and compounded of admiration and indignation, love and hate, sympathy and apathy, fondness and dislike. Whereas the hero-villains of the Elizabethan drama succeed in victimising truly good people and thus create a sense of horror, Jugga rehabilitates himself in our eyes by his supreme self-sacrifice. He is neither Satanic nor Machiavellian in the Elizabethan sense; he is truly an uncoth Indian rustic, who, caught in the quicksands of evil,

²⁷. Ibid., p. 82.
successfully struggles out of it and reaches the shores of spiritual reclamation.

The main plot of the novel is the story of tragic partition of country into India and Pakistan in 1947 and its effects at the village Mano Majra, which is the centre of the action. The action of the novel takes place at the border between India and Pakistan at Mano Majra. The novel is divided into four parts: (a) Dacoity; (b) Kalyug; (c) Mano Majra; and (d) Karma. The titles of these parts are characteristically Indian, since the novel presents a Kaleidoscopic picture of a turbulent phase of Indian history and the sordid aspect of its life. The first part, 'Dacoity', constitutes a true-to-life description of an actual robbery committed in Mano Majra village, but its ramifications and remote echoes go far beyond the inhuman and cruel actions of the robber Malli and his gang. What the reader ultimately realizes is that humanity itself has been robbed of its human attributes, that world has been dispossessed of its values, and that the universe has been stripped of its significance. The decoity in Mano Majra is an expression of man's inner spiritual deprivation.

The second part, 'Kalyug', bears a title which, according to Hindu view of Time, means the fourth and last phase in the cycle of existence. The spirit of Kali or strife has entered into vast masses of men in both India and Pakistan at the time of partition, and Train to Pakistan

emerges out of inwardly felt experiences of the novelist. Kaliyug is a Hindu religious and theological concept, but sociologically speaking it is also a widely current, popular, superstitious belief. Kali, the spirit of strife, presides over the destinies of men in it; everything becomes topsy-turvy; and voices of affirmation are drowned in the abyss of negation. The world in Train to Pakistan may be better understood in relation to this cosmic design.

The Third part, entitled Mano Majra, is the microcosm of the world and therefore it suggests the reign of Kali. This title establishes an equivalence between the human portent and the cosmic design of the novel.

The fourth part of the novel is entitled 'Karma', which is a highly significant term. The word Karma, which in Sanskrit means an act or deed, has two implications in the narrative context of the novel. In the Buddhist and Hindu views 'Karma' implies the totality of a person's actions in one of the successive cycles of his existence, and is thought of as determining his fate in the next phase of his life. It may also be used to mean the destiny. The title includes both of these implications. The partly deterministic implication of the subtitle is in tune with the realistic design of the novel. It also indicates the Hindu view of life, seeking a rapport with, and establishing a correlation between man's worldly experience and the cosmic design. The allusion to the popular superstition that God was punishing the sinful establishes a subtle
connection between the specific natural phenomena and the two concepts of Kaliyug and Karma. These parts are linked in a meaningful pattern. The novel has a perfect integration of form and content.

It may safely be said that the novel Train to Pakistan is a compact, well-knit work of art. It has remarkable reality in respect of social ethos and values. But a recent study of the novel expresses the following critical opinion:

*Train to Pakistan* is surely part of the novel toward realism but it also goes beyond it in the area of value, the field so subtly and superbly explored by great novelists such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. It embodies the exploration of new concept of reality. *Train to Pakistan*, in spite of its predominantly realistic mores, tends toward prophetic fiction. The exploration of the human world and its related values in *Train to Pakistan* is more profound and more moving than perhaps the most erudite and export's commentary on aspects of twentieth-century civilization.²⁹

The accurate representation of reality which characterizes naturalism is far removed from the quality of the created world in *Train to Pakistan*. It is a creative rendering of the real; it re-affirms the novelist's faith in human beings and renews artistically his avowed allegiance to humanistic ideals.

Critics have pointed out the political implications of *Train to Pakistan*. V.A. Shahane has dealt with the novelist's use of realistic techniques.\(^{30}\) The naturalistic treatment of its theme has been pointed out by K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri.\(^ {31}\) Some others have emphasized the loss of life consequent upon the partition of the country. But probably the interdependence of religious behaviour and the political decisions has not been systematically considered. The novel is, in fact, a severe indictment of the political inability of the states to protect people from the perils of its own blind and immature decisions. The disintegration of Mano Majra and its harmony is symptomatic of the inner disintegration of the nation at this hour of grim crisis. The pattern of conflict, confrontation and resolution at the national level is repeated and reflected in Mano Majra. There was no political solution to the sad happenings except individual grace and sacrifice. Of the several resolutions open - religious, administrative and ideological - it is only the personal act of nobility of Jugga which saves the situation in the novel. If the political decisions be shortsighted, the novel suggests, they are bound to pervert the religious and communal behaviour of the people. 'The novelist does not act in a partisan way. He blames neither the Hindus nor the Muslims for the holocaust. The partition not only displaced people and dispossessed them of their

belongings but also partitioned the hearts of the people and turned them brute and barbarous preying upon their own kind. The spirit of the novel is secular and expresses the novelists commitment to secularism. For him the solution seems to lie in the wisdom of the meek and docile – Bhai Meet Singh's and selfless Juggas.

To the traumatic tragic turmoil of partition the author has added spice by introducing a Western educated communist agent. It is indeed, as Rosenthal puts it, "a deftly understanding novel of the horror of partition." 32 The characters are convincing and the story is full of grim realism. Thus "The novel will easily rank in the fore-front of Indo-Anglian literature," 33 and Khushwant Singh has justified the praises showered on him by R.K. Narayan. 34

The novel is written against the background of partition of India. The period is characterized by a marked communal disharmony between the two dominant communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. An appalling hecatomb tarnishes the entire social luring of India at large. Owing to growing animosity and a deep-rooted hatred among the people of different communities, the tender feelings of love, fellow-feeling and brotherhood are on the wane. Even under such adverse circumstances, the abiding selfless love that

gets the upper hand in Juggat Singh cannot but leave an indelible impression on the mind of the reader.

_I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale_ (1956) is the second novel of Khushwant Singh. He dedicated it to Dharma "Who aspires to know" and inserted a quotation from Robert Browning's "Paracelsus": "I am he that aspired to know: and thou?/April: I would love infinitely and be loved". Paracelsus, the Swiss alchemist-magician-philosopher, who had sought knowledge alone, heard within him the voice of April, the spirit of a departed poet, who had aspired to love beauty only. Both knowledge and love are complementary approaches to reality. If Paracelsus' demand was refused by April to offer obeisance, then Paracelsus would exclude love. In the same way April had overlooked knowledge. Paracelsus was an embodiment of knowledge, whereas April was that of love. Paracelsus saw the error into which he and April both had fallen.

In view of the integral view of life presented by Browning, to the relevant question arises: whether it is also of the view of life enshrined in _I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale_. The answer to this question is partly affirmative. Since the emphasis on love as the true pathway to God emerges out of the inwardly felt experience of the novelist, he has creatively expressed the experience in the portrayal of Sabhrai, the most significant of all the characters in _I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale_.

Khushwant Singh sought the inwardly felt experience to understand the social problems during the British regime in India. The socio-political problems of the industrial age led to the growth of problem novels like *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* by Khushwant Singh. We come across the conflict between father's ideological principle of obsequious obedience to the British rule and securing promotion in service to enjoy a higher revolutionary activities to do away with the British rule and his son's ideology opposing his father's obedience to the British rule and becoming a notorious terrorist. Thus the theme provides the novel with its atmosphere and environment. It shows human figures in the closest organic relationship with the outer world.

This vivid and thrilling novel reflects a picturesque view of contemporary Indian life and conventions. Khushwant Singh presents the reality in a photographic way. He presents the Indian life in all its dazzling and bewildering variety. He has depicted the sordid realities of life by giving a true account of the complexities of relations in family.

*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is confined to a middle-class Sikh family in the Punjab during second world-war. It is the thrilling story of a people emerging into Independence. The theme of the novel is related with the pre-independence period. Prior to it, the Japanese had got remarkable success in South-East Asia, which left the British Government perplexed. Now the Britishers had to
face the ruin of Indian Empire. In the mean time, the Indian patriots guessing the end of the Raj sought freedom from the clutches of the English by revolutionary means.

The presentation of incidents in the novel is very dramatic. There is a brief explanatory note at the beginning of the novel to acquaint the readers with the Sikh Community, their customs and beliefs. Then a list of characters in the story is divided into three sections according to their roles. At the end the time of action is given — April 1942 to April 1943 — as the backdrop. This uncommon practice may be regarded as an artistic flaw. But this being the second novel of the author, it has a greater authenticity which reflects the ironic responses of a Sikh family illustrative of different Indian reactions to the freedom movement of the forties. The impact of the freedom movement on a small middle-class sikh family in Delhi is shown realistically. Incidents of double-dealing, treachery and posing are also dealt with. The novel is divided into twelve chapters. The novelist's obsession with sex can be seen in practically every chapter.

Since the theme of the novel is related with the disturbed pre-Independence and pre-partition period, it presents the inner tensions of members of a well-to-do sikh family of Punjab. Relations between bureaucracy and the people were becoming much more bitter, and Singh explores the consequent conflicts and tensions that arise in the
family of a Sikh magistrate. All the main characters of this work are sikhs.

The action of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* takes place between April 1942 and April 1943, when the freedom movement was at its zenith. It was the time of the Quit India Movement. However, Singh concentrates on depicting the problems of the educated, upper middle-class people, which formed part of the British administrative machinery.

The novelist significantly begins the novel with the descriptions of an incident of killing of a crane bird by Sher Singh and a group of student-terrists in order to baptize their guns. This note of violence recalls the religious fanaticism that caused the partition. The ritual murder of the crane has symbolic overtones too. The incident has got its bearing on the subsequent development of the tragic end. This throws light on the forthcoming turmoil and tensions of the sikh family and also prepares the mind of the readers to fully understand the inner tension through which each member of the family passes. The subsequent development of the novel rotates round resolving the crisis through which the Singh family undergoes.

The crisis of the novel arises from the arrest of the nationalistic student leader Sher Singh for the murder of a police informer and blackmailer, Jhimma Singh. The D.C., John Taylor, the most decent person in the novel, is sure about the murder being committed by Sher Singh, though
he is unable to prove it. Moreover, he is obviously very much anxious and unhappy over Sher Singh's reported involvement with the revolutionaries, since he is generally interested in the welfare of Buta Singh and his family. He tactfully handles this affair with remarkable decency and caution. Except Sher Singh's mother, Sabhrai, all people in the story want Sher Singh to reveal the name of his accomplices in the murder, so that Taylor is able to get the Royal pardon for him. Further, he also wants to spare the boy as far as possible, because of the long and loyal years of service of his father. The magistrate Buta Singh, who has hitherto encouraged his son's nationalistic activities, now does not want his long years of loyalty to the British Government go unrewarded. Sher Singh's sister, Beena, wants Sher Singh to be saved at any cost, and even Champak, his wife, who is involved in all sorts of immoral and faithless activities, undergoes a period of tension in the course of this unforeseen catastrophe. It is only Sabhrai, the quiet, religious mother, who realizes the gravity and the moral implications of the situations. Her faith in the Guru and the Adi Granth is great and she says firmly and quietly: "We will first do the non-stop reading of the Granth. The Guru will guide us. We will do what He commands." 36 She spends the whole night praying in Gurudwara and in the morning she meets Sher Singh in the prison cell with a broken heart. She advises her son not to betray his companions.

The crisis is resolved by the intervention of Joyce Taylor, the D.C.'s wife, who has developed a deep regard for Sabhrai. Sabhrai's illness fills her heart with sorrow and as soon as she learns of her ill health, she persuades her husband to get Sher Singh released as a token of Christian goodwill. However, Sher Singh overcome with joy at this unexpected release, misuses even this opportunity. He manages to get a procession of triumph arranged for himself with the help of Madan and succeeds in projecting an entirely false heroic image of himself. Sabhrai, however, under the emotional strain and illness, breaks down. She calls the family to her bedside, chants her morning prayer and dies peacefully with her face radiant with an unearthly glow. Buta Singh, though sorry for his wife's death, is happy as his name is being included in the New Year's Honours list of the British Government. He wants a memorial to be built for his wife with the help of the Taylors. His attempts do not go unrewarded and the novel ends with his smug statement: "Thank you, madam. As a famous English poet has said, 'All's well that Ends well'," revealing his selfish and farcical nature.

Regarding the theme of the novel S.C. Harrex writes:

In I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale Khushwant Singh is again preoccupied by the theme of the antithesis between violence and right moral
conduct and the notion that the only redemptive feature of a situation which justifies pessimism or cynicism of outlook depends on a single demonstration of personal sacrifice, honesty and moral consistency. 38

The novelist has hinged his theme on something like poetic rapture. The Nightingale is a singing bird. The singing of the nightingale symbolizes the advent of spring. It is the dawn of freedom that the nightingale implies. The implication is that the achievement of India's freedom, like the coming of spring, will give joy to millions of Indians, but Sabhrai will not be there to see the happy days when the nightingale sings. The symbol of the nightingale in the novel is multifaceted and multidimensional. The hearts of men are said to ache and a drowsy numberless overtake them as they listen to the 'plaintive anthem' of the nightingale. Even Sabhrai had a premonition of the nightingale's song on the Indian sub-continent in 1947, as darkling she listened, being half in love with caseful death. The Nightingale's song may herald spring, but it could also be an expression of intense agony, misery and spiritual deprivation. The spring of 1947 in India had within itself winter of discontent, and this greatly modifies the effect of the song of the nightingale. The symbol of the nightingale in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale may thus be related to Khushwant Singh's realism.

The symbolism in the novel, though prominent at places, is overshadowed by a realistic strain. Religious festivals — Baisakhi and Christmas — symbolise the regeneration of men, but the effect is hardly sustained by the sequence of events. Birds, too, are symbols of renewal and joy of life, and it is surely ironic that Sabhrai would not, after all this ado, hear the song of the nightingale. The monsoon, also symbolises renewal of life in a cyclic pattern, but even its effect is short-lived.

The basic theme, interlinked with symbols, is that of love as a solver of the problems of life — human, social, cultural and political. Sabhrai exemplifies the view that "God could not be everywhere and therefore He made mothers". The love inside Sabhrai's heart pervades the entire novel silently. Although all other actions and reactions are bulging with noise, throughout the novel Sabhrai's spirit of love envelopes all the other characters of the novel. Here love becomes the saviour of the lost soul. This concept of love is quite in harmony with the title. Sabhrai is the incarnation of selfless love. "There is bulbul on the bough", says Sabhrai in good humour, while looking at stringy vegetable on her husband's mustache, and adds, "it has flown!" It seems to me, that Sabhrai herself is a nightingale. She, too, has flown after singing her songs of ecstasy in this ancient land. She is like other silent

39. I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, p. 229.
sufferers of the period of independence. Sabhrai seeks the path of love through self-denial and suffering. She redeems the human world around her through death. Yet love has limitations imposed by the rigid realities of life, which Khushwant Singh has portrayed skillfully.

A dichotomy between the inference of the title and the implications of the content is created in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. The title signifies the poetic intention of the novelist, whereas the substance of the novel is dominated by dialogues and descriptions of individual, social, and political situations, and by the complications that arise from them. The tension arises out of the difference between the novelist's desire to make a poetic communication about life and his actual performance in capturing merely the physical reality of India in ferment. The schism between symbol and theme, poetical ideal and realistic treatment, is a significant feature of the novel's form. However, the schism is not deep, and the dichotomy between Khushwant Singh's intention to make a poetic communication about life and his realistic portrayal is resolved by his mode of presentation of life-like characters.

The fictional characters look in two directions — towards life and towards art. The characters in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* look toward life. In this process, the dichotomy between the poetic intention and the realistic achievement is resolved since the realm of life is all-
inclusive and covers the area of the passion of life and prose of everyday existence. The passion is transfused through and through with moral austerity and strong religious upbringing which reveals the painful side of human affection. Throughout the novel Khushwant Singh tries to deviate search for balance between the father Buta Singh and the son Sher Singh and interweaves it with his personal idealistic reaction. The family and religion seem to be his practical ideals on one hand, while on the other hand he is conscious of the social ideal and national vitality itself that was prevalent during the period of independence.

Buta Singh is a staunch supporter of the British Raj. The novel covers the entire range of human experience. Khushwant Singh shows the changing attitude towards the Britishers from servility to revolt. He observes minutely and records his findings without any prejudice. He analyses the complexity of the relationship with the family. Buta Singh is in favour of the British Government but finds himself helpless when Sher Singh is involved in terrorist activities. The father and the son are sailing in two different boats. As a matter of fact, Buta Singh is a man of double-dealing. On one side, he desires to attain the reward of his long service by favour of the English people for serving them sincerely and whole-heartedly; on the other, he is reluctant in his relation towards his son. He regards the English people as superior to everyone whether they are Germans, Italians or Japanese. While talking to Sher Singh,
he frankly admits:

The English have ruled us for over a hundred years, and I do not care what you say, I believe they have treated us better than our kings did in the past; or the Germans, Italians or Japanese will do if they win and take over India. We should stand by the English in their hour of trouble.  

What makes matters worse is that "I cannot change, at my age". The problem of generation-gap in ideas, visions and modes is raised by the novelist in a skillful manner.

Sher Singh is an active and enthusiastic leader of a terrorist group rebelling against the foreign rule. In the first part of the novel, Sher Singh and his friends are shown as engaged in target practice and rifle-shooting in a desolate part of North India. They are violently patriotic. The very first sentence of the novel states: "There should be a baptism in blood. We have had enough of target practice". Sher Singh's terrorist activities lead to the murder of a sikh peasant Jhimma Singh because he starts blackmailing him and his colleagues. As a result, Sher Singh is arrested on a suspected charge of murder. His father is amazed to know all these things. His castle of desires and prestige are reduced to dust. In prison Sher Singh gets a rough and harsh treatment and is humiliated to such an extent that sometimes, he appears to be ready to surrender.

40. I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, p. 23.
41. Ibid., p. 24.
42. Ibid., p. 3.
before the police and disclose the names of his accomplices. Sher Singh's mother, Sabhrai, advises him to die rather than betray his friends. There is a ray of hope in the shape of this pious and religious lady. She possesses a deep-rooted faith in the Guru and 'Adi Granth'. When her son is arrested and all the family members feel disturbed, she maintain the peace of the family and says: "We shall have a non-stop reading of the Granth for two days and nights. The Guru will be our guide". 43 She goes to Gurudwara i.e. Golden Temple and spends a whole night in it. Later on, she tells her son:

He [Guru] said that my son had done wrong. But if he named the people who were with him, he would be doing a greater wrong. He was no longer to be regarded as a Sikh and I was not to see his face again. 44

While most of the characters of the novel are indulging in sordid affairs and have no time to think about others, this old religious lady is a ray of hope. She is the true embodiment of moral values. After all Sabhrai rescues her son but it is an irony of fate that she does not live to 'hear the nightingale' and dies of pneumonia in a peaceful way.

The introduction of the sub-plot concerning Champak's extra-marital relationship with Madan is a bit puzzling. It serves no purpose in the novel; nor does it

43. Ibid., p. 191.
44. Ibid., pp. 208-209.
contribute to propel the main plot of the novel forward. The author might have introduced it to serve as a contrast between conservative and modern ideas.

Again, the introduction of the sub-plot concerning Peer Sahib and Shunno unfolds another facet of Indian life. The novelist seem to have introduced it to heighten the theme of selfish love of Champak and Madan. Whereas the relationship between them has grown out of sheer physical necessity, the Shunno-Peer Sahip relationship exposes the corrupt ways of religious people.

The treatment of sex scenes by the novelist is too mechanical. He has given narrative descriptions of sex urges in his novel Train to Pakistan as well as in the earlier part of I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale. Regarding these scenes, S.C. Harrex observes:

these scenes are intended to illustrate Khushwant Singh's sociological contentions that absence of privacy in Indian life causes sex to be brutal or brief or inhibited and that consequential repressions seek violent or abnormal outlets. 45

The scenic descriptions of sex could have been presented in a refined manner. The novelist himself must have realised this. As we advance through the novel we final refined descriptions of sex, whereas in the first part of the novel he conveys it with camera-like authenticity. Later on, he

just indicates it indirectly:

The service demanded returns to which he [Sher Singh] attended with so much enthusiasm as he could muster. 46

The novel has sexual elements in plenty and it depicts it as the darker side of life. The portraiture of Sher Singh's young wife, Champak, is indeed noticeable. She is not a typical Indian woman like her mother-in-law, who, in the words of the novelist, "... was the type of Indian woman who believed that her husband was a God". 47 Champak "offers a sharp contrast to the moral values embodied in Sabhrai, her mother-in-law". 48

Khushwant Singh does not fight shy of describing the scenes of sex. He treats sex boldly. He is of the view that the absence of privacy in modern Indian life is a dangerous phenomenon:

Absence of privacy is a phenomenon that pervades all life in India, urban and rural, of the rich and the poor. It has been so for many centuries and the weight of tradition is heavy against those who live in society and still wish to be alone. 49

The sex-scenes depicted in the novel, however, have their own significance. They are not meaningless. R.K. Dhawan

46. I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, p. 17.
47. Ibid., p. 194.
49. I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, p. 41.
considers the novelist as much a historian as a sociologist.\textsuperscript{50} He is not only a sociologist but a psychologist too. His psycho-analytical knowledge indicates that he might have studied the modern psychologists such as Freud and Jung.

Khushwant Singh has depicted human beings in their socio-political world. Emphasizing the sociological aspect of his art, Chirantan Kulshrestha writes:

Sociological is perhaps the word to describe the chief concerns of Khushwant Singh's fiction. The adjective indicates not only the spirit of his work, but also the method he employs to provide a focus to his view of reality. His socio-cultural pre-occupations define the nature of his fiction: class of sensibilities and life style in modern India, tensions in families resulting from the conflict between tradition and modernism, emotional responses to the partition by different communities - there are some of the elements that constitute the matrix of his plots.\textsuperscript{51}

The form of the novel \textit{I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale} evolves out of its basic structure of social and political narrative. It is essentially a social and human document. It is the story of two families, one Sikh and the other Hindu, set against the decaying power of the British Raj in the Punjab during the period April 1942 to April 1943, about

\textsuperscript{50} Three Contemporary Novelists, p. 21.

five years before the achievement of India's independence.

The novel has a limited range and a restricted canvas. The entire action takes place in a place near Delhi. The time taken is about one year. The suffering and anguish Sabhrai posses through have been detailed in the novel. Singh draws the characters that combine the elements of contrast and parallelism. The basic theme is that of love and the novel has presented love as a solver of all the problems of life.

The flaw that one can find in this novel is in the introduction of the sub-plot consisting of Champak-Madan affair. Probably Khushwant Singh wanted to highlight the negative impact of Western culture on educated, liberated, Indian women. To my mind, he could have achieved his objective in a more refined, tactful and tasteful manner. The novel is, however, a realistic representation of the social ethos of the Sikh families of Punjab. It depicts realistically and faithfully Buta Singh's servility, Sabhrai's staunch trust in the Adi Granth and the Guru and amorous Champak. His sense of keen observation of life is supplemented by a mild humour. The author smiles at the amateurish attempts of Sher Singh to play the role of a terrorist leader. The interest of the story has been well sustained and the life of a Punjab family has been beautifully depicted. Even the Shunno-Peersahib episode is as humorous as it is realistic. Although it is an
interesting and entertaining novel, it never reaches the 
heights of Train to Pakistan, the earlier novel of Khushwant 
Singh's, which has been discussed in the beginning of this 
chapter.