CHAPTER II

TREATMENT OF HISTORY IN ‘TRAIN TO PAKISTAN’

Khushwant Singh is the modern Indian writer and he presents the Indian history in the new flavour. ‘Train To Pakistan’ (1956) is the famous historical novel, which presents the historical background of the time of independence. I wish to explore in this chapter aspects of Khushwant Singh’s novel, ‘Train to Pakistan’ such as theme, title, symbol, and structure in the context of his portrayal of contemporary realism. This novel is one of the finest realistic novels in the post-Second-World-War phase of Indian fiction in English and it is Khushwant Singh’s supreme achievement. This realistic masterpiece contains, among other things, a well thought-out structure, and artistically-conceived plot, an absorbing narrative and imaginatively realizes characters.

The predominant quality of this novel is its stark realism, its absolute fidelity to the truth of life, its trenchant exposition of one of the most moving events of contemporary Indian history and the partition. It is also marked by its special naturalistic mores. The individual in Singh’s fictional world is silhouetted against this vast, panoramic background, the great human
catastrophe of the partition of India and the ghastly and inhuman events, which followed it. Singh’s art is revealed in not merely probing deep into the real, but in transposing the actual into symbol and image. His art of realistic portrayal cannot be described merely as an exercise in the Book-Keeping of existence, but in fact it is a creative endeavour of transcending the actual asserting the value and dignity of the individual and finally, expressing the tragic splendour of a man’s sacrifice for a woman.

The scene of ‘Train to Pakistan’ is laid in Mano Majra, situated on the Indo-Pakistan border, in 1947. On the August night Malli, a dacoit, and his friends, enter the village and demand Ran Lal’s treasures from him. The moneylender refuses and it’s murdered. The gang leaves the village dropping bangles in Juggat Singh’s house. Juggat or Jugga is at that time out in the fields to meet Nuran, the Muslim weaver’s daughter. Jugga and Nuran return to the village only to find people gravely disturbed by the dacoity. Hukum Chand, the Divisional Commissioner has arrived at the Officers’ Rest House and is engaged in a sordid affair with Haseena, a teen-aged prostitute. He tries to fumble with her dress, hears gunshots and then leaves the girl. Next day Policemen arrive at Mano Majra railway station to conduct an inquiry into the murder of Ram Lal. By the same train arrives Iqbal Singh, a western-educated youth, who has been depute by the People’s Party to work among peasants and common fault. The westernized young man...
Chand learns that Haseena too would be on the train, which is scheduled to carry Muslim refugees from the Chandangar camp to Pakistan. Jugga and Iqbal are both released at this crucial stage. Juggat Singh goes to Mano Majra only to find that Nuran has been taken to the refugee camp and that she would be traveling on the train to Pakistan. He also learns to the plot of the Hindu fanatics to blow up the train with dynamite as it passed the railroad bridge at Mano Majra. Jugga climbs the steel spans of the bridge and begins to slash at the rope connecting the explosive material with a sharp instrument, a 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 of the incoming train ‘was almost on him…’ Thus the train ‘went over him, and went to Pakistan.’

Thus, this, is the brief outline of the story of ‘Train to Pakistan.’ But to summarize an idea or a narrative sequences is to distort it. I therefore present the progression of action and character, form and idea in Train to Pakistan in its proper perspective.

1. THE HISTORICAL SYMBOL IN TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

‘Train to Pakistan’ was originally entitled ‘Mano Majra’ (1956). Mano Majra is the name of a place, which is the center of action in the sequence of events leading to the final catastrophe. The change in the title
materialistic age has caused severe destruction of humanistic values. Man, divorced from nature and God, feels rootless and alienated. This rootlessness of man his severance from the bonds of the earth, which reared him, is symbolized by 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) is indirectly a confrontation between the innocent, ignorant farmer and the impersonal, indifferent Machine Age.

More important the train suggests the recurrent rhythmic pattern in the novel. E. K. Brown, in his analysis of idea of 'rhythm' in fiction, has commented on the significance of recurrent patterns and given several examples, particularly from the novels of E. M. Forster. In a similar context the train in Khuswant Singh's novel is at the heart of the sequence of events and processes of motivation: 'Mano Majra has always been known for its railway station.' Whereas Express trains do not halt at Mano Majra, two passenger trains running between Lahore and Delhi stop there, shunting goods wagons spend a considerable time and the 'whistling' and 'puffing' of engines fill the atmosphere of the village. 'All this made Mano Majra very conscious of trains.' Thus the train, the symbol of both societies involved in movement, and of an uprooted community, is closely linked with Mano Majra.
In effect, all the activities of villagers in Mano Majra are closely associated with the arrival and departure of railway trains. Before day-break the Morning Mail train on its way 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 10-30 passengers from Delhi, finds all Mano Majrans at workmen in the fields and women in kitchen. The midday Express passes by when Mano Majrans are at rest and having a siesta. The evening passenger train again finds Mano Majra active and at work. Then, men return home from their farms and women get busy with their routine chores. The goods train gives them the signals for sleep and rest. Then ‘life in Mano Majra is stilled, save for the dogs barking at the trains that pass in the night’.

Thus the train, which embodies the motif of life, is a symbol of movement and activity. It is a dual symbol. On the one hand it symbolizes life and action; it stands for death and disaster on the other. The scene of the train from Pakistan, which brings in countless corpses of Mano Majra, is awful and heart-rending. The setting and appearance of the train are in tune rending. The setting and appearance of the train are in tune with its funeral atmosphere. A normal train from Pakistan had no head light, whereas this extraordinary train from Pakistan had not heard light at all. It was a symbol of darkness and death. ‘There are no lights on the train.’ The engine did not
whistle.' 'It is like a ghost.' Thus the ghostly train carrying the dead becomes a symbol of disaster, destruction, and death. One recalls the strange atmosphere of the train to the Marabar Caves in E. M. Forster's 'A Passage to India'. Yet the quality of disaster in this novel is very different from the quality of the destruction of humanistic values in 'Train to Pakistan'. Man becomes the butcher of his fellow men and the consequent genocide has become a gruesome characteristic of certain phases of twentieth century civilization.

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 was balanced on the footboards. But somehow it was different. There was something uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality. As soon as it pulled up to the platform, the guard emerged from the tail end of the train and went into the stationmaster's office. Then the two went to the soldiers' tents and spoke to the officer in charge. The soldiers were called out and the villager loitering about was ordered back to Mano Majra. One man was sent off on a motorcycle to Chandannagger. An hour later, the sub-inspector with about fifty armed police-men turned up at the station. Immediately after them, Mr. Hukum Chand drove up in his American car. 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.

The villagers and the Lambardara, 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 mystery deepened. At a later stage:

The northern horizon, which had turned a bluish gray, showed orange again. The orange turned into copper and then into a luminous russet. Red tongues of flame leaped into the black sky. A soft breeze began to blow towards the village. It brought the smell of burning 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.

The ‘red tongues of flame’ symbolize the poisonous and aggressive nature of the snake and show how, in the heat of their destructive lunacy, men turn into venomous reptiles and spout poison. The distant fires brought
a faint acrid smell of searing flesh’, which caused a sense of horror, revulsion and disgust among the villagers. Imam Baksh, the Muslim priest, and Meet Singh, the Sikh priest, were god-fearing, good-natured man who wished to uphold humanistic ideals. They realized that the train carried the dead and that it was the outcome of a ghastly, demonic act; consequently, neither the Muslim preacher nor the Sikh priest could utter their sacred word of God in that hour. It was a world without the word of God, bare and naked in its ugliness and horror.

Singh’s artistic creation of the atmosphere in Train to Pakistan has very interesting parallels in E. M. Forster’s masterly portrayal of the atmosphere in ‘A Passage to India’ (1924). Forster describes at length the mysterious and ‘extraordinary’ Marabar Caves it paves the way for transmitting the baffling experience of Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested to the reader. As Aziz, along with Mrs. Moore and Adela, boards the train for Marabar Caves, the reader looks forward to a jolly, picnic scene. But the atmosphere, sad and somber, soon dissolves the jollity into uncanny despair and the whole situation is overshadowed by an invading tide of disaster:

As the spoke the sky to the left turned angry orange. Colour throbbet, and mounted behind a pattern of trees, grew in intensity, was yet brighter, incredibly brighter, stained from without against the globe of the air. The awaited the miracle. But at the supreme moment, when
night should have died and day lived, nothing occurred. It was as if virtue had failed in the celestial fount. The hues in the east decayed, the hills seemed dimmer though in fact better lit, and a profound disappointment entered with the morning breeze. Why when the chamber was prepared, did the bridegroom not enter with trumpets and shawms, as humanity expects? The sun rose without splendour. He was presently observed trailing yellowish behind the trees, or against insipid sky and touching the bodies already at work in the fields.  

Singh uses the history as an alive character in his novel ‘Train To Pakistan.’ The historical violence in this novel becomes central to all planned and accidental activity. It appears violence itself is to be evaluated according to it. In many ways, Hegel’s concept of the breach of moral order and its restitution in tragedy is applicable to the situation in Train to Pakistan. The Chaotic violence, here, is a breach of the moral craving for restitution, to rise like phoenix from its own ashes.

There is much of historical violence in this novel but there is more about the historical violence. Its occasion, its rationale or absence of rationale, its brutality, madness, inevitability, the involvement of various institutions in it, but above all the themes there is a cast a hallow of its relation of life. If one sentence from the novel is to be culled for the
meaning of the goings on in the world of Mano Majra it will be the Police inspector’s disclosure to Hukum Chand, “Sir, what the police of the Punjab has failed to do, the magic of the eyes of a girl of sixteen has done.” Then there is Hukum Chand at the helm of affairs to grapple with violence and crime, present at the spot directing administration, maneuvering psychologies facing historical violence with diplomacy. All the same amid the chaos and uncertainty of things around him, in some remote corner of his heart there is the supervening anxiety for Haseena. A badmash and a magistrate resting on the same segment of service. To love is an interesting situation, partly as a commentary on violence and partly as a compulsive human urge. Khushwant Singh’s novel explores this dichotomy in the chaos of things as they lay.

This novel offers a glimpse into the upshot of violence, and what violence does to people, what is there beneath and above it. If this novel was to be renamed, it would be violence and beyond. The fact the Singh has impressed upon the muddle of violence and crime, the softer elements of love and sacrifice, earn him a credit as a novelist, but much arduous task confronts him in handling the chaos that the country had experienced. He cannot pretend to be inside that chaos, as Lala Kanshi Ram certainly was, yet the picture has to be real. His approach to violence is therefore systematic, orderly, illustrative because he has in hand the impossible are
suspended chaos i.e. a condition where the laws of possession are suspended and fall sense of direction is lost. Yeats gives us the same situation in his poem ‘The Second Coming’:

    Things fall apart, the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
The blood-dimmed tide is raised, and everywhere.
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.
The best lack of conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. 5

In connection with this novel it was noted that the transition of history and the historical violence from its individual and criminal nature of collective violence resulted in some exasperation in administration. The same process is there in this novel because the times are the same. Hukum Chand, the symbol of administration here is exasperated too. But for small acts of subjective goodness like these all is chaos. Chaos seems to be the most appropriate word to denote a condition where:

1. No one is master of his own will.
2. Words and deeds do not seem to yield the intended result.
3. No one exactly knows what to do.
4. Where all strings of rationality and behaviour has snapped.
5. Everyone is helpless for himself and for others.
6. No one can trust himself or any other person.
7. What seems to be solid and true today is falsified tomorrow.
8. Nothing seems to fructify into anything fruitful or good.
9. Evil seems to be self-generating.

And what further vitiates this chaos is that it arises from the history because in every period violence takes place and it gives rise to the new things in the society. Mano Majra happens to be the battleground of the forces of chaos. It has been a sleepy hollow, a by-product of the land of settled government, peace and order, but its isolation was illusory, and so was the good will among men. It was not entirely isolated. The railway station and the rest house were the things of the outer world and the villagers regulated their timings by the trains, and they extalled Hukum Chand who stayed at the rest house. Other bureaucrats also stayed there “In bureaucratic circles Mano Manjra has some importance because of an officer rest house just North of the railway bridge”. It should be implied that the bureaucratic circle had a reciprocal importance for Mano Majra because of the rest house. When Mr. Hukum Chand arrived the villager moved away to a respectful distance. They would be present there, however.
Like wise the good will among communities was a surface veneer.

The presence of the Gurudwara beside the mosque perpetuated the latent duely that could surface any moment when slightest differences arose among them. Any Sikh could cite scriptures and history to damn the Muslims:

Never trust a Musslman", they said. The last Guru had warned them that Muslims had no loyalties. He was right. All through the Muslim period of Indian history, sons had imprisoned or killed their own fathers and brothers and had blinded brothers to get the throne. And what had they done to Sikhs? Executed two of their Gurus, assassinated another and butchered his infant children; hundred of thousands had been put to the sword for no other offence than refusing to accept Islam; their temples had been desecrated by the slaughter of kine; the holy Granth had been torn to bits. And Muslims were never ones to respect women. Sikh refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims.

The Muslims too could hear echoes from the outside world:

Rumours of atrocities committed by Sikhs on Muslims in Patiala, Ambala and Kapurthala, which they had heard and dismissed, came back to their minds. They had heard of gentle women having their veils taken off, being
stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place. Many had eluded their would be ravishers by killing themselves. They heard of Mosques being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on the premises, and of copies of the holy Koran being torn up by infidels.

The least dislocation of train timings, the smallest out of the way incident in the outside world disrupted the routine in the Majra. They kept their ears intently alert to anything that could occur outside the village. No wonder that they welcome Iqbal so warmly and no wonder a few integrating questions by the head constable could divide them into two. Apart from these invisible links there was substantial interference from outside, whether Jugga liked it or not. Malli is the first encroach upon the sanctity of the village loyalties. He kills Lala Ram Lal and flouts Jugga’s monopoly as the sinewy custodian of the village unity. The bangles are the gauntlets. Hukum Chand sets his seal on the two-pronged violence of Malli by knowingly by-passing the inner sense of Jugga. If a politician had interfered with the progress of the things in the village it would have been politics but Hukum Chank’s interference by means of consciously biased decisions amounts to a manipulation of a malafide and violent sort, so far as the innocent identity of the village is concerned. The constables who came with the questions to put
the villagers on a false scent are again and encroachment from outside. Sultana badmash whose whereabouts they seek does not belong to Majra, nor is he there in any village of India now. Iqbal too is an outsider though his range of contact is limited to Meet Singh and a couple of other men. Equally innocuous at least in the beginning are the refugees who have come across the Sutlej, and here keep to the Gurudwara. The ghost trains that arrive the station with their load of the dead, the Sikh officer who comes asking for wood and oil are all extraneous to the seclusion of the village; and they all cause ripples of anxiety in the placid flow of life in Mano Majra.

It would be blatant misreading of the novel and distortion of its intention if someone says that. The situation at Mano Majra takes a turn from the worse and a commotion is caused with the arrival of a ghost train from Pakistan loaded with hideously butchered corpses of Sikhs and Hindus. It is also misleading that this intently influences the communal frenzy of the Mano Majrans and as the nightmarish madness takes over them, there follows the senseless killings, burning, raping-either in provocation on in retaliation.  

In fact there is no communal or any other violence in Mano Majra except the dacoity and murder of Lala Ram Lal, committed by outsiders. The Mano Majrans among themselves never lose their head; they never even raise a violent finger against anyone. It was only some young Sikhs with a
young leader who came to this village (they were not Mano Majrans) after the Muslims had safely left. They arranged a meeting at the Gurudewara, enlisted volunteers and planned to rake the top of the train with a rope:

The meeting dispersed. Visitors found room on the Gurudwara. So did Malli and his gang. Many of the villagers had gone away to their homes lest they get implicated in the crime be being present at the temple when the conspiracy was being hatched. The Lambardar took of the village with him and left for the Police Station at Chundunnugger.  

Mano Majra is shaken not by communal violence but by the echoes of historical violence only. It is the sounding board of the echoes of violence elsewhere. Flabbergasting imaginings of horrors take shape at successive disclosure of many monstrous pieces of brutality and violence at different places. As the bits of tranquated information of violence comes seeping down to them (for which they themselves hungered) their anxiety and suffering goes on mounting. They suffer mental violence, undergo a sort of second hand torture, embitter themselves with cruelties elsewhere. And what is worst they have to explain the violence in the light of other men’s mode of understanding.

It is a tribute to their inquisitiveness not an evidence of their bloodthirsty nature. They in themselves are of the sort that might be
conceived going into hiding alike the “money lender crouching under one of
the Charpoys”. When the women in the courtyard heard the cry and shrieked
“Dakoo, Dakoo, the dogs barked all around.” but not a villager stirred from
his house.” Shall it count towards a tribute to the communal harmony in
Mano Majra or gloss the accident that Lal was the only Hindu in the village?
The underlying spirit of the life in Mano Majra has always been that of
selfishness if not that of patent discord. It surfaced clearly in the meeting of
the Sikhs at the end. Bhai Meet Singh pleaded for the innocence of Iqbal and
harmlessness of the Muslims. The Lambardar cleverly transmitted the
argument into a selfish gain and naturally won a clause. It ran like this.

I was only talking of Manu Majra. What have our tenants
done? They are Muslims.” Meet Singh shrugged his
shoulders. To settle the argument the Lambardar felt it
was up to him: What had to happen has happened. He
said wisely. “We have to decide what we are do now.
These refugees who have turned up at the temple may do
something which will bring a bad name on the village.”
The reference to “something” changed the mood of the
meeting. How could outsiders dare to “something” to
their fellow villagers? Here was another stumbling block
to logic. Group loyalty was above reason. The youth
who had referred to Muslims as pigs spoke haughtily: We
would like to see somebody raise his little finger against
our tenants while we live! The lambardar snubbed him.
“You are a hot headed one. Sometimes you want to kill. Sometimes you want to kill refugees. We say something and you drag the talk of something else. “All right, all right, Lambardara,” retorted the young man, “If you are all that clever, you say something. “Listen, brothers”, said the Lambardar lowering his voice, “this is no time to lose tempers. Nobody here wants to kill anyone. But who knows the intentions of other people? Today we have forty or fifty refugees, who by the grace of Guru are a peaceful lot and they only talk. Tomorrow we may get others who may have lost their mothers or sisters. Are we going to tell them; ‘do not come to this village’? And if they do come, will we let them wreak vengeance on our tenants?” “You have said something worth a hundred thousand rupees”, said an old man. “We should think about it.” The peasants though their problem are seen in this novel. They could not refuse shelter to refugees; hospitality was not a pastime but a sacred duty when those who sought it were homeless. Could they ask their Muslims to go? Quite emphatically not! Loyalty to a fellow villager was above all other considerations. Despite the words they had used, on one had the nerve to suggest throwing them out, even in a purely Sikh gathering. The mood of the assembly changed from anger to bewilderment. After sometime the Lambaardar spoke. All Muslims of the neighboring villages have been evacuated and taken to refugee camp near Chundunnauger. Some have already gone away to
Pakistan. Other has been sent to the bigger brother you should go away from Mano Majra? 11

Yet they tell a tale. Next moment, Imam Baksh steps in; and after some formal slurring he is told that the Muslims must leave. The repeated promises to protect brothers, mothers, sisters, and daughters proved to be empty boasts. The real issue was how to insulate the hardness of the decision. They did it like this:

Nobody took notice of the challenger; the boast sounded too hollow to be taken seriously. Imam Baksh blew his nose again. "What do you advise us to do then, brothers"? He asked, choking with emotion. "Uncle", said the Lambardar in a heavy voice, "It is very hard for me to say, but seeing the sort of time we live in, I would advise you to go to the refugee camp while the trouble is on. You lock your houses with your belongings. We will look after your cattle till you come back. 12

The trend of their thought, the duplicity of their gain, the noiseless softness of their prawling towards a clean sweep, these are the characteristics of this village. Hypocrisy might be the word. And to such men even the narration of violence is violent enough. Naturally a man like Jugga does not fit it well into their society and, therefore, he is branded a badmash. In spite of all his noble intentions and all his honest dispositions
towards the village, it is this attitude that makes him an enemy of Malli. Yet Malli has another role to play, not in relation of Jugga but the village by becoming a symbol of physical and historical violence playing in the hands of Hukum Chand and his opportunism that could meet the villagers on their own grounds. They somehow say that they cannot look after the property, which the Muslims leave behind going to Pakistan. Meet Singh believes that “there is always danger of misunderstanding. Then Malli came forward with his followers and told the officers that the people of Mano Majra village are famous for their charity. He adds, “They cannot look after themselves, how can they look after other people? But do not bother, Sardar Sahib, we will take of Muslim Property.”

Tables turned on their surface deep sympathy. Malli is there throughout the novel. As the time passes his other role as an instrument in the hands of administration becomes more decisive. Inspite of his being a violent man (perhaps the most violent after Jugga is behind the bars) a dacoit with a gang, he stands by that administration of Hukum Chand to build up the chaos. He had opened the chapter of the historical violence in Mano Majra. It was criminal violence that the law ought to have looked after. The Police is able to pin point and arrest the offender, i.e., Malli and his gang. However, and deliberately tangled with diplomacy. Hukum Chand is the mastermind in all these doings:
The right and wrong of his instructions did not weigh heavily on him. He was a magistrate, not a missionary. It was day-to-day problems to which he had to find answers. He had no need to equate them to some unknown absolute standard. There were not many "oughts" in his life. There were just the "is"s. He took life as it was. He did not want to recast it or rebel against it. There were processes of history to which human being contributed willy-nilly. He believed that an individual's conscious effort should be directed to immediate ends like saving life when endangered, preserving the social structure and honouring its conventions. His immediate problem was to save Muslim lives. He would do that in any way he could. Besides, so far he had not really done anything outrageous. Two men who had been arrested on the strength of warrants signed by him should have been arrested in any case. One was an agitator, the other a bad character. In troubled times, it would be necessary to detain them. If he could make a minor error into a major investment, it would really be a mistake to call it a mistake.  

His aim was to avert the historical violence in Mano Majra. Could anyone listen to a simple and direct appeal to keep peace? Human nature and the flow of events pointed to a simple 'No', yet the object could be achieved only if the Muslims were drawn quietly out of the village and moved to the
refugee camp at Chundunnger. Again the question is, would they be willing to be dislodged at all? And would their Sikh neighbours who claimed fraternity with them have countenanced such dislocation? For achieving his aim Hukum Chand had to manipulate a communalism in the village that to all outward appearances had perfect harmony among communities. This harmony and the ostensible isolation enjoyed by the village were formidable barriers to be knocked down. Hukum Chand knew that the Majra was never homogenous as it was given out to have been. The Muslims maintained their identity; their routine at the mosque was never slackened. It was the Sikh priest who sometimes waited for Iman Baksh to shout for the morning prayers. Economically an owned all the land most likely it was this servile status that kept the Muslims under the easy thumb of the Sikh landlords. Perhaps Imam Baksh is a fitting specimen of the habitual docility that the Sikhs revered by calling him Chacha Imam Baksh. Religious leadership in Mano Majra went by personal stupidity fortified by crabbed ages. So Meet Singh and Iman Baksh, misfit elsewhere, were undisputed ecclesiastical heads.

This fragile order of things could not a stand fillip from the diplomacy of Hukum Chand Laying by all thought of good and bad he played his card. Just four questions got thrown into the air were to shatter all apparent solidity at interlocking. The murder was a fulcrum enough. Its known and
real culprits were to be released in the presence of the villagers who were to be further mystified by the four questions:

1. Does anyone know anything about Sutana’s role in the money lender’s murder?

2. Did he go to Pakistan before or after he murdered?

3. Is there any authentic information about Mohammad Iqbal and his movements?

4. Did he come to the village before or after the murder?

The effect was instantaneous. Rumours from the outside world got solidified into naked facts and well known realities melted into doubts. No one was sure about noticing anything suspicious about Iqbal. Dormant antagonisms sprang up like the dragon’s teeth, armed with sharpest bitterness. Within countable moments the sham of affable coexistence fell to piece. The true colour of Mano Majra came to life. Each man suspected each man.

Quite suddenly every Sikh in Mano Majra became a stranger with an evil intent. His long hair and beard appeared barbarous, his Kirpan menacingly anti-Muslim. For the first time, the name Pakistan came to mean something to them.
Hukum Chand’s diplomatic rule had worked; physical violence was averted, mental violence let loose. Iman Baksh is all in tears as he goes about from one door to another Muslim door. The torture that they must have undergone in being up rooted within minutes and leaving their homes and properties behind must have been too great to describe. Hence, Singh has left it for the reader to imagine. Here the situation available to Chaman Nahal affords a good contrast. Lala Kanshi Ram had time enough to feel, lament and thus purge himself of the awful feeling at the inevitable loss of all that he had made by working hard throughout his life. Here the shock was too sudden to give time for thought. It could only put them in a daze, the impress of which must have been lost in any lost description. Even the Sikhs felt the stress of the violence of wrenching away their tenants. It was necessary to reassure themselves of the continuance of normal life; they had to fend themselves against the horrors of chaos:

Not many people slept in Mano Majra that night. They went from house to house-talking. Crying, swearing love and friendship, assuring each other that this would soon be over. Life, they said, would be as it always had been.

The arrival of Iqbal and then the refugees was quite disconcerting to the carefree routine of the village. It became worse confounded when there
came another interference from outside—a jeep full of Sikh youths with sagacious heads, sharp tongues, strong bodies and their minds set on massacring the Muslims. Their choice of coming to Mano Majra haunting for Muslims where there were none, gives rise to many presumptions regarding their character, the intentions, their bravery and their capacity to kill. The plan of running the rope is also an evidence of their lack of self-confidence and a forced blood thirstiness. They do not have that keenness which urged the Muslims to strike to kill. How Kapoora and Gujja Matta came to be vacated is not known. Certainly it could not be the work of these talkative Sikh youths. Malli and his gang came next. They found the opportunity of joining hands for they like the gang seem to be a man of violence. Some of the Sikh refugees also joined them. They had a force of fifty volunteers from the village.

Their plan came directly in conflict with that of Hukum Chand and threatened to defeat them. However, neither of them could have their way or it would not be chaos. Perhaps the failure of Hukum Chand to prove himself was more pronounced than that of this strike squad of fifty. It would be worthwhile to trace from a little time before the progress of confusion in Hukum Chand. The murder, the mysterious outsider, Iqbal, Jagga badmash and the mistake made by the policeman about arresting these two men were not singly or all these factors put together, not sufficient to shake Hukum
Chand in any way. What really numbed him and jolted into awareness of unbearable chaos invading him, was the arrival of the ghost train with the load of the dead and he witnessing their cremation:

Within a couple of hours all his emotions were dead, and he watched corpses of men and women and children being dragged out, with a little interest as if they had been trunks or bedding... He lay down again with his hands over his eyes. Within the dark chambers of his closed eyes, scenes of the day started coming back in panoramic succession. He tried to squash them by pressing his fingers into his eyes. The images only went blacker and redder and then came back. 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 corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shricks had just then become voiceless... the very though made vomit came up in Hukum Chand’s mouth... Hukum Chand could not speak. He wiped the sweat off his forehead and sank back on the pillow, exclaiming "Hai Ram Hai Ram..." Hukum Chand wiped his face with his hands. How could one escape one’s mind...? 17

Hukum Chand had seen enough of death in his family but he could escape his own mind. A train load of dead was too much for even Hukum Chand’s fatalism. He would not square a massacre with a philosophical
Hukum Chand made a faint plea in self-justification. It would be a mistake to call it a mistake. So neither Jugga nor Qbal should be freed from confusion. It was next step into diplomacy, for diplomacy means never beings straight. So here the desperate malady called for desperate remedy, and from a physician who is himself not Jugga and Qbal should not have hope for anything better than safe stay in police custody without torture.

Hukum Chand sent forth his writ of chaos formulated in the four questions and the Mano Majrans were divided, confounded and what followed was the mischief done by Hukum Chand's diplomacy. It had arisen from and it now patched well in the specters of huge violence. The villagers were confused about Malli, Bhai Meet Singh, Jugga, Lambardar (and the rest) about Sultana and all of them about the Muslims. They must go, even if it means any shape of violence this side of man slaughter.

The web of imponderables that Hukum Chand wove for other (though it was in their own interest) that they should neither perish nor destroy, and that worked well for them, caught something of the author too like Milton's Satan he voyages through chaos without destination, only buoyed by the prattle of Hasseena. She wanted to go home. But where? There had been violence in Chudunnager. People there could not be taken in by the ruse that Muslim soldiers were about and there was blood shed and Muslims had to be pulled out and sent to the camp. The girl could not take the hint. She felt safe
here as well as in Chundunnager. “Who will throw us out? This is our village. Are the Police and the government dead?”

These were the words of Nooran Hasseena likewise felt “I am not frightened, we knows so many people so well and then I have a big powerful Magistrate to protect me. As long as he is there no one can harm a single hair of my head”. But for surrounding chaos all round helplessness and horror these lines are unbearably pathetic.

Nothing is heard about Haseena after that. Hukum Chand feels sorry that he sent her away out of his protection when her grandmother and the rest of them might have been either killed or evacuated. Similarly for Nooran, bearing the girl child leaves the village with an uncertain future. Both are confined to their dubious end. One can only hope for the best. Nooran and Haseena are only two tender soft specimens of helplessness whereas this helplessness is the pervading quality of these chaotic times. No one can have his own way inspite of all efforts and best intentions. The Muslims would have stayed on but they could not; they wanted sometime to prepare themselves, but only a few minutes were available to them. They thought of taking their dear possessions along but they could not. They have been thinking in terms of staying away for a few days could not. They have been thinking in terms of staying away from a few days and then coming back
to Mano Majra. This too proves to be futile hoping against hope. They to shout for Pakistan as they leave, that train is bound for Pakistan.

The Sikhs of the village could not hold on the status quo. The Sikhs who were out for killing were also frustrated in the end. They could kill none but the strongest of the Sikhs. It is not irony but chaos - striking out a mist. The Hindus make a posthumous discovery of being solitary-the implication of the Lala’s being only name in Mano Majra and one coming to save him. Saving, helping, protecting were not the activities in vogue. Jugga and Iqbal were innocent to every body’s knowledge. Even the Police knew that they had committed no offence. The Magistrate knew it too yet they could not have their due. Iqbal could be Mohammed Iqbal Narayan or Iqbal Singh whatever suited the custodian of law. Inspite of all that he suffered Iqbal ultimately became Iqbal Singh in Police records. His parting tribute was “I have always believed the Indian Police were infallible.” Things were easier for the other prisoner, Jugga because the lock up was just a repetition of an old exercise for him. The educated Babu could be a thing of greater interest to him if he could teach him some English.

Malli stands on a different footing even though uncertainty and chance have their full share in making the man. The favours that fortune brings to Malli are wholly unexpected. They are windfalls to his preparedness for violence and criminal acts. The prisoners in the Police
stations are not many, not even one. “We do not arrest rioters. We only
disperse them. And there is no time to deal with other crimes. Yours are the
first arrest we have made in the last seven days.” 23 These words of the
constable to Iqbal throw much light on the situation and the bright chances
of Malli. It should be needless to repeat that the work of violence lay in
several directions. Some of them wanted to avert it; others were bent upon
clamping it wherever they could. No one can exactly materialize his
intentions because things here now go by contraries. The chaos of mingled
purpose at one time convinced Hukum Chand that there is no fool like an old
fool if he thought of Haseena. But the real impact of the chaotic condition, a
reaction to the chaos outside is embodied in his exclamation of despair, a
resignation to the inevitable:

What am I 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 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 is the few hundred out of four hundred
million anyway? An epidemic takes ten times the number
and no one even brothers.” 24

Thus, this novel emerges out of Khuswant Singh’s sense of history
and sense of contemporary realism and its expression in art. He is a part of a
modern realistic and historical tradition in English fiction, which expresses a new a – historical approach. He adheres the concept of history in which the contemporary phrase of events is more important than the eternally applicable exempla.
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