TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

Train to Pakistan, the first novel on the theme of Partition, is a brilliant and realistic story of political hatred, violence, and of mass passions during those turbulent and fateful days that preceded and followed the Partition of the British India. It is based on the theme of Partition of India into India and Pakistan, and hence it narrates the pathetic tale of individuals and communities caught in the swirl of Partition. The novel is considered one of the best novels on Partition. Khushwant Singh became popular with the publication of Train to Pakistan, his first novel, in 1956. This also won for him the “Grove Press India Fiction Prize” for the year 1956. Train to Pakistan portrays the trauma of Partition that gave birth to two political boundaries—India and Pakistan. On the eve of Partition, thousands fled from both sides of the border seeking refuge and security. The natives were uprooted and it was certainly a horrible experience for them to give up their belongings and rush to a land which was not theirs. Partition touched the whole country and Singh’s objective in this novel is to see the events from the point of view of the people of Mano Majra, a small village, which is situated at the border between India and Pakistan. Originally it is entitled Mano Majra which suggests static, while the present title, Train to Pakistan, implies change. This perhaps prompts V.A.Shahane to comment that “…the change of the title of the novel from Mano
Majra to Train to Pakistan is in keeping with the theme of the novel.” (Shahane, 68) Joan F. Adkins has great praise for the novel when he says, Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan deserved a high position in Indian –Anglian literature. (Adkins, 11)

The individuality in Khushwant Singh’s writings is on account of his anger and disenchantment with the “…long cherished human values in the wake of inhuman bestial horrors and insane savage killings on both sides during the Partition of the subcontinent between India and Pakistan in August 1947.” (Harish 126) The novelist brings to the centre stage the subsequent violence on both sides of the border manifested in ruthless mass destruction as well as the evil impact of Partition on the peace-loving Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of Mano Majra.

In the words of Warren French, “Singh’s terse fable suggests a profound disillusionment with the power of law, reason and intellect in the face of elemental human passions---Singh is brilliant, sardonic observer of world undergoing convulsive changes; and his novels provide a unique insight into one of the major political catastrophies of this country.

(French 818-20)

The holocaust that followed in the wake of the Partition of the country is considered one of the bloodiest upheavals of history that claimed innumerable innocent lives and loss of property. The Partition of India and the violence it generated disillusioned Khushwant Singh
enough to conceive the idea of writing a novel to express his mental agony and inner conflict. He speaks, thus, about the genesis of the novel:

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. The division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country---I had believed that we Indians were peace-loving and non-violent that we were more concerned with the matters of the spirit. ---After the experience of the autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe to these views. I became an angry middle-aged man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world. I decided to try my hand at writing. (Singh, Guest of Honour Talk, 1964)

Singh focuses mainly on the Partition, on the events before it, the holocaust caused by it and its aftermath. His aim in this novel is to show and explore the world around him and to present it in all its naturalistic setting. He builds a powerful series of episodes with the background of Indian landscape, Indian sights and sounds; Indian manners and gestures as only a keenly observant and sensitive novelist can depict them. To use the words of Prof. William Walsh, “Train to Pakistan is a tense, economical novel, thoroughly true to the events and the people. It goes forward in a trim, athletic way, and its unemphatic voice makes a genuinely human comment.” (Walsh, 18)
The chief protagonist of the novel is the village itself. The action of the novel centers around a tiny village in Punjab called Mano Majra, in the north-western region of undivided India, at the Indo-Pakistan border on the banks of the river Sutlej, which serves as the fictional setting of *Train to Pakistan*. Singh weaves a narrative around life in this village, making the village a microcosm representing a larger world. Though the village is dominated by the Sikhs, Mano Majra has, as its inhabitants, the Hindus and the Muslims too. The novelist explores the impact of Partition on the village which allegorically stands for India. He tries to discover the true Indian response by juxtaposing the people, their views and also their actions.

Mano Majra has always been known for its railway station. All the activities in Mano Majra are closely linked with the arrival and departure of railway trains. The morning mail train to Lahore tells Mullah and the Sikh Priest that it is time for morning prayer. The Mano Majrans eat and have a siesta when the midday express passes by and they are back to work as the evening passenger from Lahore comes in. When the goods train steams in, it is signal for them to sleep and to Mullah and the Priest, the call for evening prayers. Thus, the life in the village is, in a way, centered around the railway station.

There are about seventy families in Mano Majra and Ram Lal’s is the only Hindu family. The village is equally populated by Sikhs and Muslims. They know each other very well and live in amity and
harmony like a close-knit family. The peaceful life of the village is not affected by the political events of the country. The harmonious atmosphere and functional integration that prevails in this small village is vividly described in the novel thus:

…there is one object that all Mano Majrans even Lala Ram Lal-- venerate. This is a three foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keeker tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the deo to which all the villagers--Hindu, Sikh, Muslims or pseudo-christian--repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing. (Singh, 10)

Thus the villagers, irrespective of their religious affiliations, show solidarity by praying to the sandstone during hard times.

The situation of the country deteriorates miserably in the wake of Partition. There are murders and rapes. Evil dominates the scene. As the novel opens, Mano Majra is already disturbed by the news of communal violence in Bengal and Punjab and seems to think that God is punishing people for their sins. But despite the news, Mano Majra maintains its perfect harmony among its various communities. However, the unusual summer of 1947 suggests that all is not well in Mano Majra or elsewhere. This village also becomes the microcosm of communal conflict and violence caused by the Partition. Khushwant Singh portrays the reality of the situation by laying the blame of the horrible tragedy upon both the communities:
Muslims said that Hindus had planned and started the killing. On the other hand, the Hindus, put the blame on the Muslims. The fact is that both sides killed. People belonging to both sides were shot and stabbed, speared and clubbed, tortured, raped. (9)

The riots that started in Calcutta spread to north, east and west engulfing a vast segment of population. In East Bengal, Muslims massacred Hindus and in Bihar, Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs were reported to have roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. The Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the North west Frontier were made to abandon their homes and flee towards the protection of Sikh and Hindu communities in the east. They had to travel on foot, in bullock carts, cram into lorries, cling to the sides and roofs of trains.

By the summer of 1947, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were in flight. Within few months almost a million of them were dead. On the event of Partition of India, millions of people are seeking shelter and security from either side of the dividing boundary. Millions of non-Muslims from Pakistan longed for passage to India, a land of hope and peace, whereas millions of Muslims from India sought the road to Pakistan, the land of Islamic faith and promise. It is a nightmare,’ writes Srinivasa Iyengar, “the details accumulate to a poisonous mass and numb the sensibilities.” (Iyengar, 336)
In spite of bloodshed and rioting in the frontier area, life in Mano Majra remains peaceful. Everything is quiet and normal with Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims still living peacefully together as they have been living since times immemorial. Partition has not touched Mano Majra,

... all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding
the only remaining oases of peace were a scatter of little
villages lost in then remote reaches of the frontier. Mano
Majra was one of these villages. (9)

Devoid of political consciousness, many of them do not even know that the British have left and India is partitioned and is being governed by the popular Congress Ministry. The sub-inspector of police’s report to the inquiry regarding Mano Majra gives a vivid picture of the ignorance of the Mano Majrans: “I am sure no one in Mano Majra even knows that the British have left and the country is divided into Pakistan and Hindustan. Some of them know about Gandhi but I doubt if anyone has ever heard of Jinna.” (33)

The peace and harmony of the village is shattered with the brutal murder of Ram Lal, the local money lender. One night, Mali with his gang raided the house of Ram Lal and murdered him. On their way back they fire shots in the air and throw bangles over the walls in Juggat Singh’s house—just to mock him as he has been their enemy. Juggat Singh, popularly known as budmash number ten in Mano Majra, has served several terms in jail for dacoity and is ordered by the police not
to leave his house after sunset. However, at the time of murder, Juggat Singh is in the fields with his girlfriend Nooran, the daughter of the old Imam of the village mosque and the whole village knows of their association. At the same time, Hukum Chand, the district magistrate, camping at the Officer’s Rest House is involved in a sordid affair with Haseena, a teenager prostitute.

Hukum Chand, like Juggat Singh, plays an important role in the novel. At first, he appears as a typical Indian representative of bureaucracy in British-governed India. His position as district magistrate makes him acutely conscious of the calamitous situation of his people and the events of the novel, for the most part are portrayed from his vantage point. With the relatively few Hindus in Punjab—and Ram Lal now dead—Hukum Chand emerges as a catalyst of British power and authority and to the villagers he is a figure of manliness and a symbol of peaceful order.

Next morning policemen arrive at Mano Manjra to conduct an inquiry into the murder of Ram Lal. The same train also brings Iqbal Singh, an England educated communist reformer, to Mano Majra. Iqbal has been deputed by the people’s party of India to create political consciousness among peasants at that crucial period. Juggat Singh is arrested for he is found absent from his house at the time of the incident and was unable to explain the cause of his absence. Along with him
Iqbal is also arrested. During his conversation with Bhai Meet Singh, Iqbal explains his purpose of working in the village. He says to Bhai Meet Singh:

I am a social worker, Bhaiji. There is much to be done in our villages. Now with this Partition there is so much bloodshed going on someone must do something to stop it. My party has sent me here, since this place is a vital point for refugee movements. Trouble here would be disastrous. (48)

The moment Iqbal learns of a murder in Mano Majra, he gets frightened: “Was it communal? Is it all right for me to be here? I do not suppose I can do much if the village is all excited about a murder.” (51) Iqbal is full of theoretical notions of what the Indians should do with their new found Independence to achieve material prosperity and genuine political freedom. But all his plans are frustrated when the views of the villagers are too simplistic. His speeches on various things fall on deaf ears, primarily because the people of Mano Majra have no political consciousness.

The Mano Majrans wanted to know all about Pakistan and Hindustan from Iqbal. One of the Muslims asked Iqbal, “Tell us something what is happening in the world? What is all this about Pakistan and Hindustan? We live in this little village and know nothing.” (61) For them freedom is more economic than political. Freedom meant little or nothing to them and they think that they are
better off under the British as there was some security. The lambardar of the village voices this cynical attitude when he tells Iqbal: “Freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes.” (62)

People of Mano Majra cannot welcome freedom at the cost of mass destruction. The Lambardar expresses the feelings of the common man when he says that the only ones who enjoy freedom are thieves, robbers and cut throats. Iqbal finds himself in a predicament and is not in a position to do anything to ease the situation:

what could he—one little man—do in this enormous impersonal land of four hundred million? Could he stop the killing? Obviously not. Everyone—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Congressite, Leaguer, Akali, or Communist—was deep in it. It was famous to suggest that the bourgeoios revolution. Could be turned into a proletarian one. (64-65)

Iqbal has no faith in any religion, fails to create any impression on the people of Mano Majra because of his hesitation and lack of faith in him. He is suspected to be a member of the Muslim League. He is considered ‘an outsider’ in this set up as all his exhortations to them are of no avail; they fail to see his reason. His opinions on politics and the political situation of the country are confined to his monologues. This prompts Prempati to assert:
...in fact, that the weakest link in the structure of *Train to Pakistan* is Iqbal ...Iqbal represents Khushwant Singh’s extra-literary dimension, and to the extent he remained adventitious to the text he was no better than a dispensable commodity, an interpolation dictated by non-textual considerations. (Prempati, 113)

Juggat Singh narrates the barbarity of the Baluch soldiers on their way to Lahore from Amritsar. Reaching near the Pakistani border, these soldiers “…began to stick bayonets into Sikhs going along the road. The driver would slow down near a cyclist or a pedestrian, the soldiers on the footboard would stab him in the back and then the driver would accelerate away fast. They killed many people like this and were feeling happier and happier as they got nearer Pakistan.” (83)

Juggat is of the view that no one escaped God. Bhola, the tonga driver, stresses the madness of the blood hungry people and remarked: “…when the mobs attack they do not wait to find out who you are. Hindu or Muslims; they kill…” (84) Perhaps to balance the brutality done by the Muslims to the Sikhs, he narrates the story of the four Sikh Sardars, who went on rampage rinding in a jeep alongside, a mile-long column of Muslim refugees walking on the road: “…Without warning they opened fire with their sten guns. Four sten guns! God alone knows how many they killed…” (85) Juggat gives a report about a lot of
women being abducted and sold cheaply. Police stations have become concentration camps and third degree methods are adopted to extricate truth from those who are caught.

Early in september, the impact of the Partition is noted by the train-consciousness Mano Majrans in the late running of the overcrowded trains, which disturbs normal life of the village. Trains lost their punctuality and Goods trains stopped running. One morning, in broad daylight, a ghost train arrived from Pakistan and created a commotion in the village. It is loaded with hideously butchered corpses of Sikhs and Hindus as if for their common funeral at Mano Majra. The soldiers have collected wood and kerosene from the villagers to cremate the bodies in the darkness of night. They observes hectic activities at the station after the arrival of the ghost train but they are not allowed to go to towards the station. The truth is discovered by the night and this discovery is suggested with colour and smell images:

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 toward the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene, then of wood. And then—faint acid smells of searing flesh. (100)
It is only the acrid smell of searing flesh that narrated the ghastly tragedy: “The village was stilled in a deathly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odour was. They all know. They had known it all the time. The answer was implicit in the fact that the train had come from Pakistan.” (100) The train, loaded with about fifteen hundred dead bodies, and the fact that it had come from Pakistan speaks of the animality that has been shamelessly displayed on the frontiers.

Hukum Chand is horrified and the horror is too strong to be taken with a philosophical belief in the inevitability of death. He is bewildered and frightened by its violence and magnitude.

Fifteen hundred innocent people! What else is Kalyug?

There is darkness over the land. This is only one spot on the frontier. I suppose similar things are happening at other places. And now I believe our people are doing the same.

What about the Muslims in these villages? (115)

When the people of Mano Majra discovers the truth that Muslims massacred Hindus in Pakistan and sent their dead bodies in a train to Mano Majra, a heavy brooding silence descended on the village giving rise to a feeling of fear and distrust: “People barricaded their doors and many stayed up all night talking in whispers. Everyone felt his neighbour’s hand against him, and thought of finding friends and allies.”
The bond of fraternal feelings between the Sikhs and the Muslims of the village has been shattered by the unfortunate developments.

Thus the people of the village witness the train load of dead bodies Hindus and Sikhs brutally murdered by the communal forces in Pakistan. The river Sutlej is also discovered with corpses of Hindus. The refugees who start flowing into India from Pakistan as a result of Partition bring with them tragic stories arsons, murders, rapes and so on. Tension mounts in the village and it no longer can remain unaffected. For the safety of the Muslims and equally to maintain law and order situation, the police wants the Muslims of the village to go to Pakistan. It offers to provide them all facilities to reach Chundunugger safely from where a train is to go to Pakistan. Thus the administration plays the final game to cleave it into two halves for easy evacuation of the Muslims and the visit of the head constable “…had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter.” (141)

The Muslims are scared. They remember the atrocities inflicted upon them by Sikhs in some parts of India. They recall stories about how Muslim women were stripped of and raped in market places. To them every Sikh in the village is now a stranger with an evil intent and is to be suspected. “For the first time, the name Pakistan came to mean something to them—a heaven of refuge where there were no Sikhs.”
The Sikhs on the other hand are also reminded of the atrocities inflicted upon them by the Muslims in Pakistan. They are reminded of the preaching of their Guru who warned them not to trust a Muslims as they have no loyalties. History tells them how Sikhs and Hindus are put to innumerable insults by Muslims. Why the reason that they are not surprised by the inhuman acts of Muslims, especially to women “…Sikh refugees had told them of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims. Those who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered.” (142)

The evacuation of the Muslims from their own village is the most poignant part of the entire novel. Two communities had been together for centuries in such an amicable manner that the thought of Muslims leaving the village brought tears to both. Most of the villagers did not sleep that night. They kept moving from house to house – talking, crying and swearing friendship. The next morning, Muslims are to be evacuated to a refugee camp at Chandannagar, later to be transported to Pakistan. “The women sat on the floors hugging each other and crying. It was as if in every home there had been a death”. (113)

Chacha Imam Baksh comes to the Sikh assembly in the faint hope that they will ask him and his fellow Muslims to stay. He breaks down,
“what have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers”. (110) The Sikh lambardar answers instantly:

Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like. If any one speaks rudely to you, your wives or your children, it will be us first and our wives and children before a single hair of your heads is touched… (147)

At the same time he does not rule out the possibility of danger to their lives if that is done. He continues, “But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands who will be responsible for that they do”. (147) Some amount of sanity, wisdom and humanity is displayed by the villagers. Chacha accepts his fate but his daughter Nooran refuses to leave the village. If Chacha bursts out emotionally, she asserts her rights fiercely. But her father tells her that if she does not leave by herself, she will be thrown out of the village.

Nooran who is against living the village, prays for Jugga’s return from the police custody. She, who is with Jugga’s child, visits his mother and reveals the secret to her. She also gives vent to her fear that if the child is born in Pakistan, the child will be murdered for having born to a Sikh father. She pleads with her for mercy, but the mother is so
stubborn that she shows a callous disregard for her condition and Nooran is compelled to go to the refugee camp.

Muslims decide to take shelter in the refugee camps in Chundunnugger. The Muslim officer orders them to leave behind their cattle, furniture and the goods etc., which cannot be taken in the trucks. He leaves instruction to the lambardar to look after their cattle and other property. Lambardar, having refused to do so, the Sikh Officer appointed Malli and his companions as the custodian of the evacuated Muslim’s property, and the villagers were warned not to interfere with him or his men.

Muslims of the village thought that they are going to the refugee camp only for a few days and then come back to Mano Majra once the storm was blown over. Now they realize that they will be taken to Pakistan from there and that they cannot take their belongings with them. They can only what they can carry in their hands.

Hukum Chand, the Deputy Commissioner tries to avoid getting involved in the “…winds of destruction which are blowing across the land.” (69) Inspite of his affection for Haseena, he knows that he cannot protect the train of Muslim refugees from Hindu fanatics who are hell bent on butchering its Muslim passengers. It is interesting to hear from Hukum Chand more about how he looked at Partition and its impact. He
wants Muslims to go Pakistan peacefully, if possible. He is against killing or destruction of property. Bloodshed would not benefit anyone. He knows that during the riots, bad characters would get all the loot and the government is blamed.

The leaders had sowed the wind of communal suspicion and Partition was the result, “…like a whirlwind the mad act of Partition was unrooting masses of humanity mangling them, and throwing them across the border in heap after heap” (Iyenger, 489) Hukumchand expresses his inability to stop the communal violence that had erupted in the wake of Partition. In his helpless rage he rails against the Indian Government.

---Where was the power? What were the people in Delhi doing? Making fine speeches in the assembly? Loud speakers magnifying their egos; lovely-looking foreign women in the visitor’s galleries in breathless admiration. He is great man, this Mr.Nehru of yours. I do think he is the greatest man in the world today. And how handsome! Wasn’t that a wonderful thing to say? Long ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially. Yes, Mr.Prime Minister, you made your tryst. So did many on the 15th August Independence Day---(176)
Khushwant Singh becomes sentimental and vehemently attacks on the Prime Minister manipulating sarcastically the word ‘tryst’. “Hukum Chand, a hypocritical oddity and a vestige of the British Raj, has no identity and existence of his own”. (Nicholson, 105)

Man’s inhumanity continues to invade Mano Majra. The tempo of the death increases. The Sutlej river yields hundreds of floating corpses of Muslims tortured and mutilated. Swelling Sutlej is another horrible sight, with floating corpses of men, women and children. The lambardar “…had never known the Sutlaj to rise so high in so short a time”. (121) In the night, the river’s looking like a sheet of paper, symbolized the bleak deeds of violence. The cries of human voices, calling for help, seemed to arise from the water. The corpses floating on the water made the scene horrible. The ghastly murder of these innocent people----men, women and children---told the tale of woe caused by the Partition. Khushwant singh gives a pathetic portrayal of this ghastly scene:

There were also men and women with their clothes clinging to their bodies; little children sleeping on their bellies with their arms clutching the water and their satiny buttocks dipping in and out. The sky was soon full of kites and vultures. They flew down and landed on the floating carcasses. They pecked till the corpses themselves rolled over and shooed them off with hands. (143)
Find that the villagers are gripped with the fear of another ‘ghost train’ that has just arrived at the station. The railway station once again hummed with the activities of the soldiers and the policemen. This time there was no demand from the people for oil and wood. The second train—load of men, women and children from Pakistan has to be buried in a trench, for there is no more oil to spare and the wood is damp because of the rain. The dead bodies are dug out by bulldozer. In the words of Giridhari,

Their roots losing their grip over the native soil, men, women and children on the move in search of a new home, a new harbor, a new identity, is a pathetic process of disintegration of human lives segregated by the decisions not their own. (Giridhari, 84-85)

In spite of communal riots all over the country, the Mano Majrans are still committed to peace and brotherhood. But this humanity and sanity is regarded as a sign of cowardice by the Sikh youths who come to the gurdwara at night to provoke the fire of reprisal,

Do you know how many trainloads of dead Sikhs and Hindus have come over? Do you know of the massacres in Rawalpindi and Multan, Gujranwala and Sheikhpura? What are you doing about it? You just eat and sleep and call yourselves Sikhs ---the brave Sikhs! The martial class! (148)
This angry speech, full of cruelty and criticism is continued as these fanatic Hindus vow revenge upon Muslims for what Muslims have done to Hindus in Pakistan.

Do the Muslims in Pakistan apply for permission from their government when they rape your sisters? Do they apply for permission when they stop trains and kill everyone, old, young, women and children? You want the government to do something! That is great! Shabash! Bravo! (171)

He advises the gathering when he says, “For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Muslims. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two…For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across.” (171) obviously they were guided by the maximum ‘tit for tat’ in a wrong perspective.

Iqbal and Meet Singh try their best to resist the forces of evil operating all around. But as it happens their resistance proves weak and ineffective against the forces of evil ranged against it. Meet Singh does raise his voice of protest on several occasions but his voice is drowned in the babel of voices reporting communal discord and violence.

Bhai Meet Singh sees no reason why the Muslims in India are to be punished for the crimes committed by Muslims of Pakistan. Revealing his humanitarian view, he strongly feels that only the guilty should be punished. But the fanatic Hindu youth subdue him with a violent series of angry outbursts:
What had the Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan done that they were butchered? Weren’t they innocent? Had the women committed crimes for which they were ravished? Had the children committed murder for which they were spiked in front of their parents? (171-72)

The train, going to Pakistan next day, carrying Muslim refugees has to be attacked and they need volunteers for that. They plan to stretch a rope across the first span of the bridge. Meet Singh is worried about the Muslims of Mano Majra on the train. The youth quickly dismissed such feelings. They plan to kill them with swords and spears and to fire indiscriminately at the windows of the train so that the train carries only the dead to Pakistan. Meet Singh is still concerned with the Muslims of the village but he goes unheard.

Hukum Chand is shocked to know about the conspiracy to sabotage the train carrying all the chandunnagar Muslim refugees to Pakistan that night. He desperately looks for ways and means to save it as he knows that Haseena, the prostitute whom he loves is on the train. He will not let her die. The sub-inspector tells him that they can do nothing. If the train is not allowed to go to Pakistan, the whole refugee camp may be destroyed by some armed villagers thirsty of human blood. If the train is allowed to go, there is the danger of inevitable ambush. Since he knows that Nooran is also in the train, his fertile brain
conceives a plan. He signs the papers and asks the sub-inspector to release quickly two prisoners—Jugga and Iqbal and to send them at once to Mano Majra. Accordingly, Jugga and Iqbal are released and the news of the Mano Majra Muslims being evacuated is repeatedly hammered into Jugga’s head. He is told that the train carrying Mano Majra Muslims is leaving to Pakistan that night.

Iqbal and Jugga returned to Mano Majra. Iqbal returns to Gurudwara and finds a number of refugees there. He seeks to know from Meet Singh about the happening in the village. Meet Singh’s reply is an excellent comment on the incidents of those days.

What has been happening? Ask me what has not been happening. Trainloads of dead people came to Mano Majra. We burned one lot and buried another. The river was flooded with corpse. Muslims were evacuated and in their place, refugees have come from Pakistan. What more do you want to know? (145)

Jugga, on the other hand, is concerned mainly with the welfare of Nooran. Danger to the train means danger to her life. The man climbing on the steel span is not noticed at first. With the approach of train, however, the villagers and soldiers see a man stretched on the rope. But even amid this universal madness and communal frenzy, a sense of humanity or to quote Dr. Iyenger’s words, “…the simple uncalculating
love of a man for a woman asserts itself” (Iyengar, 502) and averts the
catastrophe. Jugga----a self-confessed ‘local ruffian, realizing that the
revenge might mean danger to his Muslim beloved, Nooran, manages to
slash at the rope with his kirpan and gives a safe passage to the train:

He (Juggat Singh) pulled himself up, caught the rope under
his left armpit, and again started hacking with his right hand.
The rope had been cut in shreds. Only a thin tough strand
remained. He went at it with 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. (207)

C.L.Khatri comments on the triumph of love when he says, “The
ultimate optimism of the novelist is shown in the end that shows the
victory of virtue and love over vice and hatred even in this utter chaos”.
(Khatri, 100)

Thus Hukum Chand exploits Jugga’s emotion to the full. Jugga is
merely a tool in his conspiracy. He knows very well that if Jugga comes
to know that the villagers have hatched a plan to sabotage the train, he
would do anything in his power to stop that because Nooran would be
travelling in that train. As Hukum Chand expects, Jugga displays great
courage and sacrifices his life for his Nooran. Nooran is saved. So does
Hukum Chand’s Haseena. Thus Jugga becomes the sacrificial pawn in
Hukum Chand’s conspiracy. However, his sacrifice, “…brings back order and humanity to a village swept away by the flood of fratricidal violence sweeping over the Punjab”. (Kaul, 15)

It is Jugga who combats the forces of darkness and sacrifices himself selflessly to save innocent lives threatened by the planned Mano Majra massacre. Like Thomas Hardy, Khushwant Singh invests the common man of the soil with tragic grandeur to show, as Bonamy Dobree remarks, “The dignity of man for all his helpless littleness in the face of the universe, for all his nullity under the blotting hand of time.” (Dobree, 328) Describing Jugga’s indubious moral stature, Khushwant Singh writes,

I thought it was time I exploded this myth of the innate goodness in man. There is innate evil in man. And so I just wrote about it, and I did create one character whom I stuffed with the so called innate goodness of man, and he is the only character which is entirely fiction. (From the transcript of Indian Accent by John Thompson)

Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan may remain the most comprehensive description of the tragic suffering effected by the Partition. The author’s depiction of the elements that guided and impelled the people of India provides not only an understanding of their view of life and their place in it, but also elicits a profound sympathy
with their hopes, their aspirations, and their failures. What Khushwant Singh has written of Kartar Singh Duggal’s *Naunh Tey Mas* applies equally well to his own novel: “It has masterly portrayal of peasant character and a skilful handling of a theme where a pastoral peace rapidly moves to a tragic climax of communal massacres. It is refreshingly free from communal bias”. (Singh, 198)

Referring to the questions raised at the Press Conference after the screening of the film version of *Train to Pakistan* directed by Pamela Rooks at the International Film Festival in New Delhi (11-20 January 1998), Khushwant Singh made the following comments which seem to be very pertinent even today i.e. sixty four years after the unfortunate tragedy of Partition took place:

> We must not forget the partition because it is relevant today.
> We must remember that it did in fact happen and can happen again. That is why I keep reminding people who clamour for an independent Kashmir, Khalistan or Nagaland to remember what happened to Muslims when some of them asked for a separate Muslim state. I keep telling my fellow Sikhs that the worst enemies of Khalsa Panth are Khalistanis, and of the Nagas those who ask for an independent Nagaland. Reminding ourselves of what happened in 1947 and realizing the possibilities of its recurring, we should resolve that we will never let it happen again. (Singh, 13)
Khushwant Singh’s version of the Partition is a social one and he does not describe the politics of the Partition in much detail, because his purpose is to bring out the individual, human element and provide a social understanding. In the Partition, the major change was political; Britain’s splitting of India into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. He takes the political aspect of the Partition for granted, as all that his villagers are concerned with is that ‘it is Mahatma Gandhi’s government in Delhi’ and that ‘people sing his praise in the four corners of the earth’. The effect of the change, however, was significant and as Singh has shown, frighteningly, social, as religious groups rearranged and clashed violently. He does not focus on the political realities and the predicament of the victims of the Partition in the form of loot, arson, rape, abduction, mutations, murders and displacement. Rather, he chooses to narrate the disturbing and agonizing impact that this event has on those who have not been the direct victims of the Partition and yet been affected deep at the psychological and social levels. He makes it clear that many people played a part in this chaos and everyone was equally worthy of blame, all the while integrating examples of the sheer moral confusion which arises from trying to make sense of an event as momentous as the Partition. The broader implications of the novel are also emphasized:
“Khushwant Singh has written a compelling story of people in turmoil, far broader in its implications than its length might suggest. This is not the story of one man. It is the tale of a village led to a moral action through its own indifference”. (The New York Herald Tribune Book Review, 6)

Khushwant Singh best illustrates the tragedy of Partition and indirectly suggests the shortsightedness of Indian leadership who failed to foresee the consequences of division and to handle the situation ever after Churchill’s forecast of blood-bath. Communal discord was not a future of Indian rural scene but it was engineered first by the British Government under the policy of divide and rule and then by the nationalist leaders, with attitude tinge, though unintentionally.

Khushwant Singh believes in the stark and naked realism of life unlike the photographic and artistic reality portrayed by R.K.Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand. He comes closer to the French socialist realists like Balzac. Like the socialist realists, Khushwant Singh’s approach is positive—not negative—in as much as he views the socialist order as an independent entity. Unlike a critical realist, his approach is definitely concrete, since he looks at the society from the inside, not from the outside. Like Balzac’s characters, his Juggat Singh is a man endowed with formidable will power and individuality. The theme of the novel
with all its emphasis on Partition does not become a political propaganda like Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*. If *Kanthapura* was the microcosm of the national upsurge in the country in the twenties, Mano Majra became the microcosm of vivisected India.

As Kai Nicholson remarks:

> Khushwant Singh used the novel to voice his arguments vehemently. The novelist, however, has succeeded in communicating the readers of the ghastliness and grossness and total insanity of the Two-nation Theory and the political tragedy. (Nicholson, 39)

Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* is one of the finest and realistic novels to emerge out of the trauma of Partition. It examines with clinical intensity the harsh facts of inhuman bestialities of life and shows how human love can transcend all man-made barriers and boundaries to confront and overcome such catastrophies.

> ‘The tragic feeling is invoked in us,’ writes Arthur Miller, ‘when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life to secure one thing…his sense of personal dignity. (Miller, 1949) Juggat Singh thus redeems himself by saving the lives of thousands of Muslims in a climax. His act of love and sacrifice, as a critic points out, “silhouetted against the backdrop of hatred and violence, towers above
communal differences and lends a quiver and meaning to the general aimlessness of life in the Partition days”. The triumph of love, humanism, faith in the innate goodness of man in a “moment of real crisis and challenge” (Shahane, 52) mark the central significance of the novel. Khushwant Singh has designed the novel to explore and expose the brutal and hypocritical image of man and simultaneously present his faith in the values of love, loyalty and humanity. ‘Whatever its limitations, whatever its frustrations,’ writes Khushwant Singh, ‘Love is the greatest, the most exhilarating experience of life.’ (Singh 1967)

The value of love is the essence of his novel, *Train to Pakistan*, in spite of its portrayal of dark, rigid realities and grim horror. Even in the midst of such inhuman violence there are people who boldly encounter the cruel games of destiny with fortitude. Jugga, a confirmed ruffian, conquers the mighty forces of the wickedness and savagery by sacrificing himself for love. Harish Raizada observes, “The heroic spirit of man is revealed in the novel not by men who are considered religious and respectable in the public and supposed to have innate goodness but by a man like Jugga who is treated as a confirmed ruffian”. (Raizada, 20)

If Partition brings out the brutality, inhumanity and madness of mankind, it also brings to light the acts of kindness and decency, courage and selflessness. There are many instances in the novel which
are free from racial and religious prejudices. The **Train to Pakistan** and the train from Pakistan become the symbols of man’s inhumanity to man, man preying upon man. But the Mano Majrans display compassion and love, kindness and fellow feeling towards the Mulisms of their village.

The tragic love story of Jugga, the Sikh boy and Nooran, the Muslim girl, cutting across the religious barriers seeks to bridge the wide gulf of communal hatred. His love for her carries with it a commitment unto death. Juggat last act of saving Nooran and also the lives of Muslims on the train to Pakistan demonstrate that private values are transmuted into a general good. Jugga also intuitively knows that what he is going to do has something good in it. “In the uncomplicated and un-self conscious harmony of the Sikh peasant, …a spiritual force survives amid a torrent of chaos and despair”. (Adkins, 11) He destroys only to create again and thus symbolizes the triumph of good over evil within himself as well as the concept of renewal. His soul, like that of the phoenix, rises from its ashes only to proclaim that at least his Train to Pakistan is a symbol of hope and light in the cruel world of darkness and despair. (Shahane, 94)

India’s freedom is celebrated with mass murder and bestiality. Partition has brought about utter chaos and confusion, the savage
massacres known on the history of India. Infact, the harrowing and spine-chilling events had shaken the faith of the people in the innate nobility of human beings. S.P. Swain, however, observes that “Despite the note of utter despair bordering on nihilism, the novel is a message of hope and compromise. The most basic of all human instincts, i.e. man-woman love, sustains is an act of self-redemption”. (Swain, 123)

“Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan deserves a high position in Indo-Anglian literature. …The author’s objectivity in the treatment of theme and event, his skill and insight in the delineation of character, and his vision of humanity—the power and glory, the weakness and the defeat—all align him with the finest novelists in the English Language”. (Adkins, 11)
WORKS CITED


