3.1 Khushwant Singh: Life and Inspiration behind *Train to Pakistan*

*Train to Pakistan* is one of the most excellent novels written on the theme of Partition and is Khushwant Singh’s paramount novel. It was written in London during a time when he was functioning with Krishna Menon and they apprehended each other in reciprocated dislike.

*Train to Pakistan* deals with the catastrophe of the Punjab when people maized by a mad communal agitation, caused enormous destruction and melancholy. Khushwant Singh’s delicate life had prepared him for writing such a book. His childhood was spent in the village of his birth in the Punjab. He writes in an autobiographical sketch, *My roots are in the dunghill of a tiny Indian village.* Then he went to school in Delhi and Lahore and graduated, growing up in the *Indo-Anglican atmosphere of New Delhi.* Later he went to England, where his British education stripped him of narrow parochialism, making him a cultured humanist,

*I am the product of both East and the West, he writes, I am, if I may coin the word, an Orio-Occidental*.¹

The human values he appreciated were brusquely traumatized by the degrading horrors resulting from the Partition of the Indian sub-continent in August 1947.
The lingering memories of the unparalleled carnage witnessed shook the faith of all the susceptible and accepted wisdom of people of India. Describing his intellectual anguish and the inner divergence of this period of disillusionment, Khushwant Singh remarks:

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man.

But 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 matters of the spirit, while the rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. 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 a writing.  

The harrowing experience of Partition shook him to the central part and is reflected with insincerity and desolate pragmatism in his memorable work of fiction, *Train to Pakistan*, winning him world-wide appreciation and the Grove Press India Fiction prize for 1956.

The accomplishment of the novel spans a few weeks of the momentous days of August and September in *Mano Majra*, a small border village fringed with a river with a railway bridge straddling it. Although the frontier between India and Pakistan turns into a scene of rioting and bloodshed, everything is quite and normal in *Mano Majra*, where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims still with together peaceful as in the past. Partition does not yet mean much to them. Many of them do not even know that about ten million people - Hindus from Pakistan and Muslims from India are in flight, caught in large - scale communal annoyance, and leaving nearly a million dead.

**3.2 Mano Majra: The Symbol of Pre–Partition Inter-Faith  Brotherhood**

Happening, an August night, *Malli*, a dacoit and his gang enter *Mano Majra* and demand the money-lender *Ram Lal*’s wealth. When he refuses, he is murdered, and the gang disappears, dropping a few bangles in the house of *Juggat Singh*, (Jugga) as a sign of their disapproval for such unmanly men. *Jugga*, who has served several jail terms on many charges, is at that time out in the fields. Curfew should have confined him to his house after sunset, but the call of *Nooran*, his beloved, the Muslim weaver’s daughter, is too persuasive for him to abide by the
restrictive rules of the police. Jugga and Nooran return to the panic in the village caused by the dacoity and murder of Ram Lal. Almost, at the same time, Hukum Chand, the Divisional Commissioner, who has arrived earlier at the Officers Rest Home, is engaged in a disgusting affair with Haseena, a teen-aged prostitute. In the midst of his advances, he hears the noise of gunshots and the voices of the villagers, which make him, swear loudly and abandon the girl. The next day, policemen arrive at Mano Manjra to conduct an inquiry into the murder of Ram Lal.

By the same train arrives Iqbal Singh, a western-educated turning man, who has been deputed by the people’s party to work among the common folk. At the village Gurudwara he is welcomed by the hospitable Meet Singh, the Sikh priest and admired by him and the village Lambardar. He is, however, arrested by the police through a misunderstanding. Iqbal and Juggat Singh are both held by the police on charges of complicity in Ram Lal’s murder, though no proceedings are started against them. Malli and his gang, the real murderers, are also arrested, but they are later released. The Police Inspector suspects Iqbal to be a Muslim and in order to convince himself, has him stripped to ascertain whether he had been circumcised in accordance with Muslim practice.

Proceedings move fast, and the destiny of individuals in Mano Manjra is determinedly affected by the catastrophic events of the Partition. The arrival of the ghost train at Mano Manjra from Pakistan filled with corpses creates a commotion. Dark clouds of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries. Yet feelings of brotherliness have not disappeared, and they all meet for consultation at the Gurudwara. Muslims are evacuated to a refugee camp at Chandannagar, later to be transported to Pakistan. It is apparent that madness has invaded Mano Manjra too, in spitefulness of the compassionate character of the Mano Majrans.
Sikh fanatics from Pakistan vow revenge upon local Muslims for what other Muslims have done to them in Pakistan. Nooran, who is expecting Jugga’s child, visits his mother but is almost compelled to go to the refugee camp. In the meantime, Hukum Chand learns that Haseena too would be on the train which is scheduled to carry Muslim refugees from the chandannagar 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 would be on the train to Pakistan. He also learns of the plot of the Sikh fanatics to blow up the train with dynamite as it passed the railroad bridge at Mano Majra. In despair, he climbs the steel spans of the bridge and begins to slash at the rope connecting the explosive materials with a sharp instrument, 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. The train, then, we are told, went over him, and went to Pakistan.*

Khushwant Singh weaves a narrative around life in this village, making the village a microcosm representing a larger world. We see that the action of the novel centres around a tiny village, Mano-Majra, during the Partition. He does not deal with the effect of the Partition on the entire country, but is concerned with how this village is distorted as a result of the Partition.

The chief protagonist of the novel seems to be the village itself. In fact the novel was initially entitled *Mano Majra*. The revolutionize in title is significant because it is a change from the static to the dynamic. *Mano Majra*, the name of the village, is a fixed point in space, whereas the train is a symbol of movement. The train signifies the multitudes of people on their way to seek refuge and security on either side of the dividing line. The train is major symbol in the novel and its importance will be highlighted a little later.
Even though it is possible that Khushwant Singh might not have been personally affected by the Partition in a major way, but being a Sikh and a Punjabi he would find it difficult to escape having a sense of culpability. As he says:

…the Partition theme was born out of a sense of guilt that I had done nothing to save the lives of innocent people and behaved like a coward. 4

It is in this light that one can get a broad perception on the human behavior being portrayed: behind the large-scale massacre and violence, one can see the individual struggling to fight forces beyond his control.

Ahead of we go on to analyse the novel in its various aspects, it is essential to look back on the social milieu in which it was written. It is obligatory to understand the Punjabi society of pre-Partition India where the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims lived together, sharing the same customs, language and culture, and contributing to the larger Punjabi identity, while simultaneously belonging to their own religious groups. The village Mano Majra was by and large, typical of rural Punjabi life.

The people were caught in a disaster beyond their understanding. The rural Punjabis were completely unprepared for the holocaust which Partition proved to be. They had taken to heart the rhetoric of national leaders who proclaimed that India would be partitioned only over their bodies. This declaration had penetrated into the Punjabi psyche.

Lahore, the capital of the undivided Punjab, emerged as the epi-centre of all kinds of revolutionary and reformist movements in northern India. Also, the urban character of the national liberation struggle contributed in no small measure to the lack of preparedness of the
rural Punjabi. It was also a strong hold of the emerging Punjabi ruling class. While the Government Collage, located in Lahore, provided the British with bureaucrats, the non-government colleges of the city, on the other hand, turned out a large number of revolutionaries and reformists. But Punjabi rural life remained unaffected by these middle-class movements, where the feudal consciousness that ‘Government’ was supreme remained ingrained. Hostility towards the British presence in India was expressed mainly by the rising middle class. Slowly and gradually, however, this hostility spread to the other sections of society also. But Mano Majra, being a remote village, was unaware of even the existence of the liberation struggle. Yet it was ultimately drawn into the vortex. Train to Pakistan chronicles the frightened reactions of a people suddenly imprisoned to a destiny not of their own creation.

The character of Mano Majra as it joins the conventional of events and takes part in the communal violence, makes the author reflect on the perverse nature of human destiny. Resigning as it were to the brutality of the situation he adopts a tone of lack of sympathy to the brutality.

Its well defined physical and psychological properties become murkier as the narrative progresses towards its end. In the cauldron of violence, its distinct outlines merge with the overall atmosphere and lose their specificity. The initial focus on Mano Majra slowly changes to suggest that it has transcended its geographical identity and become a metaphor of Punjabi rural life. Thus there is a clear progression in the physical configurations of the setting as symbol, as well as in the author’s awareness of the event.

Khushwant Singh begins the novel by describing the summer of 1947, which was not like other Indian summers because the weather had a different feel in India that year. The summer in 1947 was hotter than usual, longer... drier and dustier. This presentation of the setting of natural phenomena characterized by the unusual heat is deliberate on the part of the writer. It is symbolic of man’s heated state, of his agonized heart, and of his sufferings and his fate. The dry, dusty, parched earth becomes the symbol of suffering humanity drawn into the ordeal of the Partition of
India into two nations. It seemed that the inner springs of human fellowship, affection, and love were drying up and man asked for water in vain. But,

...there was no rain... People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins.\(^5\)

The aridity of the 1947 summer stands for the human wasteland which the Punjab becomes in the course of Partition. Thus at the very outset, Khushwant Singh gives us a premonition of the events to follow. This is the subject matter of *Train to Pakistan*.

Unlike Forster, he feels that Khushwant Singh introduces Indian superstitious belief, relating occurrences in the natural world to those in human society. V.A.Shahane draws a parallel between E. M. Foster’s *A Passage to India* and Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* in the settings provided of the human versus the natural world. For example, the notion that be depriving the world of rain,

‘God was punishing them for their sins’ establishes a subtle connection between the two concepts of ‘Kalyug’ and ‘Karma’, which are dealt with in detail a little later.\(^6\)

The Sikhs are mostly landowners, and the Muslims the tenants or tillers of the land, sharing the tilling with the owners. Khushwant Singh then moves on to describe the tiny village, *Mano Majra*, which is the centre of action in the sequence of events leading to the final catastrophe. The novelist acquaints us with the setting and its inhabitants. The Sikhs and the Muslims, almost equal in number, form the rural community of the village. There is only one Hindu house in *Mano Majra*, that of Ram Lal, who is the principal moneylender of the village. Apart from this there are a few families of sweepers who have an ambivalent religious adherence. They seem to
be Muslim and yet are found within the fold of Christian missionaries. Sometimes they visit the Sikh temple also.

The religious ambivalence of the situation is further accentuated when the writer mentions the devotion of all *Mano Majrans* to one local deity the *deo* which is three-foot slab of sandstone. It is here that all the *Mano Majrans* secretly go. Religious diversities of this village are overcome by a mutually accepted centre of supernatural power.

Hate alternates with love, anger with affection, and the desire for revenge with impulse to sacrifice. *Mano Majra* is seen as a microcosm of rural Indian with its religious and caste divisions, which lead to both affection and alienation, friendship and hostility, union and division. It is out of this interaction of these mutually conflicting forces we get an insight into the village.

Though not many trains stop at *Mano Majra*, life in this village is regulated by the passing of trains across the Sutlej bridge nearby. At the very outset, the writer also lets us know that the railway station occupies a large place in the affairs of this village. The village awakes when the mail-train rushes through the bridge before daybreak. The whole village then echoes with the Mullah’s cries of *Allah- ho-Akbar* from the mosque and the Sikh priest’s prayers from the Gurudwara. By the time the 10.30 a.m. passenger train from Delhi comes in, life in *Mano Majra* settles down to its monotonous daily routine, and when the mid-day express passes by, people stop to rest and men and children come home for dinner and the siesta hour. As the evening passengers from Lahore steams in, everyone gets to work again and by the time the night goods train comes in, there is the Mullah’s call of prayer and the Sikhs priest chants and *Mano Manjra* goes to sleep peacefully. Then,

*...life in Mano Manjra is still, save for the dogs barking that pass in the night.*

7
Thus the train becomes an important aspect of life in Mano Majra, and later in the novel, it acquires superior significance.

3.3 The structure of the Novel:

The first part of the novel is entitled Dacoity, an Anglicised form of a Hindi word meaning robbery. At the very beginning, the writer highlights the murder of Ram Lal, the moneylender, by a gang of dacoits, who break open his house and mercilessly kill him in spite of pleas of the women of the house. They fall at the feet of Malli, the gangster, imploring:

_Do not kill, brother. In the name of the Guru, don’t_ 8

But paying no heed to this, the gunmen demand the keys of the safe from Ram Lal and hit him in the face. Ram Lal spits blood. One of the robbers stabs him in the abdomen and he collapses immediately.

After committing the gruesome murder, the dacoits leave the village. On their way, they fire shots into the air and drop bangles, as a taunt, suggesting the impotence and unmanliness of Juggat Singh, who at that time was not even at home.

The action of the dacoits as it is only a prelude to similar actions and is also a forewarning of the things to follow, which are a result of this dacoity. Thus the quite life of the village is suddenly disturbed. The dacoity is also symbolic of humanity itself being robbed of its values. According to Prafulla C. Kar:
...it figuratively stands for the political dismemberment of the country by the British government who blamed local lenders for causing the Partition. 9

We are then introduced to Juggat Singh, who is a confirmed criminal and has served several jail terms on various charges. But at the time of the dacoity Jugga is with Nooran, the Muslim priest’s daughter, in the fields. Khushwant Singh has elaborately described the love-scene between Jugga and Nooran which stands contrast to the scene of dacoity.

This love scene contains the germ of future action for it is love of Nooran which makes the train load of Muslim bound for Pakistan. The call of the body was too strong for both of them, and Nooran found that,

…the stars above her went into a mad whirl and then came back to their places like a merry-go-round slowly coming to a stop. 10

The fact of love is overshadowed by the event of the atrocious murder. Ironically, this act of fulfillment was followed by cries of woe in Mano Majra. This gives us a premonition that their love will be short lived. The world of dacoity represents the materialistic world whereas this world of love is symbolic of spiritual longings.

It is also significant that the bureaucrat Hukum Chand arrives at Mano Majra only a day before dacoity. It is brought to our notice that almost at the same time when Malli and his gang committing the dacoity in Mano Majra, Hukum Chand, magistrate and deputy commissioner of
the district, was involved in an “affair” with Haseena, a Muslim teen-aged girl at the officer’s Rest House. The goods train was being shunted while Malli and his gang were involved in housebreaking and murder, when Jugga and Nooran were locked in each other’s arms, and when Hukum Chand and Haseena were engaged in an attempt at physical contact. The three scenes taking place almost simultaneously to the refrain of the railway engine’s whistle demonstrate the three aspects of the novel. Dacoity is contrasted with love, while love is differentiated from sheer physical passion.

Till the time Hukum Chand arrives at Mano Manjra there was no communal trouble in the area. The sub-inspector informs the magistrate:

All is well so far. The lambardar

Reports through the village yet: I am

Sure no one in Mano Majra even knows that the

British haveleft and the country is

divided into Pakistan and Hindustan.

some of them know about Gandhi but I
doubt if anyone has ever heard of

Jinnah.¹¹
Such is the situation in Mano Majra where people lived a self-complacent life. It would look as though the Sikh priest could not without the Mullah offering his prayer, and the Gurudwara was invariably the place for the Muslims and Sikhs to meet and discuss common problems of the village. The Sikhs readily made their Chacha Imam Baksh’s sorrow their own. The help that the village offered him in times of crisis was as much because of respect as of love. In turn Chacha Imam wrote verses from the Koran for folk to wear as charms. And he gave them his inexhaustible treasure of anecdotes, jokes, proverbs, which the villagers loved to hear.

It is important to note that Khushwant Singh introduces most of the important characters in the opening section. The day after the murder, the 10.30 passenger train from Delhi unloads at Mano Majra a group of armed policemen and a young Marxist radical, named Iqbal. Iqbal was a Babu, a city dweller, who had received the stamp of western culture and education. He stayed with Meet Singh at the Gurudwara and declared his party’s purpose in sending him to Mano Majra, which was a vital point for refugee movements. Iqbal attempted to project his western ideas and socialist notions on the Mano Majra situation only to realize that he did not belong. Events then move fast in Mano Majra and the police arrests Iqbal and Jugga, suspecting them of the murder. This arrest of Iqbal is ironical because of his pompous presentation to patriotism. The arrest itself is precarious, for the policemen asked his name first, then filled in the blanks and then prepared the warrant of arrest.

The irony of the situation is further heightened by the romantic notions of jail life held by Iqbal. He thinks of the arrest as a heroic gesture, unlike Jugga, who is much more realistic.

Khushwant Singh succeeds in again creating scenes of contrasts between the two arrests. It is in this section that we realise the flaws of the bureaucracy and their biased behaviour. Iqbal is arrested merely on grounds of suspicion and even his faith has not been properly established. The policemen realise their mistake but are unwilling to acknowledge it. In order to ascertain Iqbal’s faith,
…the sub-inspector ordered him ‘to take off his pyjamas’.

This scene is shocking but at the same time exposes the ugly reality and also the inhumanity of the bureaucracy in times of crisis.

But at the same time, the treatment meted out to Iqbal and the behaviour toward Jugga amply indicates the class divisions in Indian society. Khushwant Singh dispassionately traces this caste and class difference and also mocks at it, as a silent narrator. In a society peopled by the Hukum Chand and Haseenas, Iqbal and Juggas, class distinctions are inevitable and the novelist also seems to realise that a classless society is merely an ideal.

Kalyug is the second part of the novel where the scene has undergone a change. According to the Hindu view of time, it means the fourth and the last phase in the four circles of existence. The spirit of Kali, or strife, has at this juncture entered into the mass of humanity in both India and Pakistan.

Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong.

Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seemed as though the alarm clock had been set
for the wrong hour… People stayed in bed late without realising that times had changed and the mail train might not run through at all. Children did not know when to be Hungry.13

In this part of the novel the world-view is characterized by conflict and disorder. Kalyug projected itself on Mano Majra, creating chaos and a nightmarish atmosphere. The freight train went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra.

In this nightmarish world a strange train arrived from Pakistan and halted at Mano Majra:

At first glance, it had the look of the trains in the days of peace. No One sat on the roof. No one clung between the bogies. No one was balanced on the footboards. But some-

How it was different. There was some-
thing uneasy about it. It had a

Ghostly quality. 14

Its arrival was followed by secretive activities of the police and the Sikh soldiers. The villagers became anxious over the arrival of the ghostly train, and met in the Gurudwara only to exchange expression of despair and regret. Later they were called upon to carry wood and kerosene to the station. This built up to the tragic horror that was to come. The events of the day reached a climax when large numbers of the dead were destroyed by the fire near the station, and mass cremation disrupted the rhythm of life in the village. When red tongues of flame leaped into the black sky, everyone knew the reality of the massacre.

They all knew. They had known it all

the time. The answer was implicit in

the fact that the train had come from

Pakistan. 15

This was how the Kalyug struck its gang in Mano Majra, spreading darkness over the land. Man did not raise his hands in prayer to god:

…for the first time in the memory of Mano Majra, Imam Baksh’s sonorous cry did not raise to the heavens to proclaim the glory of god. 16
It was into this village, which upto now had been the symbol of hope for human sanity and survival that the dreadful news slowly trickles in of the train-load of dead bodies of Sikhs and Hindus at Mano Majra railway station, despite the efforts of the magistrate, Hukum Chand to suppress it. There is a pall of gloom and the train is taken to be a premonition of evil times.

The slight of the dead in the ghost train deeply affected Hukum Chand and made him aware of the horror of death. His inward eye recreated the scene which he had seen in the train:

There was a man holding his intestines, with an expression in his eye which said: Look what I had got! Lavatories were filled with corpses. And all the nauseating smell of putrefying flesh, faeces and urine, the very thought made vomit come up in Hukum chand’s mouth. An old peasant with a long white beard “did not look dead at all.” His hand “stretched itself grotesquely and gripped the magistrate’s right foot, and then its grip loosened.”

Hukum Chand was completely shattered by the feeling of horror.

When he cried aloud in horror at the recollection, his servants came running. Slowly recovering his composure, he became very tender in his responses to the prostitute Haseena, who reminded him of his deceased daughter. His tender feelings for her made him manipulate a situation which would make it possible for the Muslims of Mano Majra to migrate to Pakistan in peace, and with honour.
In a world gone and, it was ironical, but not surprising that Malli, the real culprit in Ram Lal’s murder, was freed, whereas Jugga and Iqbal, though innocent, remained behind bars.

The third part of the novel is built around a changed Mano Majra. With the arrival of the ghost trains loaded with corpses, Mano Majra loses its idyllic seclusion and gets involved in the national holocaust. The action of the Head-constable further divides the village into Sikh and Muslim groups. The fifty Sikh refugees who have arrived here are sharing their stories of atrocities meted out to the Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan. The communal fire is fanned by the young Sikh boys who incite Mano Majras to take revenge. Soon the village becomes a battlefield of conflicting loyalties. Mano Majras still pledge to protect their Muslim brethren, and the Lambardar assures Imam Baksh, “This is your village as much as ours.” The others also pledge their friendship to the Muslims. “We die first and then you can look after yourselves…. We first, then you…. Imam Baksh, a religious and pious person, is touched by the affection of Meet Singh and the others. He is overwhelmed by the expression of affection when he says:

*What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers.*

But this friendliness for each other cannot stand the tide of hatred that is sweeping across the country. Though Mano Majras want to protect the Muslims, they are afraid of the angry and aggrieved refugees from Pakistan. The ideal world of the friendship of the Mano Majras, and the Muslims decide to leave for the refugee camps. Imam Baksh ultimately says:

*All right, if we have to go, we’d*

*better pack up our bedding, and*
belongings. It will take us more
than one night to clear out of homes
it has taken our fathers and grand
fathers hundreds of years to make.19

Nooran, who is expecting Jugga’s child, visits his mother before she leaves Mano Majra. Her pleadings initially fall on deaf ears but later his mother assured her that Jugga would bring her back to his home. Nooran also leaves for this refugee camp.

As the mass exodus beings, the village presents a ghastly scene. Describing the condition of the village and its people on the eve of the departure of the Muslims, the author writes:

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.20
The irony of fate is seen when forces beyond the control of the Mano Majra take over, and warmth of relationship that had existed between the Sikhs and the Muslims for generations is wiped out. The state of mental agony and conflict of the Mano Majras is thus revealed. When parting the villagers could not even say good-bye.

_Kalyug is seen to have established complete control over the fate of the people of Mano Majra._

21

The fourth part of the novel is entitled _Karma_, which is a highly significant term. The word _Karma_ in Sanskrit means an act or deed. This has two implications in the narrative context of the novel. According to the Buddhist and Hindu view, _Karma_ implies the totality of person’s actions which determine his fate in the next phase of his life. It may also be used to mean the unpredictable turns of fate or wheels of destiny. The title includes both these implications. The word _Karma_ gives the novel a metaphysical dimension. According to Prafulla C. Kar:

*Karma has a strange logic of its own; by rejecting of relation between the cause and its effect, it justifies indifference and stoic resignation. Karma is a notion based on a deterministic view of the universe.*

22

In Khushwant Singh’s vision of the world, hope gives way to determinism, and therefore, it is appropriate that the novel ends with the chapter, _Karma._

3.4 ‘Self-Preservation, And ‘… this Game of Killing and Looting’!”
In this part of the novel, one can see that all human values are shattered when the dead bodies from the train are deposited into the earth by the bulldozer. It is in this section that we realise how Partition has completely alienated the communities. The leader of the Sikhs, who has come to Mano Majra, calls for revenge. He wants the Sikhs to take revenge on Muslims for what was happening in Pakistan. In the midst of the plan to blow up the train carrying the Muslims of Mano Majra, we see that the voice of Meet Singh’s rational arguments the Guru for their acts of inhumanity and the leader pledges that he bears nothing but goodwill for all men. The entire diabolic scheme for preventing the train from reaching Pakistan is discussed.

We find that Hukum Chand who had come to Mano Majra to maintain law and order is now physically and mentally exhausted and realises that the forces outside the village have taken complete control of the situation. His mind ponders over various possibilities till he feels utterly broken by the increasing incidents of arson, looting and killing.

*Well, Inspector Sahib, let them kill. Let everyone kill* 23

But these official responsibilities compel him to think of saving the Muslim lives under his charge. He orders the immediate release of Jugga and Iqbal, also taking care that they be informed about the train carrying the Muslim refugees and the plan of the Sikhs to blow it up.

The culmination is reached when the author takes us into the inner conflicts of Jugga and Iqbal. Iqbal about what is happening around him, but lacks the courage to put his theories into action. When Meet Singh implores him to do something to stem the rot, he says, “Me? Why Me?” He is an escapist who simply says that he has nothing to do with the Mano Majras. He cannot face violence and believes that self-preservation is the best policy in times of disorder. He is merely, an onlooker. In contrast, the author shows us Jugga’s attitude to life. Keen on saving his beloved’s life, he tries to save all the innocent Muslims of his village.
Jugga who has never visited the Gurudwara arrives at the Gurudwara at night to seek the blessings of the Guru and asks Meet Singh to read the Guru’s words from the Granth Sahib:

Will you just me a few lines

quickly?... It does not matter what

you read. Just read it. 24

As the Bhaiji comes to the end of his recitation and tells him,

It is just the Guru’s word. If you

are going to do something good, the

Guru will help you; if you are going
to do something bad, the Guru will

stand in your way. If you persist

in doing it, he will punish you till

you repent, and then forgive you. 25

Jugga utter Sat Sri Akal and leaves the Gurudwara for his final mission.
Later in the novel we see him tugging at the rope intended to halt the refugee train. He sacrifices his own life but saves his Nooran. Love triumphs over hate and hope for mankind are rekindled.

In this section of the novel, ‘Karma’ takes hold of man, but man by virtue of his free will, fights against his destiny and tries to reclaim his lost soul. In a strange reversal and the dacoit Malli becomes a custodian of Muslims property. The novel closes with an ironic reversal of the order of things.

In Train to Pakistan we see that Khushwant Singh approaches the single event of the Partition through many characters and many stands in the narrative of the fiction. As pointed out earlier, a novelist has his own vision of history which he refines in the context of his work. The characterization and symbolism in the novel demonstrate Khushwant Singh’s vision of history and of Partition in particular. Khushwant Singh succeeds in looking back into the recent past and analyzing it to understand the present, to understand the larger outside forces and view them in the context of the human being.

We will now see how the characters in Train to Pakistan help us to understand the Partition, the most important event of the freedom struggle of India.

According to Charanjit Kaur:

Khushwant Singh has created his characters with a sense of involvement and they reveal the writer first-hand knowledge of the mannerisms and the behaviour patterns of the rural character of the Punjab. This is better understood in the context of the author’s statement, “My roots are in
the dunghill of tiny village.” But being an omniscient narrator in the novel, Khushwant Singh takes the freedom to enter into the minds of several characters in the novel and view the situation of the Partition from shifting perspectives.  

3.5 Juggat Singh: Self-Sacrificing and Humane Character

One of the characters in the novel, who gradually grows from being merely a Punjabi peasant in his strength and weakness, to a self-sacrificing and humane character is Juggat Singh (Jugga).

The savagery of human life is exposed after the Partition, but the writer’s faith in the values of love, loyalty and humanity in the midst of the mighty forces of evil, triumphs in the character of Jugga, who is, in the end, the most convincing and credible of the characters portrayed in the novel.

Describing Jugga’s indubitable moral stature, Khushwant Singh writes:

\[
I \text{ thought it was time one exploded} \\
\text{this myth of the innate goodness in} \\
\text{man. There is innate evil in man.} \\
\text{And so I just wrote about it, and I} \\
\text{did create one character whom I} \\
\text{stuffed with the so-called innate good-}
\]
ness of man, and he is the only

character which is entirely fiction. 27

Jugga is unpretentious about him and confesses to Iqbal that he is a badmash. But at the same time he is a man of action. He shows his mettle on several occasions. His silence about the cause of his absence from his house on the night of Ram Lal’s murder, is to protect the honour of the girl he loves. He is condemned by society as criminal and an irreligious person, but his self-sacrifice to save his beloved and the innocent Mano Majran Muslims helps him to succeed in achieving what Hukum Chand with all his might and power, Iqbal with all his rational ideologies and convictions, Meet Singh with his love and brotherhood and the lambardar with his sincere fellow feelings fail to accomplish.

According to Haydn Moore Williams:

Jugga is indeed a doomed hero; but he accepts his doom with an astonishing cheerfulness. 28

He does not hesitate in his decision when he sets out to save the train. He is certain that there is no escape for him, but he is not even concerned like Iqbal that his sacrifice will go unnoticed. He dies exactly the way he lives, full of confidence and vitality. Only love can provide the mental strength and the conviction death, without exulting in the fact of one’s martyrdom.

It is in the death of Jugga, that Khushwant Singh exhibits a genuine faith in the humanistic ideal. He feels that an intensely human problem can be solved only by a change of heart, and not by politicians, policemen or soldiers. The gravity of the situation of the Partition
was so intense that the bureaucracy, the politicians and the people could not handle it. But Jugga’s destruction becomes an assertion of values, a symbol of life-giving forces. He symbolizes the triumph of good over evil, and in the midst of the brutalities and atrocities of the Partition through his heroic death, he provides hope for the redemption of man. Khushwant Singh feels the need for a burning faith in God, which Jugga tries to seek from the Gurudwara in the wasteland that surrounded him. Khushwant Singh’s hope is now in his hero. He must redeem the Sikh religion, he must redeem Mano Majra which had failed him; he must redeem the Kirpan which has no longer remained the symbol of strength.

*Jugga* represents the common man who struggles against the forces which are not his making, but by his sacrifice brings in the possibility of salvation. The barbarism of the Partition affected the common man, made him its victim, but only a simple man could tide over it by rising to the challenges that it posed.

### 3.6 Hukum Chand: The Bureaucrat

*Hukum Chand* is the most arresting character in *Train to Pakistan*. He is a typical representative of the Indian bureaucracy in British Indian. He is a clever and efficient bureaucrat who manages his role as an administrator in *Mano Majra*. His indulgence with Haseena is not immoral for in the course of the novel we realise that he is tormented with guilt for his indulgence but he need her more for mental security than physical passion. He is a typical lecher but also a man of conscience. Though he takes the law in his hands, he is not unjust. Even though he realises that the government machinery has broken down, and cannot stop the brutalities of the Partition, he tries his best to maintain peace and safeguard the life and property of the Mano Majrans. He is a balanced bureaucrat who does not lose his balance in times of crisis.

“We must maintain law and order,” he answered after pause:
If possible, get the Muslims to go out peacefully. Nobody really benefits by bloodshed. Bad characters will get all the loot and the government will blame us for the killing.  

This attitude is reassuring in the nerve-wracking period of the Partition.

Khushwant Singh has very skillfully portrayed the character of his bureaucrat who very truly represented his times. He is a fatalist who faces the calamities of life with equanimity:

He had taken the loss of his children
with phlegmatic resignation. He had
borne with an illiterate, unattractive
wife, without complaint. It all came
from his belief that the only absolute
truth was death. The rest-love,
ambition, pride, values of all kinds-
was to be taken with a pinch of salt.....

what did it really matter in the end?  


However, he is terribly shocked with the arrival of the dead bodies in the train.

But a trainload of dead was too much

for even Hukum Chand’s fatalism……

It bewildered and frightened him by its

violence and its magnitude. 31

The truth is that the horror and the brutalities of the Partition were too much for even a man like Hukum Chand to come to terms with. All the brutalities and death that he witness brought back to his mind the horrifying scenes of death of his aunt.

When exhausted with all the murder and death, and utterly broken by these terrifying incidents, he is even tried of making a pretense of law and order. He represents the incapacity of the bureaucratic system to control the mob violence.

Well, Inspector Sahib, left them

Kill,…. 

What am I doing to do “he wailed.

The whole world has gone mad. Let it goes mad! What does it matter if another
A thousand get killed? We will get a bulldozer and bury them as we did the others......

An epidemic takes ten times the number and no one even bothers.  

Through the portrayal of Hukum Chand, Khushwant Singh points out that the aligned Indian bureaucracy was caught between the hatred of the people and the bungling of the politicians. He satirises the politicians and their haphazard functioning and their thirst of the Indian bureaucracy but also the conflicting ideals of the politicians:

Where was the power? What were the people in Delhi doing? Making fine speeches in the assembly?  

By presenting to us the mental conflict of Hukum Chand Khushwant Singh also expresses his own resentment. When Hukum Chand recalls Nehru’s speech to the Constituent Assembly on the night of August 14, 1947, we can realise the frustration of this bureaucrat trying to reconcile himself to the fate of his relatives, friends who had to accept their painful destiny. We can sense that sarcasm in the lines,

Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, you made your tryst. So did many others - on the 15th August, Independence Day.
Khushwant Singh is not attacking Nehru in the novel but certainly expressing his disgust at his idealism and the grim reality of life contrasted against it.

3.7 Iqbal: A Young Marxist

Through *Iqbal*, the author reflects on the nature of human action in times of crisis. *Iqbal* has been portrayed to depict that class of intellectuals, politicians and ideologies who would merely rationalise and idealise in times of crisis and become passive when action is the need of the hour.

*Iqbal* is a young Marxist, with Western education and sophisticated style, He is rational and logical in his criticism of social evils in the country. Perhaps Khushwant Singh gives expression to all his idealism and rationalism through this character, about progress and revolution with which *Iqbal* is obsessed, we can see the emptiness of all these theories and we also realise that the writer makes fun of this hero of inaction.

As the novel progresses we realise that all the romantic notions of this young Marxist undergo a radical change, his presentations to patriotism and his ambition to be successful and popular are all shattered in the course of events that grip *Mano Majra*. In fact as communal tension mounts in the villages, *Iqbal* wishes:

*They had sent someone else to Mano Majra. He would be so much more useful directing policy and clearing cobwebs from their minds.*  

35
He is more concerned about his own safety and self-preservation than resorting to bold steps for averting the tragedy. He lacks courage and when the hour of action comes to save the train, he prefers to drown himself in whisky and muse over the futility of any action in such a situation.

He is torn between idealism and pragmatism, and though he suffers from an inner moral conflict, he always tries to resolve it rationally. The chaos of the outer world, the breaking down of values and his inability to identify with a code of God or of man, makes him a dreamer in search of his own identity. He seems to be the author’s voice in rationalizing but at the same time the author succeeds through him in ridiculing all those after power and popularity. Iqbal wanted to be a hero when he came to Mano Majra but now realises that “it needs courage to be a coward”.

In Iqbal’s reflections on religion, politics, art, architecture, music, one can sense that it is this emptiness of the high-sounding phrase of the politicians who merely live in ivory towers without grasping the ground realities.

With effective satirical irony, the novelist shows the failure of Iqbal to overcome the dilemma presented by the Partition crisis. In his failure to deal with the situation, the writer seems to suggest that mob insanity and religious fanaticism cannot be dealt with by any political ideology of politicians or religious leader. The suffering of the people during Partition could have been averted only by the people themselves and not by anybody in control, such as soldiers, politicians, policemen or idealists.

It is no doubt true that religion and faith in God are factors that help to overcome crisis, but under certain circumstances religion itself becomes a destructive force. Khushwant Singh
shows that religious differences can be bridged when fellowship and love become the guiding factors and moral codes.

Iqbal has given up the outward symbols of his religion and there is a deliberate religious ambivalence implied in his name which helps the writer to mock at the mere outward show of religion. He could be Iqbal Mohammed and therefore a Muslims, a Hindu if called Iqbal Chand, or a Sikh by the name Iqbal Singh and he has deliberately created this ambiguity about his own religion. Therefore religion does not give him any solace as it does to the simple Sikh priest Meet Singh, who seems to be the plan of the Sikhs to sabotage the train.

Like Meet Singh, Imam Baksh also is a helpless victim seeking solace in religion. The religious leader Meet Singh and Imam Baksh, at least rise to dignity in moments of crisis but they are nevertheless ineffectual. Thus, when bureaucracy fails, and self-centredness and narrow-mindedness comes to the forefront, and religion also loses its unifying force, it is only the human aspect of a person like Jugga with an unsavoury reputation, who is able to rise above all petty and selfish considerations, and thereby helps to redeem mankind. Thus, the common man reveals his heroic spirit when the powerful authority of land sulks in indifference and inactivity, religious priests cowerd in timidity, and the best of rational political ideologies recoil in fright. Jugga represents a blend of the good and bad, wide gulf of communal hatred. His love for Nooran helps him to cut across religious barriers. And in his death, he proclaims hope for mankind and at least his train to Pakistan stands as a symbol of light in the world of darkness. Khushwant Singh does not glorify the death of his hero but rather deglamorises it by portraying Jugga as an ordinary man, not particularly exceptional. But through his sacrifice, the refugees on the train to Pakistan have some hope of reaching their destination.
References:

   All references in the present study are from the IBH edition.
8. Ibid., p.8.
11. Ibid., p.20.
12. Ibid., p. 57.
13. Ibid., p. 67.
15. Ibid., p. 73.
16. Ibid., p. 73.
17. Ibid., p.74.
18. Ibid., p. 110.
19. Ibid., p. 111.
20. Ibid., p. 115.
24. Ibid., p. 150.
25. Ibid., p. 152.
30. Ibid., p. 76.
31. Ibid., p. 76.
32. Ibid., pp. 134-35.
33. Ibid., p. 153.
34. Ibid., p.153.
35. Ibid., p. 45.