CHAPTER 2

MARTYR AS THE HERO

This chapter makes a study of Khushwant Singh’s celebrated novel *Train to Pakistan*. This novel is undoubtedly one of the most vibrant and established novels in Indo-Anglian literature of the twentieth century. There may be differing views about the classical nature or canonical validity of this novel from a purist point of view, but it remains an undeniable fact that it is a powerful novel which is centered around the theme of partition and the grisliness that characterised the partition holocaust. It successfully and effectively freezes into the fictional frame work, a particularly painful period in the history of modern India, not through any historical-factual accounting but through the ebullient narration of the emotional turmoil in which the human actors of that moment were caught.

Essentially, Khushwant Singh creates a powerful story and allows it unfold against the knotty and complex backdrop of the partition. The backdrop is there, and all the tragic and gory aspects of it are allowed to rise up and present themselves in an awfully disturbing way all through the fabric of the fictional narrative. But the major preoccupation of the writer is to tell a story, a story that is rooted in the essential traits of emotionalism characteristic of all Indian stories. Singh narrates his story in the typical Indian way but he narrates it effectively and whether it is the best way one should narrate a story or not is something that will continue to remain a fodder for critical analysis. But stories never end and there is no way of defining what goes into the soul of good story telling. John Bergers’ words appearing as the epigraph of Arundhati Roy’s celebrated novel *The God of Small Things*
seems to sum up the impermanent flux of the fleeting art of storytelling. "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one" (Roy, 1997, Epigraph). The art of storytelling continues to remain a fleeting art because one story always leads to another and in this kaleidoscopic matrix some stories stand out bright as the pole star and some others remain less bright, but recognized as stars in the firmament. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, undoubtedly has its own place in the matrix of Indo-Anglian fiction.

One of the critical aspects of the novel is the perception that it is melodramatic. Dr. Naik says,

Khushwant Singh’s ‘*Train to Pakistan*’ is a copy-book example. The story here befits any popular film… packed with incidents of rape and murder, loot and arson, spying and accidents, this tale of anaccomplished story-teller degenerates into the meaninglessness of a melodrama. (More, 2004, 93)

As already pointed out, it can be said in Khushwant Singh’s defense that excessive emotionalism is an integral part of Indian storytelling and such an emotional overdose does not seem to affect Indian sensibilities. Some of these strong emotions are primordial traits that characterized Jacobean drama of the early seventeenth century. But critical evaluations such as the above appear to be a bit uncharitable because the historical scenario which serves as a backdrop for the novel itself is one of very strong and essentially tragic emotions.

Melodrama was originally meant to shock the viewers and readers with an excessive display of emotions exhibited by characters,

‘either virtuous or vicious, are pitted against each other in sensational situations filled with suspense’. Further, melodramas are: ‘. . . emotional plays with little depth for
characterization and the situations are the chief sources of interest...’ (Nair, 2005, 44)

The quotient of conflicts and turmoil are generally caused by external factors. Going by these definitions, one could possibly see certain aspects of similarity in *Train to Pakistan*. Of course the source of conflict in the novel is external and to emphasize, it is purely external. The actual physical venue of the happenings in the novel is a tiny Punjabi village on the present Indo-Pakistan border called *Mano Majra*. It is a quiet, secular and peace loving village where people across religious differences live in total harmony and continue to remain humane and helping even in turbulent times. But the trouble comes from outside and the conflict that engulfs the lives and consumes their peace is a conflict that is totally external and like flash floods that flatten out places, comes as an avalanche to destroy the lives of people. Except for this aspect, there is nothing much that can be traceable to establish the novel as a melodrama. In a melodrama, situations are said to take precedence over characterization. But the characters created by Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* are powerfully realistic everyday characters that refuse to be pygmied by the tragic developments caused by unforeseeable circumstances of devastation and murder. There are of course sensational situations filled with violence, blood and gore. But it should be remembered that partition was indeed one of the most wretchedly tragic and morbidly ghoulish happenings of large scale human suffering ever witnessed in the history of the world. In terms of fatalities and gruesome primitive violence, partition violence is more tragic compared to others large scale mass killings such as the European holocaust and European colonial excesses like Jallianwala Bagh. There has been no great dispassionate or objective accounts of partition violence ever done by historians of any genre and this should lead one to the inevitable conclusion that the perception of excessive emotionalism in novels like *Train to Pakistan* could possibly emanate from a failure to understand the heart
rending nature of the partition holocaust itself. As such, the virulence of emotions displayed in the novel help to recreate the monstrosity of the events that accompanied partition and the helplessness of the victims and bystanders who suffered in the process. Khushwant Singh captures these essentials and what Bowra (1950, 293) said of the romantic poet may be used here to highlight the effectiveness of Singh’s fictional portrayal of the horrors of partition.

we may not accept all his assumptions and conclusions, but we must admire the spirit in which he approaches his task and admit that the problems which he seeks to solve must not be shirked by anyone who wishes to understand the universe in which we live.

When the ‘universe in which we live’ starkly and grimly continues to manifest the kind of happenings and the darker symptoms that announce such happenings, the drama depicted by novels such as *Train to Pakistan* assume greater topical relevance in terms of the lessons that need to be learnt and the kind of humanism that is required as an antidote. Reality could at times totally erase the theoretical divide that exists between the literary boundaries of ‘drama’ and ‘fiction’. The boundary at times becomes thin and non-existent because the intensity of human suffering that is depicted and the heroism that is exhibited by ordinary human beings in suffering becomes fit material for drama. The explicit dramatic content in the fictional world depicted in novels like *Train to Pakistan*, could at times, carry things forward and take the fictional content into the domains of drama and make things appear melodramatic. After all, very often the genre differences appear only tenuous and the schisms seen in the form of genres could only be a matter of convenience and as Kermode (1968, 102) argues:

. . .the forms of art – its language – are in their nature a continuous extension or modification of conventions
entered into by maker and reader and this is true even of very original artists as long as they communicate at all.

Khushwant Singh’s novels and short stories are said to express disillusionment about man’s balance and rationality. Singh is a brilliant observer of a world undergoing convulsing changes. His novels provide a unique insight into one of the major political catastrophes of the last century, the unprecedented suffering and bloodshed that accompanied the partition of India.

Khushwant Singh has not been the most admired nor the least criticized. The New York Times Review and The Observer have rated him to be a ‘born story-teller’. He possesses some rare talents such as the comic spirit, exploration of the world around, presenting it in all its nakedness and truth and the capacity to capture reality in all its magnificence and horror coupled with the felicity of expression and the capacity for a clear and realistic portrayal of events and people depicted.

Khushwant Singh started his career as a practicing lawyer in the Lahore High Court. Born in 1915, he had his education in Lahore and London. His eight years’ practice as lawyer earned him a new position as Press Attaché in Indian Foreign Service in London and Ottawa. He became a member of the staff of the Department of Mass Communications, UNESCO. He edited Yejna, an Indian Government Publication, which ultimately paved the way for his literary career. After serving as Visiting Lecturer, in Oxford and other Universities, he became the Editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India and later, Editor-in-Chief of Hindustan Times. His columns in the leading magazines of India were generally well-received.

He had no intention of writing fiction as he was a lawyer by profession. Not many cases came his way and he had plenty of time to read
and gossip in coffee houses. The first few cases that came his way as Counsel appointed by the court were to defend people on trial for murder who could not afford lawyers. So, he visited the places where the murder had happened, interviewed the person in his or her prison cell and talked to their relatives. This gained him rich experience to write about them.

Initially, he was rather scared to write. He had an inferiority complex that only selected people could write. It took several years for him to get over this sense of inferiority. At first he published a collection of short stories *The Mark of Vishnu*. Almost all the stories were based on real experience or those related by his friends. The partition of the country had expelled him from the legal profession. While working as a press officer in London, he had a desire to have a go at the profession of writing. Several of his stories were published in English, Canadian and American magazines. He resigned his post as a press officer and plunged into the field of literature. At that time he had planned to write two books. One was on the partition, the other on his own community. The partition theme was born out of a sense of guilt that he had done nothing to save the lives of innocent people and behaved like a coward. He was greatly moved by the ghoulish events during those fateful days at the time of partition. There was drastic change seen in his outlook towards life and he felt disillusioned with the current situation and his faith in mankind and its nobility was absolutely shaken. He himself said:

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 accomplished 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 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. (Dhawan, 2001, 12-13)

*The Sikhs*, reviewed as a thoroughly bad book full of errors and omissions, was published by Allen & Unwin. *Train to Pakistan* which was first entitled *Mano Majra* was completed on his return to India. It won him the Grove Press Award. Since then, he had been publishing books at the rate of one every six months. Then he turned to translating the works of other writers’ like Iqbal, Zakir Hussain, Azad, Premchand, Bedigud and Amrita Pritam.

Khushwant Singh as a writer has been most admired as well as criticized. The blurb of *The Bride for the Sahib* and other stories describes him as ‘*an author of international repute*’. Critics like Mehtadescribe Khushwant Singh as a powerful and promising writer and place *Train to Pakistan* in the front rank of Indo-English novels. Khushwant Singh had a comic spirit. He could present the world around in all its nakedness and truth. He chose only those areas and aspects of life, which he knew best and successfully presented them with sardonic wit, lively spirit, gentle jocularity and pricking pranks. A novelist achieves repute and recognition when he writes with social awareness and shows concern for the society and his book must review and refresh the society.

This perhaps forms the core of the authenticity and cultural nearness of Singh’s fictional presentation of the world around him. The fact that Singh is a Sikh and he writes about the partition horrors experienced by his own people is something that cannot be overlooked and has a greater relevance for understanding his fiction. The reasons are twofold. The first one is the fact that partition horrors involved the two antagonistic
groups of Sikhs and Hindus on the one side and the Muslims on the other. At the height of the communal flare up and the politics of hatred, the distinction between Sikhs and Hindus practically disappeared and the Muslims became the common enemies. The Muslims also gave expression to their sense of revenge by equally targeting the Sikhs and Hindus. But in terms of proximity to the horrific happenings and in terms of immediate exposure to violence and mayhem, the Sikhs bore the brunt of violence and possibly equally retaliated. Dr. Naik (1978, 121) points out:

The worst sufferers of the holocaust were the Sikhs because their contiguity to the Muslim dominated West Pakistan and the loss of nearly half of their beloved Punjab to the Muslims.

The Western land mass of India has the very accessible and very fertile province of Punjab with open borders of continuous land mass with only man made boundaries. Up North, through Rajasthan and Jammu Kashmir, the land mass becomes progressively mountainous with extremely hostile desserts. Down South, the present Gujarat border also is unfriendly with vast stretches of uninhabitable geographic conditions as those prevailing in the Rann of Kutch. So, Punjab was the only enviable terrain, not only because of its easiness of accessibility but also because of its excellent fertility. Punjab is the land of the five greater rivers cascading from the Himalayas and running through the province, making it rich with the abundance of water and alluvial soil. It is this fact which had repeatedly enticed invaders and conquerors to come into India. As Majumdar (1969, 190) observes,

That is the reason why there have been many invasions on India from the North and practically none from the south.

This centrality and primacy of Punjab in the chequered history of India particularly that of conquests is something that needs to be kept in
consideration when historical narratives in any form are taken up for analysis. Hence, Khushwant Singh’s narrative on partition is not only from a man who happened to be from Punjab but also from someone who had lived during the holocaust as a young man and one who had personally experienced a lot many things of the turmoil.

*Train to Pakistan* is a brilliant, brutally realistic story of political hatred and violence, of mass passions during those turbulent and fateful days that preceded and followed the partition of India when people were seized by communal frenzy. Ahluwalia (1987, 27) comments,

Khushwant Singh’s novel ‘*Train to Pakistan*’ stands out among the partition novels by virtue of its being concerned with the dialectics of human response to an overwhelming tragedy. The novel centers on an enveloping gloom that is relieved only at the end by an act of supreme self-abnegation.

This ‘dialectics of human response to an overwhelming tragedy’ is perhaps the most important aspect that deserves focused critical consideration for a better understanding of Khushwant Singh’s major preoccupation in writing this novel. In *Train to Pakistan*, history metamorphoses into fictional narrative with the skeletal structure of actual happenings getting filled in with the flesh and blood of fictional imagination. This fictional content too is not pure figment of the imagination but based on or bearing relevance possibly to real people and incidents. When history becomes fiction and when the two narratives blend, the dividing line could be very thin or in some cases even non-existent. Secondly, the dialectics of human response also brings into question what are the issues that Singh fails to bring into focus and what are the dialectics that lie hidden in the fictional narrative. Partition is a political happening or rather the tragic fall out of certain political happenings strongly rooted in strong ideological paradigms. Partition is not an impulsive or one-time accidental happening. It is the culmination of the ferocious interplay
of socio-cultural, religious and political factors. Behind all these factors was the looming reality of colonialism and imperialism which with their powerful manipulative arms were viciously devising schemes and moving things like the convulsive pulls of the strings in a puppet show.

These kinds of differentiated perceptions lead us inevitably to the question whether Khushwant Singh, the writer, was concerned with any of the causative political-religious factors or was he content with dramatically portraying the human theatre as it got enacted during partition. To answer this question and to understand the novel’s basic moorings, it becomes necessary to look at the plot of the novel and the events, happenings and the people who combine together in this tragic drama. It is these components of fictional narrative which enable us to understand the purpose of the author better. As Frye points out,

In the direct experience of a new work of literature, we are aware of its continuity or moving power in time. As we become both more familiar with and more detached from it, the work tends to break up into a discontinuous series of felicities, bits of imagery, convincing characterization, witty dialogues and the like. (Das et al. 2003, 367)

*Train to Pakistan* possesses most of these characteristics and to look at the details of the novel becomes necessary for a better understanding of it.

The scene opens in *Mano Majra*, a tiny village. It has only three brick buildings, one of which is the home of the money lender Lala Ram Lal. The three brick buildings enclose a triangular common with a large peepal tree in the middle. The rest of the village is a cluster of flat-roofed mud huts and low walled court yards which front on narrow lanes that radiate from the center. Soon the lanes dwindle into foot paths and get lost in the surrounding fields. At the western end of the village there is a pond ringed round by
There are only about seventy families in Mano Majra, and Lala Ram Lal’s is the only Hindu family. The others are Sikhs or Muslims, about equal in number. But there is one object that all Mano Majrans – even Lala Ram Lal – venerate. This is a three foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keekar tree beside the pond.

It is the local deity, the deo to which all the villagers – Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or Pseudo Christian – repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing. (TTP, 10-11)

The supposedly harmonious or harmonious looking social fabric consisting of a combination of predominantly Sikhs with Muslims as the second major component and one Hindu family raises a utopian kind of vision of tranquility, peace and harmony. This is symbolically accentuated and edified by Singh’s invention of the secular deity which stands as a unifying religious totem and is worshipped by all factions across faiths. This secular deity as already mentioned is the three foot sandstone slab near the pond. To the outsiders, particularly to the cosmopolitan audience from the west, these two things would appear totally baffling and somewhat contradictory. On the one side is the fictional narrative which is primarily focused on portraying the horrors of the world’s most brutal communal holocaust and totally opposed to the strands of the main narrative is a tiny little Punjabi village where people are seen to live harmoniously and as friendly neighbors. Not only that, they are seen to have social tolerance and religious maturity to transcend to the greater heights of worshipping a religious symbol which would certainly be prohibited by their canonical religions. This kind of celebrating what is known as ‘nativism’ and its glory is something that is seen throughout the texture of the novel. This is something that is commonly witnessed in all narratives that deal with postcolonial developments. This embedded ‘nationalistic discourse’ (Nairn, 1997, 347-8) is
something that this research project seeks to develop and demonstrate in the analysis that follows.

Does this rural harmony of the fictional village *Mano Majra* relate to historical reality or is this a reflection of the internal desire of the narrator for harmony and secular co-existence? If such reality was plausible and in existence, what was the obtaining reality in other villages like *Mano Majra*? These questions need to be asked as the fictional narrative is rooted in historical reality. A pure imaginative narrative may not warrant such questions. The possibility of harmony and co-existence should presumptively minimize religious and social conflicts and the fact that violence and brutality erupted viciously on both sides of the border raises the question as to who was really responsible for the carnage. Any attempt to glorify ‘us’, always inevitably seeks to put the blame on ‘them’ and if one were to look at Singh’s ideal village from this perspective, several questions appear to rebound without answers. When history itself becomes fictional discourse, such seemingly extraneous questions have the inevitability of becoming pertinent.

In this context, the symbol of the secular deity witnessed in the form of the red stone slab becomes a central metaphor representing both the ideal and the real. It is worshipped by all three contending religious groups and its physical dimensions are something that could be anathema to some of the religions themselves. It does not belong to the defined canon of dogmatic religions. And for a non-descript, backward village to have a highly cosmopolitan, all inclusive secular religious symbol could only be either Singh’s attempt to glorify the local, native secularism or it could be a mere ritualistic symbol which does not represent any real religious amity. It is true that such secular religious symbols and totems do exist in rural India even today which is visited or worshipped by people from different religions. But it is also true that such occasional secular religious symbols have not in
reality assisted or prevented the recurrence of conflicts based on religious identity. Seen from this angle, Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* appears to worship and portray some aspects of non-existent reality and inadvertently employ the technique of glorifying ‘nativism’ and subconsciously putting the blame on ‘them’. This places the reader in a kind of dilemma where the real and the fictional alternately flash across our mind’s screen and leave us bewildered. It would be appropriate to quote here Gabriel Josipovici’s observations on post-modernist fiction:

> [It] lulls into taking the picture for reality, strengthening our habitual tendencies, and then suddenly our attention is focused on the spectacles through which we are looking, and we are made to see that what we had taken for reality was only the imposition of a frame. (Pillai, 1991, 32)

Technically or in terms of the nature of its narrative content, *Train to Pakistan* is not in the class of a Postmodernist novel. But the similarities do exist and the overlapping blurring line between the real and the fictional shares its basic characteristic with the Post-modern narrative. That is the reason why the tiny village of *Mano Majra* gets elevated to a heroic model village with the abundance of virtues and enviably humanist human responses. This point is often missed and *Mano Majra* is seen as a typical Indian village. Prempati describes the village thus:

> Except for the varying percentage of religious groupings the village Mano Majra, the focal point of *Train to Pakistan*, was by and large typical of the rural Punjabi life. In terms of economic sluggishness and cultural backwardness the village was like any other village of the entire sub – continent. (Dhawan, 1985, 110)

Economic sluggishness and cultural backwardness may be a common characteristic of Indian villages. But *Mano Majra*, while facing the partition chaos, collectively seems to have the capacity to rise above the
normal or typical village. The village with its dacoits, murders and bad guys suddenly metamorphoses into a model of religious amity where the local Sikhs try to defend their Muslim brethren to the best of their capabilities. This raises the question whether this is reality, or as Josipovici calls it, the imposition of a frame done by the author who wants to uphold the virtuosity of nativism.

A look at the details of the plot may provide clarity and some plausible answers to the above question.

In the opening scene, Lala Ram Lal’s house is raided and the Lala is murdered by a gang of dacoits led by Malli. On their return, they fire shots in the air and throw bangles over the walls in Juggut Singh’s house because he did not join them in the robbery. At that time Jugga is away from the house in the encircling arms of his girl, Nooran. Almost at the same time when Malli and his gang are busy in robbery and murder, Jugga and Nooran are engrossed in love-making. The sounds of gun-shots turn them nervous and stunned.

There are two interpretations that become possible in relation to the opening scene. The character of Lala Ram Lal is a clichéd archetype, totally predictable and comprehensively stale, seen in many Hindi movies and pulp fiction. He is an archetypal as the European Jewish money lender. His is the only Hindu family in that non-descript village. Khushwant Singh imports another archetypal native paradigm in the form of horse-borne, rifle toting dacoits and robbers who belong more to the Chambal valley of Madhya Pradesh rather than the pre-independence Punjab portrayed in *Train to Pakistan*. They ‘raid’ the defenseless Ram Lal and kill him like a fly after looting his house. This happens in a village that lives in relatively strong social harmony and may be the motive of Khushwant Singh is to create an atmosphere of violence required for the communal carnage that follows. The
narrative starts with loot and murder and ends with rape and mass murder with the sacrifice of a single man standing out as the redeeming feature. In spite of all these inherent violence there is this attempt to portray the inhabitants of *Mano Majra* as secular and communally harmonious which could be interpreted as celebration of *nativism*, as already pointed out.

Secondly, Khushwant Singh’s attempt at presenting a totally contrastive and rather contrived picture of one of the possible dacoits, the hero Jugga, involved in his romantic pursuits at the actual time of robbery with gunshots serving as the background score, appears again as a kind of romantic glorification of a possibly renegade situation. There is daring, there is robbery, there is sex and violence and the narrative seems to start with the right mix of selected ingredients to present the picture of frenzied activity in a sleepy village that is mixed with backwardness and superstition. This kind of selective fictionalization of harsh reality into something semi-heroic coupled with the attempt to romanticize it lies at the core of glorifying *nativism*.

Next morning, the police arrive to investigate the case of Lala Ram Lal’s murder. By the same train, Iqbal, a western educated self-professed communist arrives at *Mano Majra*. Both Iqbal and Jugga are arrested on grounds of mere suspicion, Jugga of committing murder and Iqbal of being a Muslim Leaguer.

The introduction of the ‘intellectual’ early into the narrative is again something that appears a little contrived and engineered to fit certain premeditated fictional requirements. Iqbal is a western educated man with Marxist learnings. He is sophisticated, cultured, and articulate possesses a combination of qualities that make him an outright misfit in the world of primordial dispositions. In other words, Iqbal is carefully selected fictional implant aimed at representing some of the novelists own personal political viewpoints or the aim of the author is to incorporate the international political
dynamics of the mid twentieth century into the fictional narrative on partition. The attempt appears to fail totally because the character of Iqbal does not serve any purpose as far as taking forward the action of the plot. He seems to be a tentative, indecisive man of thought with no ability to act. He seems to be someone who resembles the westernized radicals who “simply dressed their radicalism in European hand–me–downs”, (Terence Ranger as cited in Gandhi, 1998, 118). Iqbal may represent pseudo-cosmopolitanism and a politically leftist orientation.

But Singh appears to use this character to possibly propagate his own political conviction that Marxism could not solve the problems of a tragically struggling nation like India at the threshold of freedom as well as fragmentation. Other than this, at the level of fiction, Singh appears to establish through the progression of the plot that the boorish, unlettered hero Jugga is anyway better than the sophisticated, western educated Marxist intellectual Iqbal. This kind of semi-fictional diatribes add to the contrived nature of the plot. All said and done, at the moment of the great impending tragedy at the end of the novel, it is Jugga who acts and not Iqbal. From the theatrical beginning of local robbery, dacoity and romance across two prohibitive religions, the action moves on the main theme of partition engendered brutal violence.

The sudden arrival of a train load of corpses of Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan plunders the apparent tranquility of the village, inflames the communal frenzy of the Sikhs and leads to commotion, creating fear, suspicion, violence and mass-madness in the air. The dead bodies are burnt like rubbish heaps. The Sikhs are quick to retaliate. They attack a Muslim refugee train bound for Pakistan and send it back full of thousands of dead bodies across the border with ‘a gift to Pakistan’ written on the front of the engine. The second train load of bodies of men, women and children refugees
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 mass grave is dug out by the monster of a bulldozer. To add fuel to fire, the flood in the Sutlej carries thousands of dead bodies of humans and animals. The people are shattered at being witness to the scene. At the same time many Sikh refugees reach Mano Majra. The Sikh peasants simply cannot refuse shelter to the refugees.

… hospitality was not a pastime but a sacred duty when those who sought it were homeless. (TTP, 145)

This again is poetic exaltation of the virtues of one’s own people and culture but not entirely untrue. The narrative on the polarities of partition may not have the space to also talk about similar virtues possessed by ordinary people on the other side of the border.

The Muslim population of the village is evacuated to a refugee camp for departure to Pakistan later on. Meanwhile Iqbal and Jugga are released on purpose by Hukum Chand, the Commissioner of the district for want of evidence. A handful of fanatic young Sikhs, from outside Mano Majra, by way of retaliation on the Pakistanis, are planning to blow up the railway bridge and the train scheduled to carry Muslim refugees to Pakistan. They plan to stretch a rope across the first span of the bridge, a foot above the funnel of the engine. When the train passes under it, it would sweep off all the people sitting on the roof of the train.

This part of the fictional inventiveness of the plot and the events narrated therein may appear unnatural and melodramatic for the outsider. It may even attain the proportions of an allegory as it did for critics like Jameson who consider each third world literary text as “an allegory discrete and complete unto itself.” (Morey, 2000, 162) But to those familiar with the internal and external landscape of Indian life, people sitting in hundreds on
the roof of a train could be an accustomed sight, not entirely an artificial invention. Logically, the diabolic plan of tying a rope across a bridge to sweep away all those sitting on top of the train to their deaths also becomes plausible and has to be considered as a fictional happening to be culturally understood. So, what appears essentially to be melodrama to those with western sensibilities could remain as something that is quiet plausible, feasible and even natural. The ruggedness of human existence, the fight for survival, emotional reactions of violence at barbaric levels and the totality of suffering on a massive scale combine together to take human existence to subhuman levels and the fictional narrative has to necessarily capture the unusual and the unbelievable in order to portray events that in themselves were grotesque in actuality. But amid all this mayhem appears something to redeem the goodness of human nature and that is what Khushwant Singh seeks to fictionally foreground.

At night according to the malicious plan, the avengers stretch a rope horizontally above the railway line to cause an accident on the coming train and massacre the refugees bound for Pakistan. Hukum Chand, the Commissioner tries to avoid the wreck. He knows it well that he is just unable to protect the train of Muslim refugees. So, he tries to do it through Juggut Singh. Juggut Singh is called and told that all the Muslims travelling by the train at night including his beloved girl Nooran are going to be massacred. Jugga, a self-confessed local ruffian, realizing that the revenge might mean danger to his Muslim beloved Nooran, manages to slash the rope with his kirpan.

He went at it with his kirpan, and then with his teeth. The engine was almost on him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan. (TTP, 207)
In the midst of the universal madness and communal frenzy, as Iyengar says, “the simple uncalculating love of a man for a woman asserts itself” (Kumar et al, 2003, 49) and averts the catastrophe.

Jugga, a known dacoit thus redeems himself by saving the lives of thousands of Muslims in a stirring climax. His act of love and sacrifice against the backdrop of hatred and violence towers above communal difference and lends a quiver and meaning to the general aimlessness of life in the partition days. Dr. V.A. Shahane aptly remarks,

"This is the triumph of love, of humanism, of faith in the goodness of man in a moment of real crisis and challenge which is the central significance. (Dubey, 1999, 32)"

Jugga, the outlaw becomes almost noble by his last act of self-sacrifice. He appears as a bandit and trouble maker by profession but a romantic in life, focused more on his love for Nooran. Even the negative nature of his personality appears to have some bright positive streaks. In the opening scene itself, we are given to understand that he refuses to be part of the robbery and murder at the money lender Ram Lal’s house. This could either be by design or accident as we are shown that Jugga is with Nooran, sharing intimate moments even as Malli and his gang indulge in murderous loot. He seems to be bad by the force of circumstances rather than because of any inherent evil nature. Early in the novel he is arrested for the crime he did not commit and incarceration immediately elicits a sympathetic response from the reader. His deliberately manipulated release from jail by Jail Superintendent is a clever fictional ploy that enhances the dramatic effect of the already violent communal mayhem. Jugga, on knowing about the impending danger to his beloved Nooran, decides to effectively intervene to save the lives of the people in the train laying down his life in the process. This is an act of supreme sacrifice. Jugga, the ruffian becomes the Sydney
Carton of this violent tale of two nations and some critics feel that this is the “central significance of the novel.” (Asnani, 1987, 41)

Since Westerners cannot fully perceive the tragic suffering due to the effects of the partition, at least from the historical point of view, Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* may remain the most comprehensive description of this catastrophic human situation.

*Mano Majra*, a remote village in the Punjab, serves as the fictional setting of *Train to Pakistan*. Although traditionally devoid of political consciousness, the village emerges as a microcosm of India. As Hindus and Sikhs battle Muslims for a political stronghold in their nation, the villagers’ traditional harmonious way of life progressively disintegrates into selfishness, mistrust and cruelty. The divided country symbolizes a transition in civilization from spirituality to secularization, a transition which necessarily entails great physical and spiritual agony.

Signs of man’s inhumanity continue to invade *Mano Majra*. The tempo of death increases. The river Sutlej yields hundreds of floating corpses, victims of Muslim torture and mutilation. A second trainload of corpses arrives from Pakistan, and this time, they are buried with the help of a bulldozer. “What does it matter if another thousand get killed?” asks the magistrate.

We will get a bulldozer and bury them as we did the others. We may not even need the bulldozer if this time it is going to be on the river. Just throw the corpses in the river. (TTP, 178)

Since Hukum Chand, the Commissioner, is duty bound to maintain peaceful social order, the utterly helpless position in which he now finds himself, seems all the more severe. What he witnesses is more than a
violation against man and society. It is a violation against Man and Natural Law. The burials, whether by fire or water or bulldozer provide no sacrificial offering, no hope of a new awakening, hence no real meaning to posterity. Although Hukum Chand’s immediate efforts are directed towards saving life and preserving the social structure, the state of chaos is for him tantamount to great human repression.

Jugga and Iqbal reveal two opposing ways of looking at India, one primitive and spiritual and the other modern and materialistic. Although Iqbal’s sarcastic remarks dampen the spirits of everyone around him, Jugga preserves his intuitive reverence for life, while being driven to jail in a horse carriage, they together with the policeman, talk of the indiscriminate mass killings in the Punjab. Jugga responds with an innocent faith;

They cannot escape from God … bad acts yield a bitter harvest … It is the law of karma … The Guru has also said the same in the book. (TTP, 85)

Iqbal makes a cynical remark on the truck driver who reportedly killed himself in order to save a pariah’s dog. Unlike Iqbal who theorizes about equality but expects aristocratic treatment, Jugga accepts the caste system with a great felicity as his religious faith. The new ways and the old cannot be easily reconciled. Iqbal makes a mockery of the nation’s problem of the high annual birth rate, whereas Jugga’s spirit is irresspressibly drawn towards love and sex. The affair between the Hindu Hukum Chand and the young Muslim prostitute Haseena parallels that of the Sikh Jugga and the Muslim Nooran; both affairs cut across religious barriers.

Jugga’s love for Nooran represents one of the most positive and dynamic forces of the novel. Although he is tolerant of all people and most situations, and indifferent towards the police, Jugga’s emotional ties are never questioned. His love for the Muslim girl carries with it a commitment unto
death. Since Jugga, unlike Hukum Chand, is not troubled by conscience, impulses of natural love move freely through his huge frame.

Juggut Singh’s supreme sacrifice is highlighted in the context of Iqbal’s refusal to do anything and Hukum Chand’s helplessness and indifference. Whereas, Iqbal thinks of the futility of his sacrifice, Jugga does not expect any reward; neither Jugga does not know that Nooran is carrying his child in her womb nor she of his sacrifice.

A planned evacuation and massacre of a trainload of Muslims, including Nooran and Haseena, provides the ultimate proof of man’s irrationality; for essentially good people are challenged to an act of revenge by insults upon their manliness. Thus Sikh soldiers and villagers conspire to murder their brothers – ‘brothers’ yesterday, ‘Muslims’ today. Hukum Chand, recognizing his own inability to halt the impending massacre makes a calculated risk and releases Jugga and Iqbal from prison. Since the magistrate is unable to comprehend the evil in human nature, he succumbs to despair:

Hukum Chand slid off his chair, covered his face with his arms and started to cry, and then he raised his face to the sky and began to pray. (TTP,204)

He orders the release of Iqbal and Jugga, hoping that one of them will try to save the passengers of the train and his desperate gamble pays off.

Iqbal, the social worker, arrives at the village with visions of being hailed as a leader in his party. His conversation with Meet Singh, the Bhai of the Gurudwara refers to the blood-shed caused by the partition which he feels, must be stopped immediately. On learning that the Americans have also visited the village, he asks Meet Singh whether he has liked their preaching Christianity in the village. Meet Singh replies that everyone is welcome to his
religion and in the village the Gurudwara and the mosque co-exist amicably side by side. When Iqbal is informed of the intended plan of the revolutionaries, he wonders whether he should intervene and try to prevent the planned massacre of the train passengers. Visions of him being killed haunt him and he decided against the intervention since the sacrifice would not be the

… same thing as taking punishment at school to save some friend. In that case, you could feel good and live to enjoy the sacrifice, in this one you were going to be killed. It would do no good to society, Society would never know. Nor to yourself: you would be dead. (TTP, 195)

Thus, Iqbal for all his high-flying ideas does not have the courage of his convictions.

Against this weak man is poised with Meet Singh, the old Bhai of the Gurudwara. When he hears the plan to butcher the passengers, he protests that there is no bravery in killing innocent people and no Sikh Guru had advocated violence even though they had suffered untold indignities at the hands of the Muslim rulers. His protests are drowned in the volley of harsh and intemperate words. His mild voice imploring them not to commit this heinous crime as it is against the tenets of Sikhism is cast aside contemptuously by the militant young men.

It is therefore left to Jugga to retrieve the situation. Juggat Singh is the ‘budmash’ or the bad guy of the village. His idea of education is to know English. He respects Iqbal because of his knowledge of the language. But this man of violence, who has no regret in beating up a rival for insulting him, is tender and loving towards the Muslim weaver’s daughter, Nooran. His romance with her reduces his badness, a fact acknowledged by the Sub-Inspector to Hukum Chand. He has a stoic philosophy that being a bad
character he must go to prison often and he does so with lightheartedness and humour, bantering with the policemen. His religion is not violence but one of love and as a lover he makes the supreme sacrifice when he saves his Nooran from the planned carnage. Love transcends everything for him and even though his body is riddled with bullets, he succeeds in slashing the rope tied at the top of the bridge. He is shot by the revolutionaries and his body falls on the track to be run over by the train which continues on its way to Pakistan. This act of Juggat Singh redeems him in the eyes of the readers, for he transcends the self to save his beloved. Nooran is expecting his child, a fact which he will never know, as she will be unaware of the supreme sacrifice that he had made.

An unwanted situation is created in Mano Majra when other Sikhs from Pakistan arrive there. The village has been a place of peace and harmony. The Sikhs of Mano Majra fear the safety of their fellow Muslims, if the Sikhs, tortured in Pakistan arrived in the village. It would be very difficult to prevent those Sikhs from seeking vengeance on the Muslims. They are in terrible dilemma. They cannot refuse shelter to the homeless Sikhs driven away from Pakistan and they could not let their Muslim tenants run away from their village. Their age-old love for their fellow Muslims remains unshaken against heavy odds and their anger turns into bewilderment. They are concerned about the safety of the Muslims. This confirms the fact that Mano Majra is the finest example of peace and communal harmony. There is news that the Muslims from other villages have been evacuated to the camps and arrangements have been made for their safe crossing the border to Pakistan. The villagers express surprise as to how the people from other villages could ask their Muslim friends to go away, for it is like asking one’s sons to get out of his home.
The Muslims in Mano Majra are assured of all help and protection by the Sikhs of the village. As long as we are here nobody will dare to touch you. We die first and then you can look after yourselves. (TTP, 147) Assured of all help, Imam Baksh, the Muslim priest, breaks into tears observing, What have we to do with Pakistan? We are born here, so were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers. (TTP, 147)

This is too hard for the loving villagers to bear. Meet Singh clasps Uncle Imam Baksh in his arms and sobs. “Several of the people started crying quietly and blowing their noses.” (TTP, 147) The Lambardar assures Imam Baksh of all help. People are determined to defend and save their fellow Muslim brothers, but the irate refugees from Pakistan pose a threat. Hence, the Muslims are advised to go to the refugee camp for a few days to escape the wrath of the people coming to this side of the border through great danger and difficulty. The Muslims, with a heavy heart, decide to go away packing all their belongings. The decision creates scenes of gloom and the pangs of separation are unbearable. All the people, attending the meeting are in tears at these developments.

Lambardar felt a strong sense of guilt and was overcome with emotion. He got up and embraced Imam Baksh and started to cry loudly. Sikh and Muslim villagers fell into each other’s arms and wept like children. (TTP, 149)

At night, the whole Muslim locality keep themselves busy packing their belongings. The women sat on the floors hugging each other and crying. It was as if in every home, there had been a death. (TTP, 150)

Khushwant Singh’s narration of the pangs of separation due to partition is moving and it expresses a sense of guilty and helplessness. In spite of the spiteful instigations of Sikh refugees from Pakistan, the Mano Majra people do not hate or turn against their erstwhile Muslim neighbors.
Love for the neighbor reigns supreme in the hearts of the *Mano Majrans* and that is what the novelist wants his readers to realize. Values like human integrity and dignity are highlighted and the principles of love and self-sacrifice are upheld.

The characterization in the novels of Khushwant Singh is subservient to the dominant themes; hence it can be analyzed fully only after taking into consideration the major thematic considerations of his novels. His intention is to an extent seen in his introduction to M.J. Akbar’s *Riot after Riot*. He himself points out, “the theme of this book is violence in the land of Gandhi.” He also says,

> It was about this time that the Mahatma made his final effort to stem the tide of hatred that was sweeping across the country. This was in Delhi in the Autumn of 1947 when Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan were hell-bent on driving the Muslims out of Delhi. Once again, and again single-handed, it was the Mahatma who, through his fast to atone for the wrongs done to innocent Muslims, converted hate-mongers into peace-loving Citizens. A few days later, on 30 January, 1948, he paid the price of fearlessly treading the path of truth and non-violence with his own life. In his martyrdom was his greatest triumph. (Akbar, 2003, 2)

It is evident that Khushwant Singh possibly believed in Gandhi and his principles of love and non-violence. Through the personality of Jugga in *Train to Pakistan* Khushwant Singh attempts to project the ideas of martyrdom and human integrity. Singh also lays emphasis on the fact that only love can provide the mental strength and the conviction to accept death, without exulting in the fact of one’s martyrdom. Jugga’s martyrdom is summed up in the following way:
… an intensely human problem can be solved only by a change of an essentially moral and spiritual approach to it, and by politicians, policemen or soldiers. (Mathur et al. 1976, 237)

But martyrdom and the assertion of universal love and brotherhood alone are not at the core of Khushwant Singh’s fictional world. *Train to Pakistan* contains several levels of meaning and social purpose with its rich and variegated portrayal of the partition saga. It remains a multilayered text fit for interpretations from several viewpoints. The first level would be to look at it as fiction and a literary text. But the problem, that crops up is that it cannot be seen as ‘pure fiction’ since it is interwoven with strands of history. It is neither a documentary historical novel nor is it a pure imaginary fiction. It is somewhere in the realm of fiction narrated against the backdrop of history.

Khushwant Singh 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 artist can depict. (Asnani, 1987, 42)

Secondly, the novel provides the flux of changing narrative that contains several images, symbols and metaphors. From a postcolonial perspective this aspect could be seen as being important. Singh is describing in his novel the most turbulent and decisive period in India’s hoary history. Partition can be seen from the perspective of history as the culmination of a thousand years of conquests and invasion. It not only led to the fracture of an old identity but led to the birth of a new antagonistic identity. It was also a tragic point in history which dealt with old conflicts brutally but also planted the seeds of newer and renewed conflicts. Conquests and Invasions were about space, and they were in terms of theory ‘spatial’. *Train to Pakistan* also pursues this preoccupation with the ‘spatial’ in a nostalgic sense. Partition was not only about the anger and hatred between two communities but was essentially about,
the different communities occupying the space of the projected nations. (Morey, 2000, 163)

In this brutally violent struggle for space – geographic, economic and religious – the recurrence of certain symbols and images become powerful from the narrative as well as content points of view. The most powerful symbols are the Train and the bridge themselves. Both are symbols of connection, link, unification and coming together. But in turbulent times they also become symbols of disconnection, severance, separation and falling apart. When violence breaks out, the train and the bridge could become symbols of hope for escape and survival. This could also represent closure and termination for those who are caught on the wrong side. The same way Mano Majra also consists of several symbols representing the major motifs of Singh’s fictional world as well as the real world. The three buildings that are at the centre of the village are Hindu Ram Lal’s house, a mosque and the Sikh temple representing the three religious divides. If the three buildings represent the local social fabric, the train and the bridge are to be seen as symbols of the colonial power.

British innovation has been internalized and woven into the native social fabric. (Morey, 2000, 170)

Khushwant Singh powerfully weaves the magic carpet of evocative symbols which finally become actors by themselves in the unfolding drama of human tragedy. The train in the final climatic scene escapes from the tragedy awaiting it because of the sacrifice of Jugga. The Muslim escapees are also saved along with Nooran who is carrying Jugga’s child to be born. Jugga saves people but fall to his death. The train runs over him safely and crosses the bridge into Pakistan. This could easily be described as one of the most powerful images in the post independence Indo-Anglian fiction. This is what perhaps made the famous and erudite critic Srinivasa Iyengar (1984, 502) to aptly sum up things thus:
Khushwant Singh, however, has succeeded through resolved limitations and rigorous selection in communicating to his readers a kind of grossness, ghastliness and total insanity of the two nation theory and the partition tragedy. The pity and horror of it all! And the novel adequately conveys them both.

Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* has a plot with the backdrop of the partition riots. The novel portrays the emotional responses of different communities to the partition. The novelist exhibits his concern for communal harmony the pre-requisites for which are love, tolerance and sacrifice. Love transcends caste, creed and religion. Sacrifice makes people realize the guilt and prompts them to shed violence. The super-human sacrifice made by Jugga might seem to be personal at the micro-level. But at the universal level, it is a pointer that love and sacrifice are the only remedies for the ills of a society that is on the edge of disintegration due to caste and communal differences.

*Train to Pakistan*, as Professor William Walsh comments, 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. (Bhatnagar, 1996, 90)