

PANGS OF PARTITION IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

(Mrs) Renu Kumari¹, Indu Kumari², Prof (Dr) Pramod kr Singh³

¹Professor, Veer Kunwar Singh University, Ara Bihar. (India)

Author of 30 books and over 150 Research Papers.

^{2,3}Research Scholar, V.K.S. University, Ara Bihar, (India)

Partition of India and Pakistan has been the burning issue in Indian English Literature, specially in Indian English Novels. Khushwant Singh's Train To Pakistan is one of the best examples. Probably, it has been the first English novel in India which records the odyssey of partition in its factual colour. The novel is set against the backdrop of separation of India and Pakistan and the story of the novel moves around the year 1947 when both the countries were officially bifurcated by the erstwhile British government. Mano Majra, an imaginary village, is in the centre of all the events. First published in 1956, this novel is a history of a sort. But, more important message of the novel is its human element combined with reality and horror.

Mano Majra, the village on the border of India and Pakistan, is mostly inhabited by Sikhs and Muslims. While the feelings of partition had overtaken the city dwellers on both the sides, the villages were still untouched by those sentiments. People lived in peace and harmony in Mano Majra. But, the rumours of partition was coming into this village in a filtered way. Naturally, in course of time, life in Mano Majra also changed. One day the village received the government notice that Muslims would be transported to Pakistan. The news was a great shock to both Muslims and Sikhs. One Muslim had reacted to it in the following way :

"What have we to do with Pakistan?

*We were born here. So were our
ancestors. We have lived amongst
(Sikhs) as brothers"⁽¹⁾*

And, soon a good number of muslims were shifted to a refugee camp from where they were to be carried to Pakistan. Not only this,

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some people also visited Mano Majra and instigated local Sikhs to mass murder the Muslims while they are on their train to Pakistan. Though the Sikhs were culturally a bit different from the Hindus, yet they were treated as Hindus itself even in those days. Just before the partition massacre and mass rapes were carried out in both India and Pakistan. The Muslims blamed the Hindus for starting the riot whereas the Hindus blamed the Muslims for starting it. The novelist aptly explains this situation in the novel in following words :

*"Muslims said the Hindus had planned
and started the killing. According to the
Hindus the Muslims were to blame. The
fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and
speared and dubbed. Both tortured,*

both raped.”⁽²⁾

In fact, life was extremely arduous in those days. People, out of fear, ran helter-skelter for safety. Riotous situation had gripped the scenario. Some traveled long distances on feet and some in bullock-carts and lorries. Even the roof tops of the trains used to be over-crowded while delineating the pangs the people, the writer describes the scene as follows :

“By the summer 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people- Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs – were in flight. By the monsoon broke, almost million of them were dead and all of North India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding.”⁽³⁾

At a glance, *Train To Pakistan* appears to be a true testimony of the pangs of the people at that time. It also depicts how the Hindus and Sikhs were brutally butchered by the Muslims and how the Muslims were being lynched by the Hindus and Sikhs in Calcutta, erstwhile Bihar, Naokholi in East Bengal and at many other places. Both in India and Pakistan-in-making people had to leave the place where they had lived for years and immigrate to new and safer cities

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and villages. The normal life also gets unduly disturbed on evening in the August 1947 at Mano Majra. Robbery and murder take place one Ramlal, the money-lender’s is killed. Life suddenly takes an awkward turn in the village. Upheaval’s of partition pass through Mano Majra. Hukumchand and Sub-Inspector reveal the ghastly butchering of people during those days. The trains symbolize deaths as they carried butchered bodies. At one point the magistrate tells the sub-inspector :

“You haven’t had the convoys of dead Sikhs this side of the frontier. They have been coming through Amritsar. Not one person living! There has been Killing over there.”⁽⁴⁾

The novel not only records the killing of the Sikhs and the Hindus by the Muslims, but also talks about how the Sikhs and the Hindus retaliate and take revenge from the Muslims. Since, the writer of the novel is Sikh himself, he specially highlights the details of the violence committed by the Muslims against the Sikhs. That the Sikhs had suffered a lot can also be corroborated by the following extract which is a true story of one Sikh woman who was left in Pakistan during partition and who married a Muslim and had kids and then sent to India, reunited with first-husband and had kids, and now reunites with Muslim family. She recounts :

“My wish was to see my children again once in my life-time and my wish has come true.” Said Harbansh Kore at the Family reunion in Pakistan.

Ms. Kore, a Sikh, had traveled from

Indian city of Ahmadabad to meet the Muslim son and daughter she had not Seen for more than 40 years.

Ms. Kore’s story began at the time of the partition of Indian and the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

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She and her husband were Kashmiri Sikhs living in the village of Pataika, 16 Kilometers (11 Miles) north-east of Muzaffarabad is what is now Pakistan Controlled Kashmir.

Tensions between Muslims and those Hindus and Sikhs still living in the area were such that after a few years Mrs. Kore’s husband fled to India. She was left behind. Assuming the Husband had gone for ever, Ms. Kore converted to Islam, marrying a Muslim Man named Hadayatullah. Together they had a son Manzoor Hussain Awan, and a daughter Zeenat Bibi. But in the mid 1950s, Mrs. Kore was forced to leave for India under an agreement between Islamabad and Delhi to reunite women with their original families. That was when her separation from daughter Zeenat and Son Manzoor began.

In India, Mrs. Kore re-converted to Sikhism and had another two daughters and a son with her first husband.⁽⁵⁾

Thus, we see that the partition not only divided India into two countries, it also divided individuals into two parts. There are numerous such stories here and there, but one fact is undeniable that the pangs of partition have left a deep imprint on the minds of the people of both India and Pakistan.

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Khuswant Singh’s “**Train To Pakistan**” is one of the best books written on the one of partition so far in India. It records the livid picture of moving events of partition, through imaginary characters,

yet both events and characters are very close to the realities of that time. Commenting on its content a critic called Jibran rightly says :

“Train to Pakistan is one of the earliest English Language novels to capture the horrors of the Indian partition of 1947. Since then it has classic status in the history of sub-continental literature and for right reasons.

As independence and with it partition took reality the Punjabis become desperate to learn about their fate. The province of Punjab (Like Bengal or the Eastern boarders) was to be cut in half between its Muslim majority population and Hindu-Sikh majority population. Those who found themselves on wrong side paid the price when in a village, where the story is set, neighbours and long term friends turned against one another not knowing to which new country the village had gone, since it was on the border and had a fairly mixed population.

The inanity and mindlessness of the conflict is cleverly depicted throughout the novel, specially in a case when Iqbal, on the run, finds shelter in a mosque. His is the name that at that time passed for both Hindu and Muslim, with only the surname giving away his background. So, originally Iqbal Singh

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became Iqbal Khan in the mosque.

A train load of corpse that came in from areas that were awarded to Pakistan triggers a chain reaction of riots in cities and villages where peace had hitherto prevailed. The story shows how one small incidence in a faraway town can start up a massive

bloodshed in places where, despite tensions, people had lived peacefully before but now must shade one another's blood in the name of the new countries that existed only as arbitrary lines drawn by imperial cartographers.⁽⁶⁾

Jiwan's commentary given above suitably testifies as to how Khuswant Singh's maiden novel is a picturesque diary of the pangs to partition in a real sense.

REFERENCES

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