

THE THEME OF PARTITION IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S NOVEL TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

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Abstract: *The Partition of India was the process of dividing the sub-continent along sectarian lines, which took place in 1947 as India gained its independence from British Empire. The northern part predominantly Muslim, became nation of Pakistan and the southern predominantly Hindu became the Republic of India, the partition however devastated both India and Pakistan as the process claimed many lives in riots, rapes, murders and looting. The two countries began their independence with ruined economies and lands without an established, experienced system of government, not only this, but also about 15 million people were displaced from their homes. The Partition of India was an important event not only in the history of the Indian subcontinent but in world history. Its chief reason was the communal thinking of both Hindus and Muslims; but the circumstances under which it occurred made it one of the saddest events of the history of India. No doubt, the Hindus and the Muslims were living together since long but they failed to inculcate the feelings of harmony and unity among themselves. The fanatic leaders of both communities played a prominent role in stoking the fire of communalism. The partition was exceptionally brutal and large in scale and unleashed misery and loss of lives and property as millions of refugees fled either Pakistan or India.*

Keywords: theme, partition, train, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh at a Glance

Khushwant Singh's name is bound to go down in Indian literary history as one of the finest historian and novelist, a forthright, political commentator and an out-standing observer and social critic. He is known as one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation, besides, being a significant post-colonial writer in English language. He is known for his clear-cut secularism, wit and a deep passion for poetry. His assessment and comparison of social and behavioral traits of people from India and West is full of outstanding wit. In July 2000, he was conferred the "*honest man of the year* Award by the *Sulabh* International Social Service organization for his courage and honesty in his *brilliant incisive writing* at the award ceremony. The then Chief minister of Andhra Pradesh described him a "*humorous writer and incorrigible believer in human goodness with a devil may-care attitude and a courageous mind.*"

The Indian External affairs minister said that the secret of *Khushwant Singh's* success lay in his learning and discipline and his belief in the *vener of the superficiality*. *Khush want Singh* has worldwide readership. He has written for almost all major national and international newspaper in India and abroad. He has also had numerous radio appearances at home and

internationally and had an extra ordinary career as a writer. His book, “A history of Sikhs”, remains of the best, well researched and scholarly works of the Sikhs. He has also written several novels, both fiction and nonfiction, which have been translated into many languages. His novel ‘*Train to Pakistan*’ won him international acclaim and Grove press Award in 1954, he is best- selling author of over 80 English publications. *India today* described him as ‘*the capital’s best known living monument*. Khuswant Singh was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974. Ten years later, in an act of courage on June 8, 1984, a day after the attack on the Golden temple, he drove to *Rashtrapati Bhavan* and returned the framed citation to the president of India , *Giani Zail Singh*, also a Sikh in protest at the storming of the Golden temple, however in 2007 Indian government awarded Singh an even more prestigious honor, the Padma Vibhushan. In short Khushwant Singh is a man larger than life – a lawyer , diplomat, critic, Journalist, novelist, historian, naturalist and a politician ,all rolled into one.

THEME OF PARTITION IN TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

Khuswant Singh’s Novel „*Train to Pakistan* ,brings forth a picture of bestial horrors enacted on the Indo Pakistan border during the partition days of August 1947. It tells the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events that followed, which will be remembered as one of the blackest chapters of human history. Just on the eve of independence, India was partitioned causing a great upheaval in the whole continent. Independence brought in its wake one of the bloodiest carnages in the history of India, the upshot of this, was that twelve million had to flee their home nearly half a million were killed.

The harrowing and spine chilling events of 1947 had shaken the faith of the people in the innate human beings. It had driven them into a state of wonder over what man has made of man. To *Khushwant Singh*, this was a period of great disillusionment and crisis of values, a distressing and disintegrating period of his life. The beliefs, he had cherished all his life were shattered. Giving vent to his inner struggle and agony, he says: ‘*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. He says, I had believed that we Indians were peace loving and nonviolent that we were concerned with matters of the spirit while rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. After the experience of autumn 1947, I become an angry middle aged man, who wanted to show his disenchantment with the world.. I decided to try my hand at writing.*

The sinister and venomous impact of partition and the indignation it spawned on him has been realistically expressed in scathing attack in *Train to Pakistan*. Originally entitled *Mano Majra*. The novel potrays with bold and unrelenting realism the brutal story of political hatred and violence during the turbulent and fateful days that preceded and followed the partition of British India when spirit of communal frenzy and passionate zeal for self – expression was fanning and fumbling with the masses. Every citizen was caught up in the holocaust. No one could remain aloof; no one could be trusted to be impartial. It is true that partition touched the whole country and Singh attempt in the novel is to see events from the point of view of the people of *Mano Majra*, a small village which is considered to be the backdrop of this novel. As P.C.Car writes, Singh weaves a narrative around life in this village, making the village a microcosm representing a larger world”.

Khushwant Singh recreates a tiny village in the Punjabi countryside and its people in that fateful summer, when the flood of refugees and the inter-communal bloodletting from Bengal to the North West Frontier at last touches them. Many ordinary men and women are bewildered, victimized and torn apart. The most heart – rending passage in the book is when the government makes the decision to transport all the Muslim families from Mano Majra to Pakistan. The dumbstruck villagers are overtaken by events. The Muslims leave with the barest minimum of their meager belongings within ten minutes and the Non-Muslim neighbors do not get a chance to say Goodbye. The entire scene is painful at many levels; particularly the poverty in which these people lived, the uncertainty, they were thrown into and the eclipse of people’s humanity. *Train to Pakistan* is Khushwant Singh’s Supreme achievement. It is one of the finest realistic novels of Post-world war II Indo Anglian fiction. It has a well thought out structure, a well- conceived plot, an absorbing narrative and beautifully potrayed characters. It has many notable features – symbolic framework, meaningful atmosphere and a powerful way of expression and style. Khushwant Singh has accurately depicted the real picture of the adverse effects of partition and the suffering that people were made to experience. Khushwant Singh upheld his unique mirror to reflect upon the physical torture and psychological outburst that became the order of the day, when the division of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan. He paints a vivid picture of the separation between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the summer of 1947. The novel in short potrays the issues of Independence and partition using it as a means to explore other issues which then emerge as the larger picture of the devastation and bloody birth of nations.

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