



RESEARCH PAPER

**Conflicting Communal Identities and Wounds upon Regional
Consciousness: A Socio-Political Study of Khushwant Singh's *Train
to Pakistan***

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ABSTRACT

The study analyzes Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* to explore the social, psychological and political impacts of the Partition of India. The partition is both a result and a cause of religious discrimination in the novel which chronicles the communal harmony and the subsequent disintegration in the fictional Mano Majra. David Storey's theory of Territory and Territoriality is employed to critically examine how once inclusive and cohesive communal identities turn volatile under the strain of colonial legacies, political manipulation and the resultant social discontent. A close reading of the text and engagement with the secondary data reveal the manifestations of violence, loss and betrayal in the rural microcosm. While studying the repercussions of the partition on various communities that went into chaos leading to wild massacres and mass bloodshed, this paper sheds light on the factors and motivations behind these happenings, thus opening panoramas in the domain of Partition Literature.

KEYWORDS Communal Identities, Religious Conflicts, Discrimination, Violence; Corruption

Introduction

India's segregation of the 1947 is marked as a fateful moment of trauma in the historical tradition of the subcontinent; since partition on the basis of religions proved the only terminating point of the British colonial rule. While the northern primarily Muslim-majority parts formed the newly-founded nation 'Pakistan', the southern Hindu-majority areas retained the name of the Republic of India. Even though the division was envisioned as a resolution to the sectarian strains, it nevertheless triggered massive mass displacement, violence and long-lasting socio-political disruption. Migration across the newly-drawn borders was forced upon millions of people with the consequence of the largest and the deadliest refugee crisis of the modern human history. The legendary Hindu-Muslim communal hostility, worsened through epochs of political opportunism and colonial exploitation, was driven towards outbreaks of uprisings, pillaging and massacres in matchless measures. In spite of the centuries-old co-existent living, the pressure of the partition made the concord between the two communities rapidly crumble, thus exposing the deep-seated ruptures within the social fabric of the subcontinent. The zealous followers of both parties, who fomented conflicts, transformed what seemed to be a pledge of liberation into a nightmare of trauma, displacement, and ongoing loss.

Train to Pakistan, Khushwant Singh's 1956 novel, is a moving literary response to the horrors of the partition. Singh, a well-known Indian English novelist, is well known for his realism in his writing, which depicts intricate social and cultural relationships.

Because he doesn't accept the stereotypes associated with any particular religious community, his approach to sensitive subjects is both humorous and empathetic. Even if sectarian prejudices are repulsive, the focus is on the shared humanity and suffering of those caught in the political unrest.

In the essay, Singh's account of the partition incident is used to examine how it reflected a psychological schism in the Indian mind as well as a physical division of the country. Reflecting the skepticism that many people felt following independence, the characters grapple with the contradictions of a postcolonial identity, with some even believing that India was better governed under the British Raj. The essay stresses Singh's depiction of the lasting impacts of colonial rule and partition, while also denouncing imperialist legacies and nationalist fervor, arguing that true liberation necessitates a reconciliation of community identities and an accounting for historical trauma.

Literature Review

It was among the masses in the subcontinent that the Partition of India left deep scars of resentment and bitterness. And it has been in literary form of writing – such as poetry, drama, fiction, fairy tales and essays – that the repercussions of the Partition have found the greatest expression of all. Condemnation of the event as a purely political maneuver has been the most dominant response of several distinguished Indian authors. Despite the fact of the subcontinent being divided into three distinct nations, the long-standing tradition of shared historical consciousness could never get eroded by the process of the Partition. Consequently, the literature of all three countries continue to contribute to the reinforcement and preservation of the subcontinent's civilizational heritage and collective culture; The writing of all three countries still plays a role in strengthening the culture of integration and civilization of the Indian subcontinent. As Shahane argues, "The problem of how the historical sense and reality enter into the sphere of art is important in any long-term and lasting assessment of the achievement of Indo-Anglian writers" (Shahane, 1979, p. 21). And their creative engagement with history and memory makes them transform the experience of loss into a discourse of reconciliation, thus proving the potential of literature as being a vital space for healing and cultural continuity.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) has garnered massive critical attention for its profound exposé of the Partition of India and its devastating impact upon moral values, social structures and human relationships. The novel has been explored from sociological, symbolic, political and ethical standpoints, and identified as one of the most significant literary responses to the 1947 trauma.

Raizada in his article "Some Reflections of Partition" asserts that Khushwant Singh's tale of tears and blood in *Train to Pakistan* should be interpreted not only as a political narrative but also as social documentation of profound insight. In his view, a society deeply tainted with political corruption is exposed through the text: it is a society suffering exploitation at the hands of bureaucracy whose own personal and vested interests are projected under the guise of executing the purported dogmas of the so-called authority. Further situating the narrative within the wider corpus of Partition literature, Raizada identifies it as "the most forceful and exquisite of the creative works born out of the agonized torments and travails of body and spirit endured by the sacred soil of the five rivers" (Raizada, 1988). With this observation, Raizada emphasizes the book's ability to portray the shared misery of a society fractured by administrative and

ideological deception, as well as its ability to mirror the sociopolitical meltdown that occurred after the Partition.

Dooley's literary and historical perspective helps one educate more generally about Pakistan. In his study, he noted that the literary mind has always been fascinated by how political regimes and major events impact individual lives, from the Mahabharata and the Greek and Roman epics to the present day. Singh's narrative, according to Dooley, illustrates how literary works might turn historical tragedies into discussions of the human condition. He asserts that the partition took the place of decades of collaboration between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs with resentment and suspicion. Because it examines how political conflict shapes moral ideas and personal identities, Partition literature has literary worth throughout the globe, according to Dooley's point of view.

In his essay "The Great Division," Girdhari uses a metaphorical eye to examine *Train to Pakistan* and compare Singh's depiction of Indian society to "the state of Eden before and after the fall." For him, Mano Majra is a representation of paradise, reminiscent of pre-partition India—a society where there was a sense of harmony with nature, innocence, and group trust. When political instability and religious strife break the social and moral balance of this place, it becomes a place of poverty and corruption. By interpreting the Partition as a metaphorical fall from moral grace and innocence, Girdhari's exploration adds an allegorical and mythical dimension to Singh's realism.

In a similar vein, Shahane's "Khushwant Singh: An Artist of Realism" is an emphasis on the complex moral vision of the novel. According to his argument, though the revenge motif is foregrounded by Singh to expose the iconoclasm of the "monsters of society, his vision is not altogether pessimistic. Hence comes his recognition that there are angels too, thus acknowledging the presence of goodness in the world:

As a realist, he faces the monsters, exposes them, ridicules them, and makes them the targets of his rapier thrusts and biting irony. As a humanist, he realizes and acknowledges the principle that man will supersede all the monsters and establish the supremacy of the moral law. Man is the crowning glory of creation, and, though he is partly beast, he is also partly angel. In moments of crisis, the angel in man will triumph over the beast in him. This is indeed the moral triumph of man so forcefully demonstrated in *Train to Pakistan*.

Thus Shahane maintains that *Train to Pakistan* is not only a documentation of the moral degradation and violence of the Partition but also a reaffirmation of the continuance of moral integrity, courage and compassion. In his suggestion, Singh's narrative comes to be an unforgettable moral experience, giving readers the reminder that senseless acts of extortion, killing and sexual violence can take us nowhere, and that the true essence of humanity lies beyond political and religious confines.

Mushirul Hasan provides an unbiased evaluation of the roleplay of literature after Partition. "Political dialogue will never fully overcome the need to assign blame, which fuels animosity, therefore the urgent need for literature," he states. Literary expression, according to Hasan, has the ability to rehabilitate, while political discourse promotes division and disagreement, but literature can humanize pain and facilitate reconciliation. *Train to Pakistan* and other Partition narratives are viewed by Hasan as moral and emotional answers to political historiography. In these writings, empathy is valued over hatred, and comprehension is valued over accusation. Thus says Mushirul

Hasan, "The topic of politics will never be fully covered. We urgently need literature to overcome the desire to lay the blame, which keeps hatred alive."

William Walsh's article is one of the earliest important evaluations of *Train to Pakistan*. In his opinion, it more accurately reflects the human and emotional aspects of partition than any historical or political accounts. Only literature, in Walsh's opinion, can truly convey "the suffering of the innocent." He commends Singh for breaking out Partition into its components: the harm it did, the events that led up to it, and its far-reaching effects. In Walsh's observation, Singh primarily aims to portray and explore the world around him in all its social and natural realities. He praises Singh's craftsmanship, and notes how he created a powerful series of episodes with Indian background, Indian elements and sounds. In his opinion, "Train to Pakistan a tense, economical novel, thoroughly true to the events and the people. It goes forward in a trim, athletic way, and its emphatic voice makes genuinely human comment." Thus Walsh's appraisal sets Singh not only as a raconteur of the Partition but also as a realistic artist whose precise narrative and emotional restraint elevate the novel to the status of a modern classic.

Singh's intense animosity led to widespread devastation as a result of the ensuing bloodshed. Consequently, his own misery and hatred of violence are the primary reasons for the book. There are several books on Partition written by authors from both the Hindu and Muslim communities. One community may attribute the terrible tragedy to the other side. Nevertheless, the reality is that in both cases, humankind was the one who bore the brunt of the burden. Statistical data on fatalities is insufficient to accurately reflect the victims of the split. The only way for suffering souls to find relief is through the medium of literature.

Only literature can truly reflect the suffering of the innocent, according to Walsh. Singh's emphasis is on the Classification Phase, the events leading up to it, the damage it caused, and its consequences. In this book, he intends to describe and analyze the environment around him and to portray nature in all of its manifestations. He has created a fascinating series of episodes featuring Indian themes, Indian sounds, and an Indian setting. According to Prof. William Walsh, "Train to Pakistan is a tense, economical novel, thoroughly true to the events and the people. Its emphatic voice makes genuinely human comment, and it goes forward in a trim, athletic way."

All of these issues, which highlight various aspects of Khushwant Singh's novel, are brought up by reviewers. Critics have lauded the author, but they have also drawn attention to the shortcomings of the text and the characters. Even the language and style are analyzed by the critics and how the writer gave the eloquence and the art of articulation to the characters to emphasise their point of views and transfer the feelings to the readers. They wanted to highlight the reasons behind partition and involvement of characters in Partition.

Material and Methods

This analysis draws on David Storey's (2012) theory of territory and territoriality to delve into the complex socio-political dynamics depicted in *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh. A territory, in Story's view, is a geographical or spatial entity that also signifies a place of authority, identity, and control. In this perspective, land gives individuals and communities a way to display allegiance, exercise authority, and maintain social and political norms. Territoriality, therefore, is the term for the ways and

means by which groups establish and maintain these boundaries, often to protect their religious, ethnic, or cultural identities.

Setting political boundaries during the partition of India in 1947 was a violent split that altered environments and lives rather than a quick administrative fix. These newly drawn lines on maps, where religious affiliation became increasingly linked to identity and former neighbors turned into enemies, transformed shared territories into contentious ones. According to Story's paradigm, the Partition's territorial redefinition was a symbolic and physical eviction that alienated people from their property as well as their sense of self and community.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Singh observes this shift through the microcosm of Mano Majra, a fictional town at first viewed as a model of communal harmony. As international political conflicts intensify and national borders change, the community becomes both a literal and symbolic war zone. The threads of the once-united society begin to unravel as ideas clash and allegiances are put into doubt. As Singh's story shows, the larger, more nebulous concepts of nationalism and statehood have a significant influence on daily life, transforming familiar ground into a dangerous and unpredictable place. From this perspective, Mano Majra is a live depiction of the territorial conflict and the broader identity and belonging issues that defined the Partition era, rather than just a background.

By using the qualitative method of research, a study has been conducted of the conflicting communal identities (Hindu, Muslim and Sikh) which is based on blow by blow understanding of the text and a painstaking textual analysis. Keeping in memory the corruption behind the partition and the religious conflicts an extensive reading of the novel has been done. In this whole research, various scholarly articles from reliable resources have been reviewed and cited within. This research borrows David Storey's understanding of conflicting communal identities (Hindu, Muslim and Sikh) and the wound upon regional consciousness. The main text being analyzed is Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. The primary goal of this study is to record the carnage suffered by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs as a result of the partition and to shed light on the communal violence that ensued. The main goal of this study is to convey a cosmic and worldwide message to the people of the subcontinent, and indeed the entire world, that such events will be highly toxic, violent, and unavoidable in the future. Considering the content, every aspect of communal conflicts and identities has been addressed, leaving no room for discussion. The author's emotional investigation of sabotage and the social and cultural setting in which he has portrayed the catastrophe are at the core of this book. His partition-based story, supported by Indian diversity, cultural and social divides, exclusively illustrates the reality of the Indian subcontinent's future, ignoring all associated concerns. This study depicts the discord and conflict between various religions and ethnic cultures in the shadow of David Storey's approach. The act of aggression and tumultuous separation among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs began from Calcutta and reached to Mono Majra, a village of various ethnic groups situated at the border of Pakistan.

Results and Discussion

Bloody Partition

Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a harrowing portrayal of the division of the Subcontinent, thus marking it as one of the bleakest eras of the human history. The

scarcity and cruelty of humanity are highlighted in the novel. Mano Majra is a fictitious, serene village where Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims coexist harmoniously. Here, political upheaval is shown in an original and straightforward manner as it causes everything to come to a stop. The partition's many eras of suffering and anarchy are captured in each of the narrative's four sections: Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra, and Karma, Singh masterfully conveys the era's turbulent mood in every manner.

It is in the fourth part of the narrative, namely 'Karma', that the true depiction of the partition starts unfolding itself. A metaphysical layer is added to the tale through this section which culminates in a potently disastrous dénouement. It is here that Juggut Singh saves the lives of the Muslim inhabitants along with his beloved 'Nooran' at the cost of his own life. The self-effacing turn forms the novel's thematic and emotional climax. The events take a profound twist when Juggut after sacrificing his life emerges as the true moral hero, and Malli, the dacoit, ironically assumes the role of a so-called protector of Islam.

The people of the hamlet of Mano Majra went from being happy and safe to weary and restless during independence, which was one of the worst events in Indian history. Train to Pakistan shed light on the strained relationship between Sikhs and Muslims. The global scenario got worse following the split. As a result, twelve million people were forced to leave their homes, and more than a hundred women of all ages were abducted, raped, and murdered. Thousands of people thus fled in search of safety and escape on both sides of the border. The tragic outcome of the outrageous partition at Singh is aptly illustrated by a sad report in *Train to Pakistan*, the author equally blaming Hindus and Muslims. The novelist has identified that even after the tragic storm throughout the Punjab Mano Majra remained unaffected from communal stress and tension. It appeared in fact like a small oasis in the vast desert of communal violence and weird blood bath, which, in fact, forms the essence of the novel. As we move from one to another section, the novelistic vision gets more and more complex. Manohar Malgonkar points out, "Every citizen was caught up in the Holocaust. No one remains aloof... the administration, the police even the armed forces, were caught up in the blaze of hatred" (Singh, 1991, p. 70). The major factor in the partition was the communal mistrust of the leaders. The sub inspector was furious at the ignorance of the leaders in Delhi. They were the chief persons behind the brutal acts in Punjab happened in the wake of partition. The sub inspector describes the tragic scene of the horrible killings in Pakistan and regretted the complete ignorance of the leaders proclaiming non-violence. He told the Hukum Chand (deputy commissioner).

The independence of India brought in its escort one of the most apocalyptic occasions of its history. Because of the catastrophe, Singh's imaginary Mano Majra, once a stable and peaceful village, is also pushed into discontent and disorder. How the relationships between the Muslims and the Sikhs got intensely strained during the Partition. Then there was a rapid deterioration in the situation right after the division when almost twelve million people were forced to abandon their homes. Hundreds of women, young as well as old, were captured, raped or killed. The violence drove thousands to flee in a desperate hunt for refuge across both sides of the border.

By holding both Hindus and Muslims accountable for the massacre, the book brings the tragedy of Partition home. The author points out at the start of the book that Mano Majra was not initially impacted by the widespread tribal war that swept the state of Punjab. This contrast lies at the center of the novel: a little haven of tranquility in a world split by hatred and violence.

Singh's viewpoint becomes more complicated as the book progresses. Every citizen was caught in the Holocaust. No one stays aloof... the government, the police, even the military, were caught up in the blaze of hatred. The root cause of the Partition, the novel suggests, was the communal mistrust fueled by political leaders. The village sub-inspector is portrayed as enraged by the ignorance and detachment of the leaders in Delhi, whom he blames for the brutality that engulfed Punjab. In a conversation with Hukum Chand, the deputy commissioner, he recounts the horrific massacres in Pakistan and laments the leaders' blind commitment to non-violence, which failed to prevent such atrocities.

What is happening on the other side in Pakistan does not matter to them. They have not lost their homes and belongings; they haven't had their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters raped and murdered in the streets. Did your honor hear what the Muslim mobs did to Hindu and Sikh refugees in the marketplaces at Sheikhpura and Gujranwala? Pakistan police and the army took part in killings. (Singh, 1991, p. 66)

The trains that cross the Suttlej Bridge serve as a warning to the residents of the village of Mano Majra, where life is dictated by the movement of trains. Before sunrise, the train speeds across the bridge, and the people of the village wake up. About three to four trains crossed the bridge in Mano Majra in a single day during the early days of September. Consequently, the lives of the residents of Mano Majra were affected by the train's arrival and departure, making it a symbolic representation for them. However, things soon began to change. This little town was impacted by the partition. Immediately after the partition was announced, the trains were carrying Muslim refugees from India as well as Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan. One day in early September, a ghost train carrying corpses arrived to Mano Majra from Pakistan. The train was like this:

There were bodies crammed against the far end wall of the compartment, looking in terror at the empty windows through which must have come shots, spears and spikes. There were lavatories, jammed with corpses of young men who had muscled their way to comparative safety. (Singh, 1991, p. 82)

After that, the train appeared to be a phantom. The location was, as Shahane points out, really terrible.

The train implies the movement of vast communities, torn from their links of nativity, from their places of birth and upbringing and areas of traditional growth in search of a new Jerusalem. It indicates the harrowing process of this change, the awful and ghastly experiences of human beings involved in a historical, objective and almost dehumanized process.

Religious Conflicts

The novelist explores the impact of Partition on the village, which is physically situated in India, and attempts to comprehend the religious origins of Partition. Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus lived peacefully together before partition. One of Mano Majra's most well-known sights has always been the train station. Everything that happens in Mano Majra is directly influenced by the arrival and departure of trains. There are around 70 families in the majority Muslim and Sikh community of Mano Majra, where Ram Lal's

family is the only Hindu household. As a family, they get along well and know each other well.

When the story begins, Mano Majra is already plagued by news of rioting. Nevertheless, the several communities in Mano Majra get along well despite the obstacles. The reality of the situation is communicated by Khushwant Singh by putting the tragedy of a terrible catastrophe on both towns. The reality is that both sides were killed. Both of them were kicked, stabbed, and shot. They were both treated poorly. Both instances involved rape. The mind of Mano Majrans realizes the gray aspect of everything at the beginning of September, following packed trains that interrupt the daily life of the community by splitting the Partition. When trains run out of time, freight trains cease to function. One day at midday, the hamlet was thrown into disarray by a ghost train that started in Pakistan. Hindus and Sikhs gather for the burial in Mano Majra, where their remains lie. The troops collected kerosene and firewood from the populace in order to burn the bodies in the darkness at night. After the ghost train arrives, locals can see the station complex, but they are not allowed to enter it. The truth is found at night, as seen by the instance of mass murder during partition. The train, which arrived from Pakistan carrying hundreds of corpses, is a testament to the atrocity and inhumanity that people have carried out in the name of religion with no shame.

The revelation that Hindus had been slaughtered in Pakistan and that their bodies had been delivered by train to Mano Majra caused a silence throughout the community, fostering a sense of fear and mistrust between communities. Everyone could feel his neighbor's hand against him, and he considered forming friendships and alliances. Many individuals locked their doors and passed the night socializing and spreading rumors. It's not every day that you come across a book that can transport you to a particular historical period and allow you to experience the protagonist's emotions as if they were your own. Through *Train to Pakistan*, Singh has created an environment that will inspire future generations to give the public a route to one of the most important and cherished eras in Indian history. The emotional bond between the Sikhs and the Muslim community in the city has been shattered by despair and disillusionment. Consequently, the villagers watched as Pakistani nationals murdered the train full of Hindu and Sikh corpses in cold blood. The Sutlej River is also found with Hindu bodies. Refugees who first entered India from Pakistan due to the split came with critical issues of arsons, murder, rape and so on.

In contrast, Singh suggests that geographical boundaries preclude shared existence. The geographical division of land at the time of the Symbols Phase is distinguished by personality. Singh's characters reflect a desire for existence without confinement. His characters do not wish to kill in the name of divorce; rather, their love for one another saves them. Singh looks at how religion becomes the power to lead and divide and persecute people. He points out that it is criminals who should be punished, not Muslims or Hindus or Sikhs. In Singh's view, the partition of India is not caused by an increase in the population of religion but rather by an adherence to the false religion that laid the foundations for divorce. People were morally excluded from their religion and focused on religious differences as a source of conflict. He writes, that Ethics has been carefully removed from religion. People needed to be closer to diversity in the sense of nationalism, but, deeply rooted religious theologians knew nothing about the basic qualities of peace in religion, crossing the world's path. Singh's novel highlights the events leading up to the conflict between friends and neighbors. However, an all-knowing lecturer shows more communication and communication between the strongest opposition parties than the difference made. These connectors, "singers",

prayer pronouns and common names in the community get opportunities to discuss their dissenting voice and conflict but different.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the day before India gained its independence, there was a major catastrophe that split the nation across the continent. The division was followed by community riots, bloodshed in India between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, and the worst bloodshed. The national political leadership has made attempts to exert control in an effort to stop the violence, but the riots that followed the partition were beyond anyone's control. Iqbal Singh is dispatched by the Communist Party of India to spread communal harmony in Mano Majra. His name seemed odd to the locals. They were unsure about his religious identity, wondering if he was a Muslim or a Sikh. Toward the end of the book, the boy leader plots with Sikh villagers to kill hundreds of Muslim refugees who are sitting on a train headed for Pakistan. Meet Singh advises his fellow Sikhs on the proper course of action, but he doesn't interfere excessively because he's worried about retribution. However, the bhai's comments do inspire Juggut Singh, a well-known former thief, to make amends for his past violent behavior. Juggut makes a trip, becomes acquainted with Singh, and asks the priest to say a prayer for him. When he asks if the prayer is helpful, the priest replies that the Guru's word is always good and can help those who do well. Those who commit heinous deeds will be opposed by the Guru's words. Juggut risks his life in order to safeguard the train transporting Muslim refugees, which is commendable.

Recommendation

In conclusion, language can either start or put out the ray of ignorance, just as it can be used to manipulate and spread data full of uncertainty, as well as to excite and incite people to both the past and present wants. As a result, it makes no sense to single out any religious organization. Therefore, one can conclude that Khushwant Singh employed this inscription to warn the subcontinent's inhabitants that the return of such events would be exceptionally fatal, virulent, and inescapable. Furthermore, it is possible to interpret India's fragmentation as a warning story, and the picture of Jugga's destruction on the rope proves that individuals are capable of incredible and miraculous feats of courage and heroism in the face of hatred.

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