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Representation of Love, Revenge and Sacrifice in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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Abstract: Partition is one of the most horrendous events in the history of the sub-continent. When India freed itself from the clutches of the tyrannical British regime in 1947, it was in a state of dilemma and confusion as to whether it should rejoice over its independence or whether it should lament the massacre and atrocities during the forcible migration of a large number of people. Many writers had tried their pens at the theme of partition of sub-continent. Among the several works of partition literature, *Train to Pakistan (1956)* by Khushwant Singh is looked upon as one of the masterpieces, which captures the attention of the reader from the beginning to its end. Here Singh critiques the tragic story of the partition of India and Pakistan in a realistic manner. Partition affected the whole country and Singh could not stop himself from writing about the tragic and heart wrenching events that the people of Mano Majra, a small village in Punjab, India faced. Here, the characters are quite simple and highly convincing. This novel also projects a realistic picture of the inexplicable incidents which were an outcome of communal feelings of the August 1947 partition and communal politics. At the end of the novel, the readers get to realize that the author has tried to imply that violence is not the only medium to bring an end to violence. Rather, recourse to other alternatives such as love and respect can be taken to suppress violence. The present study deals with



the aspects of love, revenge and sacrifice which are the highlights of the novel *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh.

Keywords: Love; Revenge; Sacrifice; Train to Pakistan; Khushwant Singh.

The partition is a pivotal theme in the novel *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh. It was the first partition novel published in 1956 which rose to fame universally. A kind of unacceptable and terrible feeling was constantly weighing heavily upon the mind of the author when he wrote this particular novel. As K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger aptly remarks:

It could not have been an easy novel to write. The events, so recent, so terrible in their utter savagery and meaninglessness, must have defied assimilation in terms of art. Notably, this novel portrays the social and political turmoil and events of the partition in various ways (Iyenger 502).

The third person narrative technique has been adopted as a medium of delineating all these events. Here Singh puts emphasis not only on the violence, horror and savagery of the people during partition, but also projects the victory of love over hatred in this world.

Portrait of a little village called Mano Majra is quite fascinating in '*Train to Pakistan*'. Indeed, Mano Majra was a typical village of North India then. It was located near the border between India and Pakistan, where people from different religions were leading their life peacefully and harmoniously. They were quite pleasant and cooperative with each other. They would love and respect each other in spite of their differences in cast, creed, religion and all other social aspects. They were above all sorts of narrowness and religious parochialism before the ghost train pulled into Mano Majra from Lahore. People of Mano Majra represented the true spirit of India. All of them had a common deity and this is manifested in the following lines:

.....a three-foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under 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.(Singh 10)

The gruesome impact of partition descended upon the masses of this particular village a little later compared to the other parts of India as they lived on the frontier and were far away from the



Independence movement. The novelist here also points out that people of Mano Majra were uninfluenced by the then freedom struggle. As the Lambardar rightly asked Iqbal:

Freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes? ... No... Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis. (Singh 62)

Bapsi Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy Man* also imbues such kind of optimistic attitude in the life of the villagers, who, at the odd hours of partition had to meet their tragic ends. Villagers of Mano Majra, who had a scant connection with the political life of the nation, were surprised to confront an abrupt political cataclysm which occurred in their village. They were already informed about the violence outside their world by the large exodus of refugees from Pakistan at first. Gradually, such violence was disseminating into their village Mano Majra. Initially, they were completely ignorant of such violence across the western and the eastern border of India. Moreover, Refugees entering into India from Pakistan with the uncountable grim stories of killing, rape and arson make the villagers fearful and anxious about their future. Thereby, only murder of Hindu Ram Lal surprised the villagers heavily. River Sutlej was also found to be choked with the corpses which aggravated the tension in Mano Majra. The horrific sight of corpses-laden train in Mano Majra was beyond the bounds of their imagination. They were astounded heavily to see such strange happenings which they had never come across before. Train here stands for life. But this train also implies the doleful situation of humanity. Thereby it acted as a fatal blow to them. The wounds worsened when Muslims were being forced to evacuate their village Mano Majra by their fellow Sikhs. Police also wanted to keep the situation calm by asking Muslims to go the Pakistan for their own safety. At the beginning, the Muslim villagers of Mano Majra took that evacuation as something beneficial for them but bit by bit they became cognizant of the fact that this evacuation was only meant for the Muslim denizens from Mano Majra. They were moved to desolation when they came to know that they had to evacuate the place where they have been living for a long time. Muslims of Mano Majra thought their departure towards Chandannagar camp was only for a few days. But finally they got to know that they would be shifted away to Pakistan from Chandannagar camp for their safety with their



belongings under the care of their fellow Sikhs very soon. Their hopes were further dashed and faith became shattered after realizing the fact that their belongings would be under the care of a dacoit Malli and his gang. At that moment, the peaceful world of the Muslims in Mano Majra was torn apart. The thought of losing their belongings in the hand of pseudo protectors brought them under the grip of deep consternation. For Imam Baksh it was too much to give in to the idea of being evacuated from Mano Majra and being relocated to Pakistan. Eventually, he moaned “What have we to do with Pakistan. We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers” (Singh153). Finally a decision was drawn up that Muslims had to move over to Pakistan in their own interests, then Imam Baksh choked out “All right if we have to go, then we’d better pack up own bedding and belongings. It will take us more than one night to clear out of homes it has taken our father and forefathers and grandfathers hundreds of years to make” (Singh148). The conditions became worse after evacuation of Muslims from Mano Majra. The villagers turned more hostile to each other that the novelist criticises severely. The novelist has described this heart-rending displacement of the Muslim villagers in such a way that the readers are moved to tears. As the narrator says:

There was no time to make arrangements. There was no time even to say good-bye. Truck engines were started. Pathan soldiers rounded up the Muslims, drove them back to the carts for a brief minute or two, and then on to the trucks. In the confusion of the rain, mud and soldiers herding the peasants about with the muzzles of their stem guns sticking in their backs, the villagers saw little of each other. All they could do was to shout their last farewells from the trucks..... The Sikhs watched them till they were out of sight. They wiped the tears off their faces and turned back to their homes with heavy hearts. (Singh 159)

So the tragic incidents in the little village Mano Majra were nothing but the reflection of incidents in Punjab and Bengal in 1947.

Khushwant Singh further exhibits that villages like Mano Majra wherein the people have been able to keep enmity at bay till before partition, were all of a sudden stirred by the canard of an administrative officer, Hukum Chand at that time. Hukum Chand is a kind of hypocrite who pretends to be good and honest to Muslims. He tried to provoke Sikh people against Muslims in



many ways. Such incitement or rumour by Hukum Chand against his fellow Muslims triggered a kind of fear in Mano Majra. Sikh villagers would never allow them to be antagonistic against their Muslim villagers in pre-partition period. At the outset, Sikh villagers were in two minds whether to throw out their Muslim villagers or not. But as the provocation of Hukum Chand exerted its influence on the rabble, they decided to take revenge on their fellow Muslims. Even influx of the large number of refugees from Pakistan precipitated a sense of fear and suspicion among Sikh villagers towards their fellow Muslims to some extent. Consequently Sikh Villagers of Mano Majra stood committed to be shorn of their fellow Muslim Villagers. Thereby, Malli, a dacoit and their gang plotted a secret plan to halt the Pakistan-bound train laden with Muslim passengers for decimation.

At this juncture, Juggat Singh, a ruffian from Sikh community was astonished to hear such conspiracy schemed by some Sikh villagers because Juggat Singh's beloved Nooran was also aboard the same train heading for Lahore, Pakistan. Criminal Juggat Singh never wanted to inflict any sort of pain upon Nooran because he was in love with her deeply. Hence, at times he set off visiting her regularly in the field. Beauty of Nooran fascinated Juggat a lot. Even they did not let religion come between their relationships. Despite being a scoundrel, he was quite defensive of his beloved and made excuses for his beloved Nooran when she put up her fear of being ensnared by her fellow villagers. Even he was not permitted to go out after sunset by police because of his criminal record. One day when his mother was asking about his going out of home at night, he replied promptly –'To the field, Last night wild pigs did a lot of damage'. Moreover, his mother forbade him to go outside after sunset as he was on probation. When police asked Juggat Singh about his whereabouts on the day of Ram Lal's murder, then Juggat Singh remained tight-lipped to save the honor of Nooran. Because of his silence, he was accused mistakenly for this murder in the village. Juggat Singh could not even bear the idea of slinging any sort of derogatory comment upon Nooran by someone unwarrantedly. He got angry with Bhola for making sardonic comments on their affair. Malli's comment upon Juggat's on the way to prison, "Sat Sri Akal, Sardar Juggat Singhji. Is there any message we can convey for you? A love message may be? To the weaver's daughter" (Singh 121), enraged him a lot. For Nooran, he decided to save the same train from the



hand of miscreant Malli and his gang at any cost. Thereafter Juggat Singh visited gurudwara and requested the Bhai, “I want the Guru’s word. Will you read me a verse?” On Meet Singh’s question to know Juggat’s purpose, he promptly replied to him ‘It does not matter about thatjust read me a few lines quickly” (Singh 198).After that, Meet Singh recited Guru’s (God) word from the Morning Prayer and Juggat Singh left the place .

Magistrate Hukum Chand and intellectual Iqbal are projected as prototypes of such persons who act as patriots in front of the villagers but here patriotism is only to fool the honest and simple villagers. One day they are exposed and the villagers wonder what the world is coming to. Even after realizing that they were being misguided, they did not step forward to rescue their fellow Muslim villagers at the crucial juncture of their life. In the last part of the novel, it is revealed to the readers that they were hypocrites who did not have genuine feelings and sympathy for their Muslim villagers. When Bhai Meet Singh expected of Iqbal to stick up for the villagers as he was an educated young one, Iqbal said “Me? Why me? ” He also told to Bhai Meet Singh surprisingly “what have I to do with it? I do not know these people. Why should they listen to a stranger?” (Singh.24). Here Iqbal showcased his callousness, hypocrisy by not standing up for the safety of Muslim villagers. After being an educated people, he proves himself self-centred which was unexpected. Religious leader like Meet Singh was also found to be fake who did nothing for the villagers. These people used to call themselves as social reformers who committed to serve the people but when situation demands for their sacrifice, they retreated themselves from the right action in right moment. But a ruffian named Juggat Singh raising himself above all the inhumanity and cruelty sacrificed his own life to save Nooran and the Muslim Villagers from the hand of the gang of Sikh villagers. He was shot dead by the leader of that gang. Villagers could not expect such noble deeds from Juggat Singh .Juggat Singh was deemed as a ruffian in the eyes of everyone before saving Nooran and fellow Muslim villagers because of his engagement with some anti-social activities in the past. Nobody in the village could believe that Juggat dubbed as a criminal would come up in such way to protect his beloved Nooran and fellow Muslim villagers from the destruction. Before this heroic feat, Juggat Singh was considered to be a gunda in his locality. Here he substantiated that how a gunda can become a real hero for the sake of his love. Juggat Singh



also proves to all that a criminal's love for his beloved can be transformed into the love for all Muslim villagers and humanity. In this context S.K. Dubey's comment are quite appropriate:

“In the sacrifice of Juggat Singh the novelist intends to inform the readers that the overpowering urge for violence in men may be resisted only by the force of love, which drives the hero of the novel, Juggat Singh, to avert mass killings by laying down his own life” (Dubey p.3).

Juggat Singh appeared as a speck of redeeming humanity amidst dark and cloudy situations. There, he played the role of a messiah of humanity. Uncompromising love for her beloved Nooran makes a ruffian Juggat Singh an ideal human being. Through this heroic deed, he also became an ambassador for peace and communal harmony. He would know it from quite early on that if he goes to protect the train carrying Nooran and Muslim villagers from the clasp of Malli led gang, he would certainly be killed by the gang of Sikh Villagers. Despite that, Juggat Singh did not back away from sacrificing his life for the sake of his beloved Nooran and fellow Muslim Villagers as well.

Novelist also highlights the general love between people belonging to different religions in Mano Majra. They would share their joys, emotion and sorrows with each other exceeding any sort of barrier. Their bond and mutual relationship between each other are to be praised in pre-partition period. It is also well worth pointing out the respect that the villagers of Mano Majra would hold for the religion of each other.

Besides setting out the love episode between Juggat Singh and Nooran, Novelist also depicts the love between Hukum Chand and prostitute girl Haseena. In the novel '*Train to Pakistan*' their meeting and love making process have also been outlined to some extent. Hukum Chand desired Haseena to be saved from the hand of that same gang because Haseena was also aboard the train bound for Pakistan. At that moment, Hukum Chand plotted a conspiracy to which Juggat Singh submitted himself. In this way, Hukum Chand succeeded in his attempt to save Haseena along with Nooran by sacrificing Juggat Singh's life.

Khushwant Singh has not only brought out the ghastly violence, horror, and bloodshed to the fore in '*Train to Pakistan*' but has also highlighted the use of other non violent ways to sort out issues in the novel. It is love and affection which can be a plausible solution for all the problems



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and this is the solution that the criminal Juggat Singh finally finds and uses to great effect in *Train to Pakistan*.

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