

Chapter - II
TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

I

Khushwant Singh, in the beginning published his novel under the title, Mano Majra, named after a tiny village on Indo-Pak border. To make it more effective he changed it into Train to Pakistan (1956). It presents the tragedy of partition, as V.A. Shahane puts it with a remarkable authenticity,

"It is a grim story of individuals and communities caught in the vortex of the partition of undivided India into two states in 1947."¹

The sleepy, little village of Mano Majra, on the Indo-Pak border is the locale of Khushwant Singh's novel. He describes it vividly. Sikhs and Muslims of Mano Majra live happily even in the days of partition. They represent a very common situation of communal harmony obtained in thousands of other villages and towns on what was going to be the Indo-Pak border. Chaman Nahal's Agadi too has such a harmonious community. In fact, this is a typical situation in all the novels dealing with the theme of partition. This is the fictional strategy of the novelists who take their village or town as a microcosm of the situation of the sub-continent in 1947. They have been there for centuries and are equal in number and live like brothers and sisters. Life here is regulated by the incoming and outgoing trains. The Gurus and the Mullahs

are equally regarded and revered by both communities. Sikhs of the village are ready to sacrifice their lives for Muslims and vice versa. Thus, there is not seen a slight sign of communal hatred or violence in Mano Majra. The villagers are totally ignorant of what happens outside the village gates. This ignorance, according to Dr. G.P.Sarma

"... is blessing to them, at least temporarily, because the Muslim and Sikh people of this remote frontier village who have heard of Gandhi, but not heard of Jinnah, do not know that along with freedom the country is divided into Hindustan and Pakistan."²

Thus the Mano Majrans are simple and ignorant. Having lived in the remote rural area they remain unaware of the things happening around them. And only due to this ignorance they live happily, at least for the time being. For them Imam Baksh is not a Mullah merely but a chacha. There is a mutual understanding among the villagers which maintains peace and non-violence.

However, the peaceful and friendly atmosphere does not last long as,

"... 1947 was not like other times, suspicion and violence filled the air and an ill wind carried them even to little oasis of communal harmony like Mano Majra."³

Mano Majra, being on the border, is a very sensitive spot. But there is silence still. The villagers

do not let their minds fill with communal hatred. However, this silence is disturbed by,

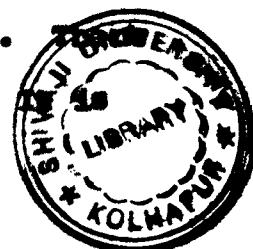
"The arrival of the ghost train, filled with corpses at Mano Majra from Pakistan, 'created a commotion.' Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries, are engulfed in a fratricidal conflict."⁴

Thus, the 'ghost train' pollutes the total picture of Mano Majra and the villagers begin to look at each other with suspicion and horror. The news of Muslim atrocities on the other side of the border supplies fuel to the fire of communalism, and the sleepy Mano Majra, too, stands on the threshold of partition tragedy.

Consequently, there is a deep unrest in Mano Majra. The Muslims are afraid of their future. But the Sikhs of the village assure them of their safety and security. They say,

"It is like this uncle Imam Baksh. As long as we are here nobody will dare touch you. We die first and then you look after yourselves."⁵

There is the communal harmony in the village Mano Majra. However, the news of the ghastly and beastly atrocities in Pakistan results in a radical change in their attitudes. Even then they do not attack the Muslims of Mano Majra. The Muslims, on the contrary, decide to join the refugee camp only to be on the safer side. There is a grim and intolerable silence in the village.



against this background that some educated, young Sikhs in Khaki dress arrive in the village. They are sullen and angry. They challenge the villagers, thus,

"Never trust a Mussulman," they said. The last Guru had warned them that the Muslims had no loyalties. He was right. All through the Muslim period of Indian History, some had imprisoned or killed their own fathers and brothers."⁶

In spite of this challenge, the Mano Majrans remain unmoved. They do not raise their hands against the Muslim brothers. Then a Sikh youth informs them of the massacred Sikhs and Hindus at the hands of Muslims, on the other side of border. He asks,

"Do you know how many trainloads of dead Sikhs and Hindus have come over? Do you know of the massacres in Rawalpindi, and Multan, Gujranwala and Sheikhpura? What are you doing about it? You just eat and sleep and you call yourselves Sikhs - the brave Sikhs! the martial class."⁷

It is thus, only after the entry of the outsider Sikhs and some educated city people that the sleepy village becomes alert and responsive. They join hands with the outsiders and plan to attack the train bound for Pakistan with a load of thousands of Muslim refugees.

II

Himself a Sikh, born in the Punjab, Khushwant Singh has given first hand descriptions of the massacre, bloodshed, rape and the total holocaust that took place in

those fateful days. He comes from the partition - affected area and must have witnessed the tragedy himself. Hence his descriptions have become extremely authentic. He writes everything objectively and impartially. His being a Sikh may, however, give rise to a doubt in one's mind whether he would do justice to the Sikhs and injustice to the Muslims. What he writes at the outset of the novel speaks of his objectivity and impartiality in this matter :

"The summer before, communal riots, precipitated by reports of the proposed division of the country into a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan, had broken out in Calcutta, and within a few months the death roll had mounted to several thousands. Muslims said they had planned and started the killings. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped."^E

This passage clearly shows the novelist's objective and impartial handling of the theme of partition.

Khushwant Singh has selected his characters very cleverly. It is through his characters that he has pointed out the inability of the ministers, police department, and government officials, to restore peace and non-violence in either parts.

Hukum Chand, the deputy commissioner and the magistrate of the district, is grieved deeply at heart by

the partition tragedy, but is unable to stop the riots and killings. Instead, he indulges in love-making with a Muslim girl, Haseena, like several other officers of his lot. Only when the thought of separation from Haseena enters his mind, he becomes somewhat active and aggressive. He wishes to stop the evacuation of the Muslims but is unable to do so. When he receives the news that the train which his Haseena is to be transported to Pakistan is to be attacked, he releases Juggat Singh, budmah number ten, in a clever manner. He knows very well that the same train is carrying Juggat Singh's Nooran, too. This may be considered as the novelist's catering to the exigencies of plot, which detracts from the novel's serious purpose. The fact that the novelists have to submit to the compulsion of plot development by resorting to love story and coincidence shows a serious flaw in the novels of partition as they are attempted by such novelists. Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar or Chaman Nahai are no exceptions.

Meet Singh, the priest of the Gurdwara, is also unable to avert this great disaster. The lambaradar, Iman Baksh and the other villagers are deeply moved by the strange activities happening around them. Iqbal Singh, the immature socialist is kept almost till the end of the novel in prison. But when he is released he inquires Meet Singh of everything. However, the lengthy discussion between Iqbal Singh and Meet Singh reveals nothing but their impotence. Thus, almost all the characters of the

novel are either mad or impotent. Even the government is also considered as inactive and cowardly. A Sikh youth says,

"Government!" sneered the boy contemptuously
 "you expect the government to do anything?
 A government consisting of cowardly banian
 moneylenders."⁹

However, the brave Juggat Singh is the only heroic character in the novel. When, after his release, he comes to know the planned train-attack and that his beloved Nooran travelling in the same train, he resolves to let the train go to Pakistan, safely, undamaged. He does it. But for this he has to sacrifice his own life.

Juggat Singh is the main character of Train to Pakistan in which the theme of partition receives standard treatment. He is a farmer, formerly a budmash but then is changed because of the love of a Muslim girl, Nooran. He is prohibited to go out of house during night because of his past deeds. But in the beginning of the novel we see his love-making with his beloved, when Malli budmash and his men kill Lala Ram Lal, the only Hindu of Mano Majra. While departing Malli budmash throws bangles in Jugga's courtyard. The next day Juggat Singh is arrested and taken prisoner for no fault of his.

However, the fact is known by the sub-inspector and many others. Juggat Singh tries to learn English from Iqbal Singh. He, in fact, waits for an opportunity to settle his account with Malli. He is very reckless by

nature. He is, in the words of Vasant Shahane,

"The Uncouth, amoral, strong man of rural Punjab against the setting of people fighting against themselves."¹⁰

In spite of the warning given by his mother, he goes out of his house during the night and is arrested. In his love-making too, he is very rash. He does not hesitate to fall in love with a Muslim girl. He attacks Malli in prison very fiercely, and is not afraid of the sub-inspector, such is Juggat Singh.

The partition, however, forces the government officer to release Juggat Singh and Iqbal Singh as well. Their release is a matter of strategy for the deputy commissioner and sub-inspector. Juggat Singh is released only to help the train go to Pakistan safely, as Nooran and Hasena are on the same train.

When Juggat Singh comes to know the proposed plan of train-attack, he fears for the safety of his love, Nooran. He decides to cut off the rope and leave the train go undamaged. As he begins to cut the rope, the Sikh youths fire at him. But Juggat Singh continues his work and then,

"The engine was almost on him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the center as he (Jugga) fell. The train went over him and went on to Pakistan."¹¹

Thus, the brave Juggat Singh saves thousands of Muslim refugees by sacrificing his own life. In the whole

novel, only he seems to be an active and heroic character. He does it for his Nooran. However, love between a Sikh youth and a Muslim girl is not feasible in the normal course of life, but a personal motivation is explicitly discernible on the part of the hero in his taking such a heroic action. About this character V.A. Shahane comments,

"The concept of the common man as a tragic hero is an interesting aspect of the theme and symbol in Train to Pakistan."¹²

The next character of some importance is Hukum Chand, the deputy commissioner of the district. Like many other officers of his times, he, too, indulges in love-making with a Muslim girl, in the Rest House. He is the 'cherisher of the poor' for his junior officers and others. It is for the first time in the discussion between the sub-inspector and Hukum Chand that the talk of partition occurs. The discussion goes thus,

"No communal trouble in this area?"
 "We have escaped it so far, Sir, convoys of Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan have come through and some Muslims have gone out, but we have had no incidents."¹³

They discuss such ghastly incidents very lightly. Hukum Chand gives some paternal advice to the sub-inspector asking him to 'see everything and say nothing' and resumes his love-making.

It is this Hukum Chand who releases the orders of arrests of Juggat Singh and Iqbal Singh. He is a real

diplomat and knows what to do and when. However, he too, is startled to see the trainloads of Sikh and Hindu dead-bodies which he himself disposes of. He is deeply moved, and sees nightmares. He is unable to sleep that night after the burning of the corpses.

Hukum Chand looks at everything objectively. He is an officer by blood who burns out several dead-bodies of Sikhs and Hindus with utmost care and deep secrecy. Only when the smell of the burning flesh comes in Mano Majra, the fact is known to all. Seeing the mercilessly slaughtered Sikhs, he is unable to eat and sleep for several days. He does not believe in what he sees. But he does his duty unhesitatingly by helping the Muslims to go to Pakistan. However, when the evacuation of Hasena comes, he is in a most complicated state of mind. Very diplomatically he releases Juggat Singh to save the life of his Hasena only.

In the course of discussion he exposes the folly of the government service. When the sub-inspector speaks of his duty which is not valued by the people of either side or by the governments, Hukum Chand says, ironically,

"Yes, Inspector Sahib, you and I are going to get nothing out of this except bad name. What can we do? Everyone has gone trigger-happy. People empty their magazines into densely packed trains, motor-convoys, columns of marching

refugees, as if they were squirting red water at the holy festival, it is a bloody holi."¹⁴

Therefore, the wise and shrewd deputy commissioner also becomes helpless to get his orders executed. He, in a way, presents the inability of his type to save the victims of communal hatred.

Iqbal Singh comes in Mano Majra with his deceptive name on the very next day of the dacoity. An educated city-man and an immature socialist, Iqbal occupies the Gurudwara as soon as he comes in Mano Majra. He considers the village as a suitable spot for his social service. He is sent there for political enlightenment among the people living on Indo-Pak border. But he is kept in the prison for no fault of his. In jail also he behaves like a social worker. When he receives the news of the massacre and bloodshed, he becomes agitated. He criticises almost all political parties of India and holds them solely responsible for it. He broods over,

"Could he stop the killing? Obviously not. Everyone-Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Congressite, Leaguer, Akali or Communist - was deep in it."¹⁵

It seems, from the above statement that Khushwant Singh has used the character of Iqbal Singh for a special purpose. It is through him that the novelist criticises the political parties and leaders who do not bother about the partition tragedy. He is very angry with the

biased and communal police department. About this Dr. G.P. Sarma rightly says,

"The police, the military, and the administration as well become biased and communal."¹⁶

What is shocking is the contradictory behaviour of Iqbal Singh, who speaks in high spirit but does nothing after his coming back to Mano Majra. He is surprised to see the changed face of the village with all its Muslims gone. Meet Singh introduces him as a Sikh without hair. It is from the dialogue of Meet Singh and Iqbal Singh that we come to know several things. Iqbal Singh is more interested in collecting the information about the things that happen there. Meet Singh, on the contrary, is interested in the pillows and air-mattress of Iqbal Singh. Meet Singh expresses his inability to do anything to stop the massacre in the following words,

"What difference will my telling them make? They know what they are doing. They will kill. If it is a success, they will come to the gurudwara for thanksgiving. They will also make offerings to wash away their sins."¹⁷

Thus, Meet Singh stands for those who are helpless in the face of the grim tragedy. They have to witness the tragedy as if it is an inevitable thing.

Iqbal Singh is agitated when he listens to this. He himself is sure that nothing will prevent them from the

fateful massacre. When Meet Singh asks him to do something, the cornered Iqbal says,

"Bhaiji, when people go about with guns and spears you can only talk back with guns and spears. If you cannot do that then it is best to keep out of their ways."¹⁸

As a result of such characters, the partition tragedy proves to be unavoidable and all witness it passively and helplessly. Their support to the miserable ones proves to be a barren one, and they go on accepting the things as they come. The last thought of Iqbal throws light on their behaviour. He thinks,

"If you look at the things as they are, he told himself, there does not seem to be a code either of man or God on which one can pattern one's conduct. Wrong triumphs over right as much as right over wrong. What happens ultimately, you do not know. In such circumstances what can you do but cultivate an utter indifference to all values? Nothing matters, Nothing whatever ..."¹⁹

Needless to say that against this background, only the character of Juggat Singh seems to be an active and heroic one. The sentiment of love within him makes him sacrifice his own life to rescue the train of the refugees.

III

In Train to Pakistan, according to K.R. Srinivas Iyengar,

"Khushwant Singh, however, has succeeded through resolved limitation and rigorous selection in communicating to his readers a hint of the grossness, ghastliness and fatal insanity of the two-nation theory and the Partition tragedy. The pity and the horror of it all."³⁰

Khushwant Singh, thus, has succeeded in throwing a flash light on the pity and horror of the partition tragedy which was a result of the 'two-nation theory.' His locale Mano Majra, a hamlet of seventy houses is on the Indo-Pak border. There, people belonging to different religions, creeds and loyalties live together with mutual understanding. However, when the trainload of Sikh and Hindu corpses arrive in Mano Majra, the entire atmosphere of the village changes. In spite of the assurance given by the elder Sikhs, the Muslims decide to leave the village for Pakistan, and the younger generation of Sikhs become aggressive when their ego is challenged by a Sikh youth, who has come from city. He asks the Mano Majrans to kill,

"For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Muslims. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot two. For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across. For each road convoy that is attacked, attack two.

That will stop the killings on the other side. It will teach them that we can also play this game of killing and looting."²¹

Thus is the background prepared for the killing of Mano Majran Muslims. They decide to cut them "Like a knife slicing cucumbers."²²

Khushwant Singh, however, believes in the supreme power of love, and it is the love of the uncouth, rough Juggat Singh that saves the ill-fated refugees. V.A. Shahane, in his article quotes a sentence of Khushwant Singh's which reads as,

"whatever its limitations, whatever its frustrations," writes Khushwant Singh, "Love is the greatest, the most exhilarating experience of life."²³

Even the old rake Hukum Chand has also some feelings and emotional attachments for Haseema, a young prostitute girl. Hukum Chand's love-affair prompts him to release Juggat Singh and Juggat's love-affair inspires him to rescue the train from the imminent disaster. Thus, love is the greatest force which converts even a budmesh into a romantic lover who prepares for the highest sacrifice to save his love. As I have already discussed, in the early part of the chapter, that this act of Juggat Singh may sound romantic or even melodramatic to serious students of the novel but, at times, it appears to be inevitable.

Khushwant Singh has narrated a few selected incidents to expose the inhuman cruelties of people. The holocaust that took place during those days of partition has no equal in history. The migration that took place was even beyond imagination. Observing the whole scene, even the deputy commissioner from Traja to Pakistan cannot help criticising either of the governments. His orderly's daughter, Sundari, falls a victim to the Muslim mobs. She is a newly married girl but the marriage is not consummated. She is raped by the mob after killing her husband.

The second case is of Sunder Singh, whom Hukum Chand has recruited for the army. His train is halted and held on for four days. They are not allowed to get out of the train at any rate. Sunder Singh's wife and three children cry for water. Unable to quench their thirst and see them in agony,

"Sunder Singh gave them his urine to drink. Then that dried up too. So he pulled out his revolver and shot them all."²⁴

This and several other incidents of Muslim atrocities make Hukum Chand criticise the passive and indifferent stand taken by the Ministry, including Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister. He criticises in the following words,

"What were the people in Delhi doing?
Making fine speeches in Assembly!
Loudspeakers magnifying their egos!

lovely-looking foreign women in the visitor's galleries in breathless admiration. "He is a great man, this Mr. Nehru of yours. I do think he is the greatest man in the world today. And how handsome! Wasn't that wonderful thing to say? Long ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially." Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, you made your tryst. So did many others ... on the 15th August, Independence Day."²⁵

These reactions, therefore, are not only of Hukam Chand but of millions of partition affected Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs. All those who suffer the bitter fruits of partition, blame the men in Delhi. They are very harsh in their attitudes towards Nehru Ministry.

In the novel, however, Juggat Singh's love for Nooran saves the migrating refugees and not the police nor the army. The most difficult task even for the police department and army is done by a common man's heroic action. When the train goes to Pakistan, crushing Juggat Singh, safely, the reader closes the novel with a sense of relief. The end of the novel seems to be very dramatic. Khushwant Singh has not given any importance to any of his characters. He has narrated his story through selective incidents in a village which makes the plot. He portrays very effectively the communal harmony and fellow-feelings

inherent in Indian society which was disrupted by vested interests at the crucial points. He also criticises,

"... the bias and inefficiency of the administration in handling the unfortunate situation."²⁶

The novel also deprecates the part played by the so-called intellectuals in adding fuel to the fire of communal hatred, and causing the historical devastation. All these people make mockery of the whole movement of freedom-struggle.

In Train To Pakistan, however, there is no ideological clash as it is in A Bend in the Ganges. In the latter, Malgonkar has dealt with the clash between non-violent Movement led by Gandhiji and the terrorist movement which was in full swing during the forties. He tries to probe these ideals with great interest. Khushwant Singh, however, takes

"... the political aspect of the partition for granted, as all that his villagers concerned with is that, 'it is Mahatma Gandhi's government in Delhi' and that 'people sing his praise in the four corners of the earth.'²⁷

Thus, there is no any clash of values but mere description of the activities happening in a sleepy, little village on Indo-Pak border.

However, what Khushwant Singh ultimately emphasises is the power of love—even of a criminal like

Juggat Singh who saves "the train to Pakistan." This of course, is a romantic solution, required for the effectiveness of plot - a Dickensian plot - so to say.

Khushwant' Singh's novel gives almost an eyewitness account of the partition days. His lively portrayal of characters and realistic description of village politics convince us that Khushwant Singh is a master craftsman.