

THEME OF PARTITION IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to find out the effect of Partition on the Indian Sub-Continent after independence of India in 1947 after 400 years of British colonization. It also shows that how seeds of hatred sown by the colonizer, led not only to unprecedented death and destruction but also division of the Sub-Continent on communal and sectarian lines. The two countries gained their independence but with ruined economies and without an established and experienced system of government. Besides about 15 million people were displaced from their homes. The Partition was an important event not only in the history of the India but in the history of the World.

KEYWORDS: Carnage, Communal, Partition, Muslims, Sikhs, Sectarian

INTRODUCTION

The Partition of India was the process of dividing the Sub-Continent on sectarian and communal lines in 1947 as India gained its independence from British rule. The northern part predominantly Muslim became nation of Pakistan and the southern predominantly Hindu became the Republic of India. The Partition devastated both India and Pakistan as it led to unprecedented loss of precious human lives in riots, rapes and large scale blood shedding of innocents. The chief reason was the communal thinking of both Hindus and Muslims, the seeds of which were sown by the outgoing imperial power, who for its gains had sowed the seeds of hatred into the minds of both communities. The circumstances under which it occurred make it one of the saddest events in the history of India. No doubt, 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 unprecedented in scale and unleashed misery and loss of lives and property as millions of refugees fled either Pakistan or India.

Khushwant Singh's name is bound to go down in India's literary history as one of the finest historian and novelist, a forth right political commentator and an outstanding observer and social critic. He is known as one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation, a significant post colonial writer in English language besides being 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 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 self- discipline.

Khushwant Singh has worldwide readership. He has written for almost all major national and international newspaper in India and abroad. He has had numerous radio appearances at home and internationally and had an extra exemplary career as a writer. His book, *A history of Sikhs* remains one of the authentic histories 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 India fiction Award in 1954. India today described him as 'the capital's best known living monument'. Khushwant Singh was also awarded the Padam 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 of the storming of the golden temple, however in 2007, India government awarded Singh an even more prestigious honor, the Padme 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. He is also an outstanding author of over 80 English publications.

THEME OF PARTITION IN TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* brings forth a picture of bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pak 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 12 million had to flee their home and nearly half a million were killed. These harrowing and spine chilling events shook the faith of the people in the innate human goodness. It had driven them into a state of wonder over what man has made of man. The individuality in Khushwant Singh's writings is on account of his anger and disenchantment with the "...long cherished human values in the wake of inhuman bestial horrors and insane savage killings on both sides during the Partition of the subcontinent between India and Pakistan in August 1947."(Harish 126). 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 has been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country'. He also says, 'I had believed that we Indians were peace loving and non-violent and 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 shout his disenchantment with the world. I decided to try my hand at writing'. *Train to Pakistan* is in keeping with the theme of the novel" (Shahane, 68).

The sinister and venomous impact of partition and the indignation it spawned on him, has been realistically expressed in scathing attack in the novel, originally entitled *Mano Majra* and portrays with hold 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. 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 thus 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 many ordinary men and women, who are bewildered victims and torn apart. Every citizen was caught up in the holocaust. No one could remain aloof, no one could be trusted to be impartial. The novelist brings to the centre stage the subsequent violence on both sides of the border manifested in ruthless mass destruction as well as the evil impact of Partition on the peace loving Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of Mano Majra. 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. In the words of Warren French, "Singh's terse fable suggests profound disillusionment with the power of law, reason and intellect in the face of elemental human passions---Singh is brilliant, sardonic observer of world undergoing convulsive changes; and his novels provides unique insight into one of the major political catastrophes' of this country"(French 818). *Train to Pakistan* is thus Khushwant Singh's supreme achievement. It is one of the finest realistic novels of post world war II Indo Anglican fiction. It has a well thought out structure, a well concaved 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. Joan F. Adkins has great praise for the novel when he says, 'Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* deserved a high position in Indo Anglican literature' (Adkins, 11).

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