



## **POLITICS OF LOCATION IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S 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 the 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..

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**Keywords:** partition, independence, communalism, culture, subcontinent

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Khushwant Singh was born on Feb. 2, 1915 at Hadali in West Punjab (now in Pakistan). He is the second son of Sir Sobha Singh and lady Singh. He was educated at Lahore and the University, of London. He is one of India's most widely read writers and journalists, admired and lambasted in equal measure because of his often irreverent and controversial views. He is one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation. A brief account of his achievement as a novelist, short-story writer, historian, essayist, journalist and editor is sufficient to establish him in Indian Writing in English as a versatile genius. His career as a topflight journalist began in 1969 as Editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, followed by stints as Editor, Yojana, New Delhi magazine and The Hindustan Times. His journalistic talent is versatile.

As a novelist Khushwant Singh is famous for "Train to Pakistan (1956) and 'I shall Not Hear the Nightingale" (1959). His first novel 'Train to Pakistan' made him internationally known, though he had made a literary reputation with publication of his short stories 'The Mark of Vishnu and other stories' (1957). "I shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959) is the second novel by Khushwant Singh. It is essentially a social and human document, a story of two families one Sikh and the other Hindu. The first collection of his stories "The Voice of God and other stories" (1957) is marked by both verbal irony and by irony of situation. 4 Bride for the Sahib and other stories (1967) is his second collection of stories. These stories bring out intense human predicament, temperamental, social and marital dissonance. It has a well-thought out structure, a well-conceived plot, an absorbing narrative and beautifully portrayed characters. It has many notable features-symbolic framework, meaningful atmosphere and a powerful way of expression and style. Stark realism dominates in Train to Pakistan. It presents a moving tragic tale of partition period of Indian history. In its background there is the great human catastrophe of the partition of India and Pakistan and the inhuman events that followed. The novelist succeeds in asserting the value and dignity of a man's sacrifice for a woman.

Train to Pakistan was originally entitled Mano Majra (1956). Mano Majra is the name of a place which is the centre of action in the sequence of events leading to the final catastrophe. The change of the title is after deep deliberation. It is not by chance or casual choice of the novelist. The change in the title is from static to the dynamic. Mano Majra is the name of a village. It is a fixed point in space whereas the train is a symbol of movement. The use of the word "train" has other contextual associations also. The train signifies groups or multitudes of people who are heading for various destinations. On the eve of the partition of the Indian subcontinent, millions of people from either side of the dividing boundary were on the way, seeking refuge and security. Millions of non-Muslims from Pakistan longed for a passage to India as their land for hope and peace. On the other side millions of Muslims from India sought the road to Pakistan. In this way the train denotes the movement of vast communities uprooted from their traditional area

Contemporary Indian Writings in English of growth to a new place of living. It indicates the harrowing processes of this change, the awful and ghastly experience of human beings involved in a historical, impersonal, and dehumanized process.

The scene of Train to Pakistan is laid in India on the eve of the partition in 1947. Col 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 times. Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. 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. From Calcutta, the riots spread north and east and west: to Noakhali in East Bengal, where Muslims massacred Hindus; to Bihar, where Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the North-west Frontier abandoned their homes and fled toward the protection of the predominantly Sikh and Hindu communities in the east. They travelled on foot, in bullock carts, crammed into lorries, clinging to the sides and roofs of trains. Along the way -at fords, at crossroads, at railroad stations they collided with panicky swarms of Muslims fleeing to safety in the west. The riots had become a rout by the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced. ten million people Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding. The only remaining cases of peace were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. Mano Majra was one of these villages.

Mano Majra, a tiny village in the Punjab is situated on the Indian border, half a mile away from the river Sutlej. In spite of bloodshed and rioting in the frontier area, life in Mano Majra remains to be peaceful. The Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus are living in harmony and amity. Partition has not touched Mano Majra: "No one in Mano Majra even knows that the British have left and the country is divided into Pakistan and Hindustan." Life here is regulated by trains with their arrival and departure. The villagers are not acquainted with the progress of science and ignorance of scientific progress is a bliss to them. The peaceful life in Mano Majra comes to a jolt when on an August night the village moneylender's house is raided by Malli, a dreaded deceit. The decoys drop bangles in the house off Jogga Singh of the village. Later Jogga Singh rested on the maspect of the murder and decolty. People's party of India sends its Iqbal Singh to work for peace when there are comm there. Police also arrests him as a suspect in moneylender's murder case. The situation at Mano Majra aggravates further. A commotion is created with the arrival of the ghost train from Pakistan. The trein loded with the dead arrived from Pakistan at Mano Majra. At the railway line a thousand bodies were committed to the earth and a heavy bulldozer was used to bury the dead. This engulfs Mano Majra. Madness takes over the people of different communities. It follows senseless killing, looting, burning and raping.

Partition touched Mano Majrans at both levels at the community level and at the individual level. At the community level it effects very badly with Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The dark clouds of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together for

centuries. Yet feelings of brotherliness have not disappeared; and they meet for consultation in a scene that is both intensely humane and touching. When Imam Baksh, the mullah of the mosque came to the lambardar to ask the decision about their staying in Mano Majra, at that time the lambardar answered, "This is your village as much as ours." But after some time he said, "It is very hard for me to say, but seeing the sort of time we live in, I would advise you to go to the refugee camp while this trouble is on. You lock your houses with your belongings. We will look after your cattle till you come back." The lambardar himself felt a strong sense of guilt and was overcome with emotion. He got up and embraced Imam Baksh and started to cry loudly. Sikh and Muslim villagers fell into each other's arms and wept like children. In this way, Muslims are evacuated to a refugee camp at Chandannagar, later to be transported to Pakistan by train. A group of Sikh fanatics arrives at Mano Majra to incite the people to take revenge. They hatch out a plan to fire at the train of refugees going to Pakistan. Thus, partition here effects at the community level.

At the individual level, partition effects mainly the two characters Juggut Singh and Nooran, the daughter of Imam Baksh. They love each other. Juggut Singh's love for Nooran is a positive force. It cuts across caste and religious barriers. The novelist beautifully presents the emotional ties between them. After release from the police custody, Jugga learns from his mother that Nooran visited her before leaving for the refugee camp and she carries Jugga's child in her womb, he becomes Contemporary Indian Writings somewhat sentimental. somewhat sentimental. The waves of feelings and expectations in his to a decade in the final rouse of the novel. The train to Pakistan carrying refugees of Mano Majra is to leave. The fanatics have prepared themselves to attack it when the train passes through Mano Majra railway bridge. Jugga decides to save Nooran and other refugees. He heroically clings to the rope with his hands and cuts it to pieces. The engine is almost on him. He falls down dead and the train goes over him and goes to Pakistan. The tragic love story of a Sikh boy and a Muslim weaver's girl seeks to patch up the wide gap of communal hatred. Thus, it effects at the individual level.

By focusing on a micro-level (the village: Mano Majra) the novel depicts what was happening at macro-level (the country) during partition. Taking Mano Majra as basis, here the novelist wants to portray that at the time of partition, the condition of the small village had changed totally. Mano Majra is the representative of the whole country. The novel is the only description at micro-level that what happened before and during partition in one particular village. Partition did not touch only this small village. It touched the whole country from west to east and also the north. There was senseless killing, looting, burning and raping at the macro-level also.

The novel is a true representative of Indian Writing in English because here, the author draws a vivid description from all the facets of the time when partition was taking place in India. When the Britishers had left India, after a long struggle, at that time, on one hand the people were celebrating the independence and on the other hand there were communal riots spread everywhere in the country and millions of people were killed, looted, burned and raped because

the country was divided into Hindustan and Pakistan. India became independent after a long struggle against the British rule. At that time, Nehru said, "At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation long suppressed, finds utterance, we end today a period of ill-fortune and India discovers herself again." And in 1947, one Nation was getting divided into two-Hindustan and Pakistan. (And thereafter in 1971, a further partition of Bangladesh took place)

The novel remains significant today because we are celebrating India's 50th year of Independence this year. And it's an ironical twist that this novel has been turned into a film by a British national (Pamela Brooks) rather than an Indian. But, on the other hand, the acceptance of an Indian English Writing as screen-material is proof enough of the strength and finesse of this genre of writing.

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