

Partition and its Impact on Indian English literature

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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 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.

1. Introduction

Khushwant Singh at a Glance:

Khushwant Singh's name is bound to go down in Indian literary history as one of the finest historian and novelist, a forthright, political commentator and an out-standing observer and social critic. He is known as one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation, besides, being a significant post- colonial writer in English language. He is 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 organization 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 discipline and his belief in the *vener of the superficiality*. Khush want Singh has worldwide readership. He has written for almost all major national and international newspaper in India and abroad. He has also had numerous radio appearances at home and remains of the best, well researched and scholarly works 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 Award in 1954, he is best- selling author of over 80 English publications. *India today* described him as 'the capital's best known living monument'. Khuswant Singh was awarded the Padma 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 at the storming of the Golden temple, however in 2007 Indian government awarded Singh an even more prestigious honor, the Padma 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

2. Theme of partition in Train To Pakistan

Khuswant Singh's Novel "*Train to Pakistan*", brings forth a picture of bestial horrors enacted on the Indo Pakistan 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 twelve million had to flee their home nearly half a million were killed.

The harrowing and spine chilling events of 1947 had shaken the faith of the people in the innate human beings. It had driven them into a state of wonder over what man has made of man. 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 had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country. He says, I had believed that we Indians were peace loving and nonviolent 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 show his disenchantment with the world.. I decided to try my hand at writing.

The sinister and venomous impact of partition and the indignation it spawned on him has been realistically expressed in scathing attack in *Train to Pakistan*. Originally entitled *Mano Majra*. The novel portrays with bold 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. Every citizen was caught up in the holocaust.

No one could remain aloof; no one could be trusted to be impartial. It is true that partition touched the whole country and 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”.

Fateful summer, when the flood of refugees and the inter-communal bloodletting from Bengal to the North West Frontier at last touches them. Many ordinary men and women are bewildered, victimized and torn apart. 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.

Train to Pakistan is *Khushwant Singh’s* Supreme achievement. It is one of the finest realistic novels of Post-world war II Indo Anglian fiction. 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. *Khushwant Singh* has accurately depicted the real picture of the adverse effects of partition and the suffering that people were made to experience. *Khushwant Singh* upheld his unique mirror to reflect upon the physical torture and psychological outburst that became the order of the day, when the division of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan. He paints a vivid picture of the separation between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the summer of 1947. The novel in short portrays the issues of Independence and partition using it as a means to explore other issues which then emerge as the larger picture of the devastation and bloody birth of nations.

Various writers have tried to write their experience in the form of novels, short stories, etc. The misery displacement, the huge loss, sufferings that was experienced by the people was recorded. Some writers have directly suffered due to partition. We can point out some of the famous novels based on

partitions are, *The Heart Divided* by *MumtazNavaz*, *Ice Candy Man* by *BapsiSidva*, *Clear Light of Day* by *Anitha Desai*, *Shadow of Time* by *NigarMasroor*, *Train to Pakistan* by *Khushwant Singh*, *Azadi* by *ChamanNahal*, *A Bend in the Ganges* by *Manohar Malgokar*, etc.

Train to Pakistan is a story everyone wants to forget; yet one cannot overlook this stark reality of our past. When the nation was on the threshold of new dawn, it also faced unprecedented destruction, bloodshed and trauma. *Khushwant Singh* has successfully delineated this unpleasant phase of our national history in the novel. *Khushwant Singh’s* balanced presentation of Partition version concerns the way in which he introduces news of the atrocities. Though brutal violence provides the basis of the story, the restraint with which *Singh* approaches this subject, particularly at narrative points when excessive or premature description would be at the expense of real-life expectances, is commendable. Thus *Singh* so manipulates the version that a gradual and refracted revelation of the atrocities is necessary to coincide with the villager’s growing suspicions: psychologically the main interest is in the impact the violence makes on their minds. *Khushwant Singh’s* *Train to Pakistan* differs from most of the other novels on Partition in respect of canvas, and unity of time, place and action. It has greater unity of time and place. Its action centres in the vicinity of *Mano Majra* and it covers a period of not more than a month.

Manohar Malgonkar was a shikari, and a soldier before he ventured into the profession of writing and he is far from being indifferent to professional success; and this for him means reaching wide audiences in English speaking countries through foreign imprints and have found publishers in England and America and have been translated into several European and Indian language historical events of the time. Therefore the narration is authentic. He narrates the events so superbly that the novel has become an excellent piece of story-telling. He uses a swiftly moving narrative for an epic portrayal of the complex forces which lead to the Partition tragedy. He mirrors the deeply rooted caste prejudices in the Indian Society. He uses the third person narrative technique. No doubt the narrator of the story is the novelist himself. In *A Bend in the Ganges* we find the classic situation of a man beset by conflicting values brought by historical changes, yet the entire background is enriched by the detailed accounts of social, political and historical circumstances and has been vividly portrayed and illustrated with a comprehensiveness and through sweeping accounts of the holocaust.

ChamanNahal say that the study of Nationalism and history is a study of the alternative choices open to people at a particular time, but, for a writer of fiction, choices are endless. What he could not change in real life, he changed through his creative imagination! He is the true representative on Indian panorama of his time. He has a remarkable skill in blending fact and fiction. Another feature of *Nahal’s* style is the occasional use of too many adjectives for the sake of emphasis. *Nahal* has a fascination for writing long sentences. *Nahal* makes use of a number of linguistic devices in his narration techniques, that is carefully chosen clusters of images and symbols that figures most prominently amongst the devices deployed by him. They

help in evoking the required atmosphere to provide a deep insight into the characters psyche and lend textural density and structural unity to the novel. Nahal makes an exquisite use of the stylistic devices of contrast and conflict. In Azadi the demonic creatures' Abdul Ghani, InayatUllah Khan and VasptainRahmat-Ullah Khan offer a contrast with Bill Davidson, ChaudhriBarkatMi and the Hakim, who are sympathetic and enlightened. Gangu Mull, who becomes a Muslim so that he can remain in the newly created Pakistan and retain his property, is contrasted with Niranjana Singh, who is steadfast in his faith ends his life for the sake of religion.

The novel starts with an expectation from the public on the 3rd June, 1947 when the Viceroy was awaited to make an important announcement in the evening. LalaKanshi Ram, the major character in the novel, was not literate enough person but an experienced intelligent. He and his wife, Prabha Rani with a son, Arun live a quiet and peaceful life. The announcement of partition shattered their lives. In communal frenzy, the Muslims started to humiliate Hindu minorities. They take out the procession to warn the Hindu and Sikh population that they had no land of theirs and that they should quit. LalaKanshi Ram evaluated the situation and convinced that the British already were not interested in preserving the unity of India

The partition brought the communal riots between Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs and Muslims. However, Nahal plays a

neutral role while delineating the trauma of partition. It is not as if his sympathies are either with the Muslims or the Hindus; rather, one cannot pass any judgments on them. Actually, he brings to our attention as to how the reactions to the partition range from disappointment, cynicism, frustration to partial happiness and ultimate betrayal.

3. Conclusion

The common concern of Singh, Malgonkar and Nahal is the reflection of Indian value and feeling of common man and the sensitive writers that partition was a game that was unwanted element for the common man, and an unforgettable incident in the history of the subcontinent. Many years after the partition, the two nations are still trying to heal the wounds left behind by this incision to once-whole body of India. Many are still in search of an identity and a history left behind beyond an impenetrable boundary. The two countries started off with ruined economics and lands and without an established, experienced system of government. They lost many of their most dynamic leaders, such as Gandhi, Jinnah and Allama Iqbal. India and Pakistan have been to war twice since the partition and they are still deadlocked over the issue of possession of Kashmir. The same issues of boundaries and divisions, Hindu and Muslim majorities and differences, still persist in Kashmir.

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