

## Khuswant Sing's *Train to Pakistan* as a Partition Novel

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### ABSTRACT

*The most horrific and shocking incident in the history of India's independence is certainly that of partition of the land. It brought in its wake communal conflict and havoc on a large scale. This prompted writers galore in different languages to study the theme in perspectives completely different from those of historians, political analysts and social scientists. Being a close witness to the catastrophic events resulting rampantly from the partition, Sing could not but focus on the theme by way of censuring the havoc that was stalking large in the contemporary India in the name of partition. In this novel, the novelist foregrounds the issue of the partition through the love story of Jugga and Nooran. My objective here is to show to what extent the novel explores the partition theme.*

### 1. Introduction

Partition marks the most traumatic experience in the history of India's independence. It let loose anarchic forces which wreaked havoc in the Indian sub-continent, stigmatising and upsetting the long and communally shared history and cultural heritage of the land. What should have culminated in joy ultimately turned into a disgraceful and lurid debacle resulting in arson, rape, women disfigurement, genocide, lootings, flight, mayhem, trauma and so on and so forth, bringing about a shocking disillusionment of faith in man's inherent goodness. Being himself a witness to the communal violence raging through the entire Northern India, Sing felt the necessity to pen this novel in a bid to absolve himself of the guilt of being a passive spectator of the partition holocaust and to explore the theme of partition in the light of the trauma and miseries left on its trail, by way of denouncing them.

*Train to Pakistan* as a partition novel : Khuswant Sing's debut novel and his masterpiece *Train to Pakistan* is a grim record of the traumatic experiences of the partition of India against the backdrop of an idyllic locale. The novel relates two tales at the same time : the tale of an obscure hamlet and that of a nation, weaving both the strands into the texture of the single whole. The locale of the novel is Mano Majra, an obscure and peaceful hamlet on the frontier of the newly divided nations of India and Pakistan. As the novel opens we find that the Sikh land-owners with their Muslim tenants had been living for generations in a bond of peace, harmony and brotherhood. And during the partition, through communal violence had been raging in the outside India, this could not affect the peaceful tenor of the Mono Majrans in the sequestered corner of their village. These people were innocent, and ignorant of the proceedings of the outside India. They wake up with the trumpeting sound of the Delhi-Lahore Male train with which Imam Baksh, the local mullah of the village, and the Sikh priest get ready to start their morning prayer. With the arrival of the morning passenger train at 10.30 a.m. the Mono Majrans settle down to their monotonous daily routine. Middy expresses passes with the inhabitants of the village having a siesta. Goods train arrive with a reminder to the villagers of their bed time thus railway schedule lends punctuality to the life of the Mono Majrans.

But the peace of the village was suddenly disturbed by an incident of dacoity in the village. One day Mali and his gang murder Ram Lal, the local money lender of the village, and throws a packet of bangles into the yard of Jugga, the 'budmash number ten' of the village in a plot to frame him for the crime when the latter was off in the field making love to his paramour Nooru under the cover of darkness, violating the legal compulsion which confined him to home, as he was on parole. The police arrest Jugga and Iqbal who was there as a representative of the People's Party to work for peace in the time of communal discord on suspicion of the guilt of the crime though both of them were, truly speaking, free from this guilt. Mali and his gang, the real criminals were also arrested but they were set free later.

Things move fast and like a sudden appearance of a storm cloud which plays topsy-turvy on its way, the quiet and simple life of the Mono Majrans was suddenly turned upside down by the disastrous events of the partition. The punctuality in the life of the Mono Majrans began to go missing in the early September days when the movement of the trains suddenly became irregular many trains started to run at night . good trains which lulled the villagers to sleep at night stopped running. Ghost trains began to pass at odd hours between midnight and dawn disturbing the late night sleep of the villagers. These apart, some Sikh soldiers have erected tents near the railway station and armed soldiers have been deployed to work vigil on the platform and the villagers are not permitted to go near the railings of the platform . all these augur ill for the people of Mono Majra. There is a mass whispering about a ghost train from Pakistan and this created a great confusion in the life of the people of the village. Reportedly, the train has brought from Pakistan dead bodies of Hindu and Sikhs killed in Pakistan after the partition of India into Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India. The dead bodies are cremated with fire wood and kerosene with nauseating odour in the air turning Mono Majra into a virtual cremation ground with its characteristic dead silence. People of the village feel atrophied by the ghastly turn of the situation. The Muslim Imam and the Sikh priest have stopped uttering prayer in such a world of utter lawlessness, darkness, ugliness, horror and

confusion. The long-standing friendly and brotherly relationship between the Sikhs and the Muslims suddenly sours. They turn hostile to one another. Communal animosity and distrust took the place of co-operation and harmony. Reports began to pour in about mass killings of Muslims and demolition of mosques in Amritsar, Patiala, Ambala. The Sikhs decided to give protection to their Muslim brethren out of a long-standing sweet relationship. But the situation takes a worse when the dead bodies of a large number of Sikhs and Hindus massacred in Pakistan came floating in the flooded Sultej. Soon the arrival of another train laden with dead bodies from Pakistan made the situation explosive. Sikh youths from outside came to Mono Majra and kindled the Sikh spirit of revenge upon the Muslims with a harangue addressed to a gathering at Gurudwara.

To tackle this explosive situation all the Muslims of the village are evacuated to a refugee camp at Chandunnagar where from they are to move to Pakistan \_\_\_ the land they deem their haven of safety and peace. All the refugees decide to go to Pakistan by a night train. But stung by a spirit of revenge the Sikhs hatched a conspiracy to murder the Muslim refugees going by train. They decide to stretch a rope across the span of the bridge so high that when the train would move those sitting atop would be knocked down to the river Sultej and the Sikhs would fire indiscriminately at the train. Hukum Chand, the magistrate of the district who came there to ward off any communal conflict came to know of this conspiracy to sabotage the proposed train journey to Pakistan and released

Jugga and Iqbal in the hope that one of the two would do something to prevent the impending calamity. Coming to learn of the plot, in a diehard attempt to save the life of his sweetheart Nooran who would be in the same train, Jugga climbed the bridge in an air of helping the conspirators lying in wait to open fire upon the train and slashed the rope across the span of the bridge. The leader of the conspirators fired at Jugga. He fell down to the railway track and the train passed over him and went on to Pakistan.

## 2. Conclusion

Thus the novelist has presented the Jugga-Nooran love story against the backdrop of the holocaust of the partition of India. Driven by amorous passion for his paramour Nooru, Jugga crosses the frontiers of religion (for Nooran is a Muslim girl) and through his self sacrifice, he proves himself, though a recognised notorious fellow, the messiah, and saint of love. Rising above the bigoted notions of religion, nationalities, castes and politics, Jugga gives us a new vision of religion\_\_\_ this is the religion of love which triumphs over all sorts of conventional discriminations nations of man. Through the achievement of his hero, the novelist tries to served his purpose behind penning this novel : that is to liberate people from the age-old bigoted affiliations to caste, creed, communities and politics and to awaken their conscience to lead a happy and ideal life upholding the values of liberty, equality and fraternity .

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