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KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN* AS A PARTITION NARRATIVE

*Miss Veena Kadkol, 'Matra Chaya,' Gacchinkatti Colony, Opp. BLDE Hospital Road,
Near Basaveshwar College, Vijayapur, Karnataka*

Indian Partition did not serve the purpose. Dr. Ramaiah observes, “The partition of 1947 and the subsequent communal riots have been attributed to the evil intentions of the English and their so called 'divide and rule' policy” (Ramaiah 1760). Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a classic partition novel as ever before. *Train to Pakistan* is in four parts 'Decoity,' 'Kalyug,' 'Mano Majra' and 'Karma' characteristically signifying a kaleidoscopic picture of a turbulent phase of Indian history. The first part 'Decoity,' an anglicized form of Hindi word means robbery. Vasant Sahane observes, “This section constitutes a true-to-life description of cultural robbery committed in Mano Majra village, but its ramifications and remote echoes go far beyond the inhuman and cruel actions of the robbery of Malli and his gang.” (*Train* 76) This part describes the harsh Indian summer of 1947. The climate is dry. Khushwant Singh presents man's agonized heart and suffering. Some of them knew the country was partitioned into two Hindustan and Pakistan and the event had turned sinful and bloody. Muslims feel that the Hindus had planned and started the killing. Hindus feel that the Muslims were to blame. But people are killed both sides. Mano Majra (the sub-title of the novel), is a village on the Indo-Pak border. The village is a major character. The specialty of the village is that it has a railway junction. The village is small with seventy families. Yet people of all religions Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs live there harmoniously. The only three brick buildings . . . one belonging to the Gurudwar, one to the Masque and one to Mr. Ram Lal, the Hindu moneylender stand there as monuments of synchronization. There is an old peepul tree symbolizing peace and harmony.

The villagers are farmers and peasants. Bhai Amitsingh has been in charge of the Gurudwar not because he is interested in Sikhism but because he is lazy to work at fields. Imam Sahib is in charge of the masque as he is blind. There is no Hindu doing church service. Interestingly life in Mano Majra runs in accordance with train service. The train is highly symbolic of Mano Majra life. Coming of a train in the morning towards Lahore means the dawn. The train returning ends people's daily activities. A goods train that passes at 9 pm indicates rest. Khushwant Singh describes it,

All this has made Mano Majra very conscious of trains. Before daybreak, the mail train rushes through on its way to Lahore, and as it approaches the bridge, the driver invariably blows two long blasts of the whistle. In the instant, all Mano Majra comes awake. Crows begin to caw in the keekar trees. Bats fly back in long silent relays and begin to quarrel for their perches in the peepul. The mullah at the masque knows that it is time for the Morning Prayer. He has a quick wash, stands facing west toward Mecca and with his fingers in his ears cries in long sonorous notes, '*Allah-o-Akbar*.' The priest at the Sikh temple lies in bed till the mullah has called. Then he too gets up, draws a bucket of water from the well in the temple courtyard, pours over himself, and intones his prayer in monotonous singsong to the sound of splashing water.

By the time the 10:30 morning passenger train from Delhi comes in, life in Mano Majra has settled down to its dull daily routine. Men are in the fields. Women are busy with their daily chores. Children are out grazing cattle by the river. Persian wheels squeak and groan as bullocks go round and round, prodded on by curses and the jabs of goads in their headquarters. Sparrows fly about the roofs trailing straw in their beaks. Pye-dogs seek the

shade of the mud walls. Bats settle their arguments, fold their wings, and suspend themselves in sleep.

As the noonday express goes by, Mano Majra stops to rest. Men and children come home for dinner and the siesta hour. When they have eaten, the men gather in the shade of the peepul tree and sit on the wooden platforms and talk and doze. Boys ride their buffaloes into the pond, jump off their backs, and splash about in the muddy water. Girls play under the trees women rub clarified butter into each other's hair, pick lice from their children's heads, and discuss births, marriages and deaths. (p.6)

This passage speaks of the train and how the three times of the day are considered. The major events in the first part are the dacoity of Lal Ram Lal's house, opening up of Juggut Singh's love affair with a Muslim girl and the arrival of a communist worker there as a disturbing phenomenon. These incidents influence upon each others. One day a five-member gang with arms gets to Mano Majra for robbing Lal Ram Lal's treasure. They rob the house and they throw a few bangles into Juggut Singh's house. This is planned to make Juggut Singh responsible for the loot and crime. Dacoity highlights the 'this worldliness' of Mano Majra. The crime world is marked by a stark, blatant, unvarnished materialism. Malli's gang as well as Juggut's amply displays this.

Later we come to know Juggut Singh, the rowdy's life. Both his father and grandfather were also rowdies. Juggut Singh is lately fallen in love with Nooran, blind mullah Imam Baksha's only daughter. This holds back Juggut Singh from all crimes. Iqbal is a communist activist from Delhi. He had his education in England. Being interested in Marxism, he comes to Mano Majra for guiding people to safer destinies. Yet he is not a man of practical experience. Totally grounded in western lifestyles he toys to improve the Indian lot. Ironically he does not mix up with Bhai Amit Singh and any other local folks! He does not give the details of his nativity, parentage and caste when the police arrest him. Interestingly Iqbal is taken a Hindu like 'Iqbal Chand, a Muslim like 'Iqbal Mohammad', and a Sikh like 'Iqbal Singh.' So with doubts he is arrested by Hukum Chand's order within a few days of his arrival.

'Kalyug,' the second part of the novel bears a title, which according to Hindu view of time means the fourth and last phase of human cycle of existence. Here it means the then time was the last phase of India and Pakistan's relations. It is partition time, indeed. There is the moneylender's murder. Things go wrong and this is the characteristic feature of the Hindu concept of Kalyug. The author writes:

Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seemed as though the alarm clock had been set for the wrong hour. On others, it was as if no one had remembered to wind it. Imam Baksh waited for Meet Singh to make the first start. Meet Singh waited for the mullah's call to prayer before getting up. People stayed in bed late without realizing that times had changed and the mail train might not run through at all. Children did not know when to be hungry, and clamoured for food all the time. In the evenings, everyone was indoors before sunset and in bed before the express came by if it comes by. Goods trains had stopped running altogether, so there was no lullaby to lull them to sleep. Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra. (*Train* 68)

The villagers talk of the murder of Ram Lal, Juggut's affairs, the partition of India, and the continued suppression of illiterate masses. The men discuss these things at Mosque and Gurudwara. Banta Singh is the Headman otherwise known as lambardar. His duty is to distribute posts, look after the village law and order and make arrangements for outsiders.

One day evening there comes a Lahore-Delhi train with a load of corpses of Hindus. This makes the Hindu-Sikh community dispatch a trainload of Muslim corpses as 'A Gift to Pakistan'. Hukum Chand, the

Deputy Commissioner shifts Muslims to safer places. Both Iqbal and Juggut are arrested on the charge of murder. Hukum Chand is a corrupt officer. Later the news of Hindu-Muslim massacre reaches Mano Majra shaking people beyond imagination and they wonder,

“No, no. I just went round the servant's quarters. You are early. I hope all is well.”

'These days one should be grateful for being alive. There is no peace anywhere. One trouble after another...'

The magistrate suddenly thought of the corpses.

'Did it rain.'”(Train 85)

'Mano Majra', the third part continues the theme. Khushwant Singh depicts how the border village is devastated,

When it was discovered that the train had brought a full load of corpses, a heavy brooding silence descended on the village. People barricaded their doors and many stayed up all night talking in whispers. Everyone felt his neighbour's hand against him, and thought of finding friends and allies. They did not notice the clouds blot out the stars nor smell the cool damp breeze. When they woke up in the morning and saw it was raining, their first thoughts were about the train and burning corpses. The whole village was on the roofs looking toward the station. (Train 103)

Mr. Malli and his gang are released at Mano Majra. A few days later the village Sikhs discuss the current turbulence of communal life. They decide that the Muslims must evacuate the village. What touches us is the event of Nooran's parting of Juggut Singh. The latter is still in prison. Although the Muslims of Mano Majra decide to go, their brethren the Sikhs remain human to them. But the outside Muslim officers misunderstand the communal relations. The Muslim lot of Mano Majra, like the neighbouring villages Julandar, Chundunugger, Kapoora, Gujjoo, evacuate from Mano Majra with a sadness.

'Karma,' the fourth part is highly significant. It means the totality of a person's actions in one of the successive cycles of his existence. The climax lies in it. The time the holocaust begins, summer ends and monsoon comes. There is a heavy rain. Unfortunately some villages on the Sutlej are washed away. But the situation gets confused when the Muslims of border villages get murdered and their bodies are floated there. The ghostly trains, the beastly people and the devastating floods complete the picture of degeneration. The Sikh mob, along with the Hindus, more than thirty thousand strong, well-armed kill their Muslim brethren forgetting the latter's humanity. Meanwhile both Juggut and Iqbal are released. The former goes frantically in search of Nooran. Hukum Chand is a man of Kalyug. At the time of train passing three events --dacoity, JuggutNooran love affair and Hukum Chand-Haseena sex contact take place. The author has succeeded in his tirade against Hinduism, Indian bureaucracy and politics. Iqbal stands for the failure of communist ideals. *Train to Pakistan* displays Khushwant Singh's inborn sense of ghastly reality during the time of partition of India in 1947. The novel has certain symbolic treatment. Train symbolizes life connected to birth, death and preservation. Imam means a religious person, Meet, an affectionate friend and Iqbal a compromise.

References:

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