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Train to Pakistan – Azadi : Vice-versa Journey**Dr. Mangalkumar R. Patil**Associate Professor,
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Khushavant Singh is one of the most prolific and versatile twentieth century Indian writers in English. He was a lawyer by training. His most enduring work has been done in the field of Sikh history and biography. On the other hand, he is one of India's most widely read writers and journalists. He 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. He owns many distinctive honours. He was a Member of Parliament from 1980 to 1986. He won the Grove press Award for *Train to Pakistan* as the best work of fiction in 1954. He was awarded the Padam Bhushan in 1974, which he returned in 1984 in protest against the Union Government's siege of the Golden temple, Amritsar. 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. He has published two novels, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959). He also published two collections of short stories. He has also translated Rajinder Singh Bedi's Urdu novel into English. *Train To Pakistan* is a historical novel. The novel projects with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border region. It recounts the Partition of India in August 1947.

Chaman Nahal was born in Sialkot, (formerly in India, now in Pakistan). He educated at the University of Delhi and the University of Nottingham. Since 1949, he went about teaching in many universities across India. *My True Faces*, his first novel, was followed in 1975 by *Azadi*, which is regarded as his best. His other novels, which are noted for realistic writing with lot of emphasis on the Indian middle classes, include *My true Faces* (1973), *Into Another Dawn* (1977) and *The English Queens* (1979), *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981), *Sunrise in Fiji*. Chaman Nahal is an award-winning Indian novelist. His work, *Azadi* was considered as a very fine work of fiction. The novel is a riveting narrative of the conflict-ridden effects of Partition in 1947. Chaman Nahal was born in Sialkot, (formerly in India, now in Pakistan). He educated at the University of Delhi and the University of Nottingham. Since 1949, he went about teaching in many universities across India. His first novel *My True Faces* was followed in 1975 by *Azadi*, which is regarded as his best. His other novels, which are noted for realistic writing with lot of emphasis on the Indian middle classes, include *Into Another Dawn* (1977) and *The English Queens* (1979). Chaman Nahal's writings are known to talk about India without any touch of exoticism. So his works do not portray India as a land of maharajahs, tigers and snake charmers. *Azadi* is the best of the Indian-English novels written about the traumatic partition which accompanied Indian Independence in 1947.

There are some novels which deal with the partition of India as the centre theme. These novels are *The Dark Dancer* (1959) by Balchandra Rajan, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Huain, *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) by Manohar Malgonkar, *The Rape* (1974) by Raj Gill and *When Freedom Came* (1982) by Sharff Mukaddam. In all these novels, the theme of partition is a major preoccupation of the novelists. These novels depict the stupendous historical

events as well as a mere historical chronicles. Therefore, these novels deal with tragic dream of Partition as well as political motif.

Train to Pakistan is a superb book on many levels. This is Khushwant Singh's supreme achievement. It is a documentary of Punjab, its people, its culture. It is a narrative of the gruesome events that burned northern India in 1947. It is a story of the cultural, political, and intellectual atmosphere of India at the time and it succeeds brilliantly. It brings the reader into the picture so vividly, its rather disturbing. How much it'll mean to the readers if they are not familiar with the culture of Punjab. 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. In this view, M. K. Naik remarks :

The impact of Partition on a small village on the Indo-Pakistan border is shown here with pitiless realism of depiction and the swift tempo of the narrative carries the reader along. The integrity of the novel is however flawed in two ways : the only role that Iqbal, the Communist who comes to the village for party work, seems to play is that of acting as the mouthpiece of the author; and there is also the conventionally romance motif of love of Jugga, the Sikh village gangster, for (of course) a Muslim girl, in saving whom he duly sacrifice his life. (Naik, 1982, 230).

The story primarily revolves around a fictional village located along the borders, named by author as Mano Majra. It is the summer of 1947. But Partition does not mean much to the Sikhs and Muslims of Mano Majra, a village on the border of India and Pakistan. Then, a local money-lender is murdered, and suspicion falls upon Juggut Singh, the village gangster who is in love with a Muslim girl. When a train arrives, carrying the bodies of dead Sikhs, the village is transformed into a battlefield, and neither the magistrate nor the police are able to stem the rising tide of violence. Amidst conflicting loyalties, it is left to Juggut Singh to redeem himself and reclaim peace for his village. The story begins with a vivid description of how the village was like. It is followed by a dramatic incident that took place there one night. Khushwant Singh writes :

Mano Majra is a tiny place. It has only three brick buildings, one of which is the home of the moneylender Lala Ram Lal. The other two are the Sikh temple and the mosque There are only about seventy families in Mano Majra, and Lala Ram Lal's is the only Hindu Family. The others are Sikhs or Muslims, about equal in number there is one object that all Mano Majrana – even Lala Ram Lal – venerate. This is a three-foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keener tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the *deo* to which all the villagers – Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or pseudo-Christian – repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing. (2)

Ram Lal, the village money lender is killed by a neighbouring village's dacoit, Malli. Now the story shifts to its main characters Juggut Singh, Iqbal and Hukum Chand. Juggut Singh is arrested as murder suspect by the police. He is portrayed as local badmaash of the village who loves only daughter of half blind mulla of the village named as Nooran. On the other side, Iqbal, a social reformer, is a visiting commie in disguise who wants to mobilize support for the socialist party of India. Then we come across the character of Hukum Chand who is the village magistrate.

Hukum Chand is the regional magistrate, and the most influential character in the story. It becomes apparent that he is a morally conflicted man who has probably used his power over the years with much corruption. He is often described with a dirty physical appearance as if he is overwhelmed with unclean actions and sins, and is just as often trying to wash himself of them,

similar to Pontius Pilate after Christ was condemned. Hukum Chand's ethical issues are shown in one of repeated encounters he has with two geckos, which likely represent Muslims and Hindus in conflict, on the verge of fighting each other. When they start fighting, they fall right next to him, and he panics. The guilt he gets from not helping when he has more than enough power to do so literally jumps onto him.

Hukum Chand felt as if he had touched the lizards and they had made his hands dirty. He rubbed his hands on the hem of his shirt. It was not the sort of dirt which could be wiped off or washed clean (24).

Alcoholism is another tool Hukum Chand uses in attempt to clean his conscience. He feels the guilt of his actions by day and relieved of them by night, when his alcohol is able to justify visits with a teenage prostitute the same age as his deceased daughter. In all his confessions, he is able to acknowledge that what he is doing is bad, but is still unable to promote good.

The descriptions of various characters in the story are presented in great detail that may allow the reader to form picture of what all happened. The village is portrayed to be a peaceful and harmonious place until the seeds of hatred and suspicion were sown. The story can be viewed from different angles. It is a combination of various strains. Humour, violence, cruel events and torture lend it a tinge of the 'picaresque' where the anti-hero, Jugga, plays a dual role of the creator and the destroyer. If it was a love story between a Sikh boy and Muslim girl, it was also a story that depicted the brutalities suffered by the people generated as a result of partition. Not just this, it also tried to show how people viewed famous personalities like Mahatma Gandhi in some way or the other. The bravery of Juggat Singh is brought about in the story, when he attempted to save several innocent lives and his lady-love, Nooran too. The crisis began when the horrifying train with corpses entered the village. Moreover the brutally mutilated bodies evoked the furies and drove the Hindus of Mano Majra to shoo away the Muslims who were till then their good friends and kin-like. Various situations that lead to one incident from another and the author weaves a heart-wrenching story in the backdrop of Partition.

Mano Majra, the fictional village on the border of Pakistan and India in which the story takes place, is predominantly Muslim and Sikh. Singh shows how they lived in a bubble, surrounded by mobs of Muslims who hate Sikhs and mobs of Sikhs who hate Muslims, while in the village they had always lived together peacefully. Villagers were in the dark about happenings of larger scope than the village outskirts, gaining much of their information through rumor and word of mouth. This made them especially susceptible to outside views. Upon learning that the government was planning to transport Muslims from Mano Majra to Pakistan the next day for their safety, one Muslim said, "What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst [Sikhs] as brothers" (126). After the Muslims leave to a refugee camp from where they will eventually go to Pakistan, a group of religious agitators comes to Mano Majra and instills in the local Sikhs a hatred for Muslims and convinces a local gang to attempt mass murder as the Muslims leave on their train to Pakistan.

Partition touched Mano Majra at both levels – at the community level and the individual level. At community level it effects very badly with Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The dark clouds of suspicion and fear arises among the Sikhs and Muslims, who lived together for centuries. Sikhs and Muslims villagers fell into each other's arms and wept like children. In this way, Muslims are evacuated to a refugee camp at Chandannagr, 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 refugee 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.

Juggut, nevertheless, acts on instinct after he found out about the fiasco that was going on, he then sacrifices his life to save the train. After his release, he comes to know about the planned train-attack in which his beloved Nooran was travelling, he resolves to let the train go to Pakistan safely. He is a passionate man of action. He heroically saves the Muslim refugees and falls under the wheels of the train. He saves thousands of Muslim refugees by sacrificing his own life though not for them but for his beloved Nooran. Iqbal spends pages wondering to himself whether he should do something, exposing a moral paradox on the way:

The bullet is neutral. It hits the good and the bad, the important and the insignificant, without distinction. If there were people to see the act of self-immolation...the sacrifice might be worth while: a moral lesson might be conveyed...the point of sacrifice...is the purpose. For the purpose, it is not enough that a thing is intrinsically good: it must be known to be good. It is not enough to know within one's self that one is in the right (170).

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 of the dividing boundary were on the way. They were 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 of growth to a new place of living. It indicates the harrowing progresses of this change, the awful and ghastly experience of human beings involved in a historical, impersonal and dehumanized process.

Train to Pakistan, with its multiple gruesome and explicit accounts of death, torture, and rape for the public to read, makes the case that people do need to know about the bad. According to D. R. More, "Himself a Sikh born in the Punjab, Khushwant Singh has given first-hand portrayal of the genocide, bloodshed, rape and the total holocaust that took place in those fateful days. He comes from the partition-affected area and must have witnessed the tragedy himself" (More, 2008, 58). The story by Khushwant Singh even being a work of fiction is very close to reality in terms of the scenes that are created. The story has a tone that is quite depressing and touches the core of the heart. This book is a must read for all those who want to get a glimpse of what had happened as consequence of one of the most saddened episodes of not just of the history of the subcontinent but also in human history. Khushwant Singh's style is marked by vigour, raciness, clarity and frequent use of the nativization technique. The novel gives a throbbing eyewitness account of the partition episode. He is a master of craftsman. In the words of Iyenger, *Train to Pakistan* is one of the more satisfying 'imaginative records' of the partition tragedy.

Azadi is the majormost novel by Chaman Nahal. The navel, *Azadi* deals with the theme of partition of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. As Chaman Nahal himself was a refugee, he writes with remarkable penetration and realism. The novel is historical, political, and above all, a great work of art. It offers the most comprehensive treatment of the colossal tragedy to date. *Azadi* won the Sahitya Akademi Award. The novel depicts in photographic detail the catastrophic episode that was enacted on the Indian soil immediately before and after the declaration of the British decision in June 1947 to vacate India after partitioning it. *Azadi* is certainly perhaps the most comprehensive presentation of the partition holocaust in Indian

English fiction. It contains some moving episodes. But there are some serious limitations like conventional romantic touches, an over plus of sex and a faulty narrative strategy. It is a matter-of-account of a well-to-do Hindu grain merchant and his family.

The novel begins in mid-1947 with the people of Sialkot learning about the partition, but they cannot digest the fact that they now have to move base. It was the most fateful incident in the history of the Indian subcontinent. It made a very great impact on the Indian people. The Hindus Sikhs and Muslims became enemies of one another. Once they unitedly fought against the British for a long period. Lala Kanshi Ram, the Hindu, Barkat Ali, the Mohammedan, and Teja Singh, the Sikh speak the same language and consider Sialkot their homeland. It gives the detail attentions about the knowledge of the life which makes the novel a pleasure to read. Nahal has presented life-like picture of the period of the Partition. However, the remarkable feature of the narration is the tragic effects of the Partition. We certainly feel horrified when we read this novel. In this civil war, thousands of men from both sides were killed, the murders, massacre, the women rapes, burning, looting and destroying properties, abducted, children mutilated, and the condition of uprooted refugees caused by the partition.

Chaman Nahal expresses one of his memories which was about his meeting with Gandhi, related to the partition, he wrote, "I had been personally exposed to Gandhiji during the last few months of his life. After 1947, he made Birla House in New Delhi his home. Our family by then had migrated from Pakistan to Delhi. And it was possible for me to attend Gandhi's prayer meetings on most evenings. And what caught my eyes was the immense humility of the man. Many of us amongst his listeners were angry young men who had lost everything in Pakistan including the dear ones who were assassinated in the riots. And, we asked Gandhi angry questions, to which he never gave an answer without making us feel that our pain was his pain too. I also saw how plain and ordinary Gandhi was to look at short-statured, thin, with rather common features." (WEB)

According to Chaman Nahal, in his Novel *Azadi*, there was a Hindu - Muslim unity and peaceful life before the Partition. Sialkot was a Muslim dominated city. Yet, there was unity among people of all castes. There was seldom any rivalry between Hindus and Muslims. This fact is presented through the friendship of Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhari Barkat Ali and the love of Arun and Nur. Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhari Barkat Ali were not only friends but just like brothers. Both the families heard each other's happiness and sorrow. Influenced by Gandhi's speech, Chaudhari Barkat Ali says to Lala Kanshi Ram : You are my brother from today. The author adds : "Lala Kanshi Ram chuckled. He had always regarded Chaudhari Barkat Ali as a brother; he did not need Gandhi to make him aware of that". Then, Arun, the son of Lala Kanshi Ram, loves Nural-Nissar, the daughter of Chaudhri Barkat Ali. He is ready to become a Muslim for her sake. Munir advised him to show harmony between Hindus and Muslims.

Hindu revivalists also deepened the chasm between the two nations. They resented the Muslims for their former rule over India. Hindu revivalists rallied for a ban on the slaughter of cows, a cheap source of meat for the Muslims. They also wanted to change the official script form the Persian to the Hindu Devanagri script, effectively making Hindi rather than Urdu the main candidate for the national language. It is on 24th June, that the Muslim friends of Lala Kanshi Ram kill a number of Hindus, and then it becomes a daily ritual. It is reported that Muslims refugees from India come to Sialkot in a wretched condition, telling the stories of molestation and massacre by Hindus and Sikhs. This provokes the Muslims to kill the Hindus in retaliation. Now it is the Hindus who began to go to the refugee camps and then to India.

Lala Kanshi Ram is not ready to leave for India; he is even reluctant to call himself a 'refugee' in his own 'home'. He thinks, "I was born around here, this is my home, how can I be the refugee in my own home." (130). This shows the deep attachment to his home though now it is going to become part of Pakistan, a foreign land, after the unnatural and forced division of the country. This is, indeed, a highly touching and poetic piece in the story.

The 'Lull' is over with Lala Kanshi Ram's leaving for the refugee camp and then the real 'Storm' begins. According to Jha, "The lull of the Book I has erupted into the full-fledged storm of Book II" (Jha, 1978, 116). Then the Book second gives detailed description of the atrocities. As K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger writes :

The 'leaders' had sowed the wind of communal suspicion and partition was the result; like a whirlwind, the mad act of partition was uprooting masses of humanity, mangling them and throwing them across the border heap after heap. (Iyenger, 1962, 498)

When the storm breaks out in the city, Lala, Choudhari even Bill Davidson get depressed. In the refugee camp, Lala receives the news of the death of his daughter, Madhu, who while coming from Wazirabad to Sialkot by a train, is attacked and killed by some frenzied Muslims in addition to the news of the murder of her husband. Madhu's death is the last blow to Lala's 'shattered psyche'. It becomes very difficult for Hindus and Sikhs even to walk on the open street. Everyone, who does not look like a Muslim is stripped to see whether he is circumcised or not as "..... the acid test of being a Muslim lay in on me and only sign, in circumcision" (174).

In spite of several difficulties, Arun and Suraj Prakash got to Barkat Ali and then to the railway station to find out Madhu's dead body. Chaman Nahal gives the horrifying details of the atrocities as below :

..... dismembered limbs, dozens of them legs and arms, and bands and thighs, and feet. The fire had consumed other parts of the bodies; it was the part which had not fully burned that stood out. And there were the skulls. Again dozens of them. Many lay face down, the others faced the sky or looked sideways. Bare jaws, scooped out eye-sockets, gnashing teeth. Very often a skull cracked open with a popping noise, its bones disinteresting into the heap around. Since it was a quite night, the sound came like the crack of rifle; it was an unnerving sound. (183-184)

Lala now insists on leaving for India as early as possible. His faith in the police, army, administration and even in humanity itself dies away. Indian government has sent military troops for the protection and safe evacuation of Hindus and Sikhs. Then begins the episode of mass migration perhaps not witnessed by any period in history. Lala is by now a completely broken man. In this view, M. K. Naik remarks : This account of the migration of Lala Kanshi Ram, a Sialkot merchant and his family to India at the time of the dismemberment of colonial India into two nations in 1947, is easily one of the most comprehensive fictional accounts of the Partition holocaust in Indian English Literature. (Naik, 1982, 243) The novelist describes the strange atrocities committed not merely by the frenzied Muslims but also by the police, the military, and above all the government itself.

The plight of the Sikhs is the worst as it is very easy to recognize a Sikh by his turban and beard. So with the fear of being recognized, many Sikhs cut their hair off, though it is against their religion. Niranjana Singh, a headstrong Sikh youth, refuses to cut his hair. However, Lala tries to persuade the Sikhs to get his hair clipped. Now Lala's philosophy is 'survival first, then everything else'. Sikhs, on the other hand, remain unchanged maligned. The news of many more atrocities, rapes, train attacks pours in. The military officer, Gurkha Jung Bahadur Singh, prepares a perfect plan of migration. Due to the non-cooperation of Pakistan government, the movement of the convey is delayed by several days. When on the first day of March, the

migrants leave Sialkot, Choudhary Barakat Ali and his son, Munir, come to see them off. The relationship between Choudhary Barkat Ali and Lala is like an oasis in the desert. Lala is also shocked to see some Hindus converted to Muslim religion. For instance, Gangu Mull becomes Ghulam Mohammad only to save his life and property.

Now the helpless refugees want to reach India at their earliest. The first attack is followed by the second and then the third, killing hundreds of Hindus and Sikhs. They reached Narowal on the ninth day hardly eight miles distance from India. At Narowal, Muslims take out a parade of naked women on the main street only to humiliate the refugees. Nahal describes the pathetic scene :

Many of the kidnapped women disappeared into private homes. A lone Muslim dragged a woman away, and kept her with the consent of other Muslims, converted her to Islam, and got married to her. The rest were subjected to mass rape, at times in public places and in the presence of large gatherings. The rape was followed by other atrocities, chopping off the breasts, and even death. Many of pregnant women had their wombs torn open. The survivors were retained for repeated rapes and humiliations, until they were parcelled out to decrepit the aged, the leftovers who could not find a wife, or those Muslims who wanted an additional wife. In the meantime more women were abducted and the cycle was repeated all over again. (293-294).

On the Indian side, the situation is not different from the one on the Pakistan side. Lala Kanshi Ram comes with his family first to Amritsar and then to Delhi. He witnessed the identical scenes in India too. He observes the parade of naked women in India too. Amritsar was bombed. He knows what happened in Sialkot also the same happened in India. So Lala Kanshi Ram stopped hating Muslims. Nahal presents the reality very objectively :

Whatever the Muslims did to us in Pakistan, we are doing it to them here! But they killed thousands of us without reason, raped our women, drove us out of our homes. We are the same-exactly the same. (338)

Thus, in spite of the melodramatic description of rapes and killing, and a romantic love-affair at the centre of the novel, Nahal has successfully projected *Azadi* as perhaps, the best novel on the theme of the partition. He displays a wonderful belief in forgiveness and adds, "We have sinned as much. We need their forgiveness." (340) It shows his noble heart rich with human values. This novel superbly manifests the psychology of the victims of the partition as exemplified by Lala Kanshi Ram, Barkat Ali Khan, Bill Davidson, Arun and Nur. According to D. R. More, "A searching probe into the mind of men or society gives a novel a lasting power and not a mere documentation of facts and realities. The actions and reactions of the characters must throw light on human behaviour under different situations. *Azadi* stands this test." (More, 2008, 120).

Overall Chaman Nahal ended his novel with a sadly depleted family trying to begin a new life in Delhi. *Azadi* has none of the sensationalism of other novels about India's partition, such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* or Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*. Nahal shows the cruelty as well as the humanity of both sides. The novel also shows the maturing of Arun, Kanshi Ram's only son, but the account of his love, first for Nur, the Muslim girl left behind in Pakistan, and then for Chandni, a low-caste girl who is abducted on the way to India, is not as gripping as the rest of the novel. In this way, Nahal portrays Indian panorama very realistically on the impact of partition on Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities.

Conclusion

Both novels depict what was happening during the partition. Both novelists portray in their respective novels at the time of partition, the condition of villages, romantic love, effect of partition on community. In both novels train carries people those who moved as refugee to leave the beloved country though intended. It touched the whole country from west to east and also the north. There were senseless killing, looting, burning and raping at both countries. Thus, both novels remain significant as a true representative of Indian Writing in English.

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