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Lover's Sacrifice for Love at the Altar of Country's Partition in Khushwant Sing's *Train to Pakistan*

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Khushwant Sing's *Train to Pakistan* is perhaps his best novel; most sensitive. Sex as an aspect of love as the author cherishes as an invariable aspect of it is present here too but not so prominently over the real love involving not only senses but mind and heart and psyche. The situation here is serious and grave involving the life of men and the country. The independence of India is linked with the birth of Pakistan, the cause of serious communal frenzy. The independence was achieved through massacre and bloodbath, vivisectioning the age old India. The time is infernally disturbed by communal distrust and violent riot between the communities; a war inside the country due to the birth pang of another country. But who could arrest the course of love which was born before the partition and the birth of the countries?

The author has utilized the situation effectively in his novel by creating chasm between pure love and nauseating man made outer circumstances. Love succeeded in death defying all outer obstructions. Love to save the beloved saved the enemies from a communal point of view.

Let us see the quality of the story, its pros and cons, as we proceed through it, while assessing the quality of the work. I always use the narrative as the base to criticize a work of fiction to help readers to relish the story while realising the worth of it.

At deep night when others sleep Juggut Singh, the hero of the novel, came out of his house in utter disagreement with his mother.

"He struck his spear in the ground with the blade pointing upward, then stretched out on the sand. He lay on his back and gazed at the stars. A meteor shot across the Milky Way, trailing a silver path down the blue-black sky. Suddenly a hand was on his eye.

"Guess who?"

"Juggut Singh stretched out his hands over his head and behind him, groping; the girl dodged them. Juggut Singh started with the hand on his eyes and felt his way up from the arm to the shoulder and then on to the face. He caressed her cheeks, eyes and nose that his hands knew so well. He tried to play with her lips to induce them to kiss his fingers. The girl opened her mouth and bit him fiercely. Juggut Singh jerked his hand away. With a quick movement he caught the girl's head in both his hands and brought her face over to his. Then he slipped his arms under her waist and hoisted her into the air above him with her arms and legs kicking about like a crab. He turned her about till his arms ached. He brought her down upon him limb to limb.

"The girl slapped him on the face.

"You put your hands on the person of a strange woman. Have you not mother or sister in your home? Have you no shame? No wonder the police have got you on their register as a bad character. I will also tell the Inspector Sahib that you are a budmash."

"I am only budmash with you, Nooro. We should both be locked up in the same cell."

"You have learnt to talk too much. I will have to look for another man."

"Juggat Singh crossed his arms behind the girl's back and crushed her till she could not talk or breathe." (Pakistan /21-22)

Goods train passed whistling and storks flew up from pond to the river. Then there was gunshot and dacoits passed them at a distance of a few yards. In spite of everything the budmash, well known in his locality as a marked criminal, had his way through the body of the girl in tears ignoring her wishes. The night was spent in fear and passion. The enemies were nearby. They finally left before dawn. The girl walked back home behind the armed escort, her lover.

This was a bodily affair between the two lovers but the way it happened hinted at their long standing relationship; a relationship sensual yet beyond the physical and mental, moving towards the psychic.

The Sikhs and Muslims of the remote frontier area of the country, Mano Majra, were entirely in amity. But the Hindu Muslim disharmony in the entire country and the recent situation of the arrival of a train load of dead Sikh bodies was very grave which compelled the Muslims to leave their own village for fear of retaliation, for the unknown Pakistan.

“The Lambardar 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. Imam Baksh gently got out of the Lambardar’s embrace. ‘There is no need to cry,’ he said between sobs, ‘This is the way of the world’-” (Pakistan/149)

At night when Nooro was sleeping her father, Imam Baksh, hurriedly came to wake her up to tell, “‘Get up and pack. We have to go away tomorrow morning,’ he announced dramatically.

“‘Go away? Where?’

“‘I don’t know . . . Pakistan!’

“‘The girl sat up with a jerk. ‘I will not go to Pakistan,’ she said defiantly.” (Pakistan/150)

When her father who was a local leader left she went out faintly hoping that Jugga who was in jail, might be released in this situation as such other persons were released. At night she came to Jugga’s house where only his mother lived and finding the door bolted with chain from outside waited for long in rains.

“Some people while passing through the muddy lane shook the door and immediately there was response, ‘Who is it?’ Afraid, Nooran kept mum and when there was angry demand to know who it was, she said indistinctly, ‘Beybey.’ She asked if he was her son.

“‘No, Beybey, it is I- Nooran, Chacha Imam Baksh’s daughter,’ answered the girl timidly.

“‘Nooro?’

“‘Has Jugga come back?’

“‘What have you to do with Jugga?’ His mother snapped. ‘You have sent him to jail. You have made him budmash. Does your father know you go about to strangers’ houses at midnight like a tart?’

“Nooran began to cry, ‘We are going away tomorrow.’ That did not soften the old woman’s heart.”

“Nooran played her last card. ‘I cannot leave. Jugga has promised to marry me.’

“‘Get out, you bitch!’ the old woman hissed, ‘You, a Muslim weaver’s daughter, marry a Sikh peasant! Get out or I will go and tell your father and the whole village. Go to Pakistan! Leave my Jugga alone.’” (Pakistan/151-152)

Nooro touched her feet, clung to it and seemed to say something more when the woman sensed a premonition.

“‘What have you to say now? ‘Beybey! Beybey! Why don’t you say something?’ Asked the woman, pushing Nooran away. ‘What is it?’

“‘The girl swallowed the spittle in her mouth.

“‘Beybey, I have Jugga’s child inside me. If I go to Pakistan they will kill it when they know it has a Sikh father.’

“‘The old woman let Nooran’s head drop back on her feet. Nooran clutched them hard and began to cry again.

“‘How long have you had it?’

“‘I have just found out. It is the second month.’

“‘Jugga’s mother helped Nooran up and the two sat down on the charpoy. Nooran stopped sobbing.

“‘I cannot keep you here,’ said the old woman at last. ‘I have enough trouble with the police already. When all this is over and Jugga comes back, he will go and get you from wherever you are. Does your father know?’

“‘No! If he finds out he will marry me off to someone or murder me.’ She started crying again

“‘Beybey, if I get the chance I will come to say ‘Sat Sri Akal’ in the morning. Sat Sri Akal. I must go and pack.’

“‘Nooran hugged the old woman passionately. ‘Sat Sri Akal,’ she said a little breathlessly again and went out.” (Pakistan/152-153)

The above situation describes with ample reasons how the generally deteriorating communal atmosphere of the country affected the lives of individuals. Here the lovers cause the situation to change to the extent shown in the novel by the pull of the string of love.

Magistrate Hukum Chand had almost sleepless night at the possible development in areas under his administration. The police inspector called on him, remaining at his beck and call. The magistrate suddenly said, “‘What about Jugga’s weaver girl you told me about? What was her name?’

“‘Nooran.’

“‘Ah yes. Nooran. Where is she?’

“‘She has left. Her father was a sort of leader of the Muslims of Mano Majra. The lambardar told me a great deal about him. He had just one child, this girl Nooran; she is the one alleged to be carrying on with the dacoit Jugga.’

“‘And this other fellow, didn’t you say he was a political worker of some sort?’

“‘Yes, Sir. People’s Party or something like that. I think he is a Muslim Leaguer masquerading under a false label. I examined . . .’” (Pakistan/182)

In the course of talks the Magistrate corrected the inspector, telling that he was Iqbal Singh, a Sikh and that only a Sikh might come into the area in such a situation to preach peace among them, never any educated Muslim. With all insight he asked for official paper from the police and signed order to release Jugga budmash and Iqbal Singh who were in custody, asking him to help them get a tonga to go to Mano Majra. The order was carried out meticulously.

After the release, “‘Jugga’s immediate concern was the fate of Nooran. He did not look at his companions in the tonga or in the villages At the back of his mind persisted a feeling that Nooran would be at Mano Majra. No one could have wanted Imam Baksh to go. Even if he had left with the other Muslims, Nooran would be hiding somewhere in the fields, or

would have come to his mother. He hoped his mother had not turned her out. If she had, he would let her have it. He would walk out and never come back. She would spend the rest of her days regretting having done it.” (Pakistan /188-189)

Coming up to this we can understand the subtle sense and shrewdness of the magistrate in anticipating the course of action the dacoit would take after being released, based upon his long experience in dealing with such characters like Jugga. In spite of the presence of criminality in him, the Magistrate perceived that his love for the Muslim girl was genuine and that such impetuous love would seek to find its way by all means to save his lover at all cost and that would be the cause for a release from the oppressive situation. Though not exactly, the Magistrate hoped for this, intuitively.

A great upheaval was going through the borders of the country. Millions were disturbed. Thousands were being brutally and blindly butchered as it was precipitated due to the haste and greed of the leaders eager to snatch power at any cost, even at the cost of the people whom they represented. History has recorded how M. K. Gandhi and his followers failed to prevail upon communal amity among the warring people using all their goodwill in a situation when Jinnah and his followers declared partition of the country as their goal. The people were neither clear of their goal nor about their claim but passionately clung to their leader who in demanding for partition relied entirely on people’s communal zeal and rivalry. Though the Magistrate with all insight and experience took the move of releasing the two arrested persons at the last moment, he became skeptical at his own actions, was torn asunder for his possible failure. The writer has brought the scene of anxiety of the Magistrate alive.

“Hukum Chand was also uneasy about his own role. Was it enough to get others to do the work for him? Magistrates were responsible for maintenance of law and order. But they maintained order with power behind them; not opposing them. Where was the power? What were the people in Delhi doing? Making speeches in the assembly! Loud-speakers magnifying their egos; lovely-looking foreign women in the visitors’ galleries in breathless admiration. ‘He is a great man, this Mr. Nehru of yours. I do think he is the greatest man in the world today. And how handsome! Wasn’t that a wonderful thing to say? ‘Long ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge’” Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, you made your tryst. So did many others- on the 15th August, Independence Day.” (Pakistan/201)

The writer is ruthless in his criticism of the leader who jumped for grasping the power at all cost, even at the cost of bloodbath of the people. All powers were perhaps in one hand so the others of the country were powerlessly butchered. Few ambitious people reaped the benefit of independence and partition and greater patriots suffered with vulnerable people. The writer hints at the historic moment when the would-be Prime Minister was uttering high sounding hollow words witnessed by Lady Mountbatten.

Events were taking shape very fast. Let us understand the position from the following conversation:

“‘Bhaiji, what has been happening?’ Iqbal asked again.

“‘What has been happening? Ask me what has not been happening. Trainloads of dead people came to Mano Majra. We burned one lot and buried another. The river was flooded with corpses. Muslims were evacuated and in their place, refugees have come from Pakistan. What more do you want to know?’

“‘Tell me, was there a killing in the village?’

“‘No,’ said the bhai casually ‘But there will be. . . .’

“‘What do you mean- there will be killing?’ asked Iqbal, plugging the end of the mattress.
“‘All Muslims have left, haven’t they?’

“‘Yes, but they are going to attack the train near the bridge tonight. It is taking Muslims of Chundunnugger and Mano Majra to Pakistan. Your pillow is full of air.’

“‘Yes. Who are they? Not the villagers?’

“‘I don’t know all of them. Some people in uniforms came in military cars. They had pistols and guns. The refugees have joined them. So have Malli budmash and his gang- and some villagers. . . .

“‘I see,’ said Iqbal Bhaiji, can’t you stop it? They all listen to you.’

“‘Who listens to an old bhai? These are bad times, Iqbal Singhji, very bad times. There is no faith or religion’” (Pakistan/191-92)

But here in this story the conclusion was happy indeed, coinciding with the Magistrate’s rare intuitive action. It is the last chapter of the novel, the last scene of this Act.

“A little after eleven, the moon came up. It looked tired and dissipated. It flooded the plain with a weary pale light in which everything was a little blurred The high railway embankment cast a wall of dark shadow.

“The signal scaffolding stood like an enormous sentry watching over the scene. Two large oval eyes, one on top of the other, glowed red. The two hands of the signal stood stiffly parallel to each other. The bushes along the bank looked like a jungle. The river did not glisten; it was like a sheet of slate with just a suspicion of a ripple here and there.

“The men had spread themselves on either side of the railway line a few feet from each other. They sat on their haunches with their rifles and spears between their legs. On the first steel span of the bridge a thick rope was tied horizontally above the railway line. It was about twenty feet above the track.

“It was too dark for men to recognise each other. So they talked loudly. Then somebody called.

‘Silence! Listen!’

“They listened. It was nothing. Only the wind in the reeds

“They began to talk in whispers.

“There was a shimmy-shammy noise of trembling steel wires as one of the signals came down. Its oval eye changed from red to a bright green. The whispering stopped. The men got up and took their positions ten yards away from the track.

“There was a steady rumbling sound punctuated by soft puffs-puffs. A man ran up to the line and put his ear on the steel rail.

“‘Come back, you fool,’ yelled the leader in a hoarse whisper.

“‘It is the train,’ he announced triumphantly.

“‘Go back!’ repeated the leader fiercely.

“All eyes strained toward the grey space where the rumbling of the train came from. Then they shifted to the rope, stiff as a shaft of steel. If the train was fast it might cut many people in two like a knife slicing cucumbers. They shuddered.

“A long way beyond the station, there was a dot of light. It went out and another came up nearer. . . .

“A man started climbing on the steel span. He was noticed only when he had got to the top where the rope was tied. They thought he was testing the knot The man stretched himself on the rope. His feet were near the knot; his hands almost reached the centre of the rope. He was a big man.

“The train got closer and closer. The demon from the engine with sparks flying from its funnel came up along the track. Its puffing was drowned in the roar of the train itself. The whole train could be seen clearly against the wan moonlight. From the coal-tender to the tail end, there was a solid crust of human beings on the roof.

“The man was still stretched on the rope.

“The leader stood up and shouted hysterically: ‘Come off, you ass! You will be killed. Come off at once!’

“The man turned round towards the voice. He whipped out a small kirpan from his waist and began to slash at the rope.

“‘Who is he? What is he . . . ?’

“There was no time. They looked from the bridge to the train, from the train to the bridge. The man hacked the rope vigorously.

“The leader raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired. He hit his mark and one of the man’s legs came off the rope and dangled in the air. The other was still twined round the rope. He slashed away in frantic haste. The engine was only a few yards off, throwing embers high up in the sky. Somebody fired another shot. The man’s body slid off the rope, but he clung to it with his hands and chin. He pulled himself up, caught the rope under his left armpit, and again started hacking with his right hand. The rope had been cut in shreds. Only a thin tough strand remained. He went at it with the knife, and then with his teeth. The engine was almost on him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went to Pakistan.” (Pakistan/204-207)

The end is something contrived towards its dramatic end. But then, it may be said that fact is stranger than fiction and when love’s force resolved to sacrifice for the lover, one great and adventurous sacrifice for saving one life only saved a trainload of lives. The story is worth reading on such a living subject as the partition of India; more romantic than the verbal tryst with the destiny for it was the destiny of the men sacrificed at the evil altar of partition.

The area of life and the situation of the country covered by the novel are most dramatic. It carries the heart of the readers with it as it is not a communal fight, not a challenge against the society but the force of love trying to save the lover saves all the passengers. The writer is successful in proving how the evil force proves beneficial in particular situation. Love reconciles all contraries but it is not body-bound love. It goes far beyond to embrace the whole earth. Train to Pakistan is a historic novel dealing with the actual turn of history making it further dramatic by a turn of wild imagination.

The scenes depicted, characters presented and the situations described in the novel recreate the happenings in such a way that there remains no doubt about the fact as in the novel. The little chance of showing sensual love has been characteristically utilised by the writer but the whole situation of the novel is so serious, demanding the other actions above the sensual love only, that the writers moves away from it keeping a sense of higher urge of sacrifice for such a love. Love is freed from its pettiness and raised to its higher realm of surrender and sacrifice.

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