

MODERN HUMANISM IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN**Chintamani Yashwantrao Jadhav**Asso. Prof. and Head, Department of English, Doodhsakhar Mahavidyalaya, Bidri, Tal-Kagal,
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Received: July 08, 2018

Accepted: August 16, 2018

ABSTRACT

In the modern age, the world has become small. So also man is also becoming self-centred. On this background, the need of treating man as human being has arisen very urgently. So after two world wars in the 20th century human concern became the focus in the writing of 20th century. The aftermath of independence has figured in the novels of Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Attia Hosain, Chaman Nahal and Salman Rushdie among others.

This paper attempts how humanism has reflected in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan. Humanism is a philosophy which has the welfare of man as its central theme. Train to Pakistan is a great novel that describes with anguish and passion the gruesome tale of partition and its aftermath. Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan is an epoch-making novel which describes not only the terror and tumult at the time of partition of the country, but also lays stress on the values dear to human beings. Khushwant Singh has very artistically made the novel a mirror of the age which reflects not only its external feature but also its inner face.

Thus, we see Khushwant Singh as the champion of the cause of humanism.

Keywords: *Need of being human, treating man as human, its reflection, common man, Jugga's struggle, his ultimate death, saves the train, truly noble act of humanism.*

Khushwant Singh ranks among India's distinguished men of letters on account of his achievement as a novelist, journalist, historian, translator, and short-story writer. His novel *Train to Pakistan* brought him recognition and wide acclaim. The novel won for him the coveted Grove Press India Fiction Prize for the year 1956. *Train to Pakistan* earned for Singh a place in the galaxy of Indian fiction writers of fifties.

Luxuries and comforts created by the machine age affected man on the larger scale. Modern advancements made the world smaller for man. Similarly men also become small, selfish and self-centered. Literature being the mirror of the society reflected this entire changing panorama. Human concern became the focus in the writing of 20th century. Humanism as defined by the New Oxford Dictionary is an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human nature rather than divine or supernatural matters. Humanist belief stresses the potential value and goodness of human beings, emphasizes common human needs, and seeks solely rational ways of solving human problems. Humanism is always a victory for the total human understanding, feeling and values. It is a philosophy which has the welfare of man as its central theme. According to the philosophy of humanism, man is supreme not in the field of reality but in the field of values.

Modern humanism, also called Naturalistic Humanism, Scientific Humanism, Ethical Humanism, and Democratic Humanism, is defined by one of its leading proponents, Corliss Lamont, as, "a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion" ([https:// americanhumanist.org](https://americanhumanist.org)) modern humanism has a dual origin, both secular and religious, and these constitute its sub-categories. Keeping this in mind both Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is analyzed in the present paper.

The freedom struggle in India caught the imagination of the people and some of the Indian English novelists highlighted this struggle in their works. The aftermath of independence has figured in the novels of Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Attia Hosain, Chaman Nahal and Salman Rushdie among others. Though Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is mainly concerned with theme of partition and its aftermath, in the process it reveals social reality and humanistic concerns. Khushwant Singh exhibits a genuine faith in the humanistic ideal in *Train to Pakistan*. Unlike the novelists who are contended to depict simply the sordid actualities of life, Khushwant Singh goes deeper and deeper in ethical humanism. It shows how human love, compassion and brotherhood can assuage the wounds caused by man's hatred for his fellow men in times of great divides. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is one of the finest humanistic novels to emerge out of the trauma of partition. It examines with clinical intensity the harsh facts of inhuman bestialities of life and shows how human love can transcend all man-made barriers and boundaries to confront and overcome such catastrophe. Khushwant Singh attacks the narrow concept of religion and upholds the values of human

life such as love, affection and brotherhood. Jugga's supreme self-sacrifice for Nooran shows the triumph of love and of faith in the goodness of man in moments of challenge and crisis.

Train to Pakistan is a great novel that describes with anguish and passion the gruesome tale of partition and its aftermath. Khushwant Singh is totally objective in his portrayal of man's inhumanity to man. Singh's humanism in *Train to Pakistan* is characteristically human and not supernatural, it belongs to man and not to external nature; it raises man to his greatest height or gives him as man, his greatest satisfaction, apt to be called human. Singh emphasizes human dignity, individual freedom, social justice and cultural values. This defines his humanistic bent of mind.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is an epoch-making novel which describes not only the terror and tumult at the time of partition of the country, but also lays stress on the values dear to human beings. These values come into focus in Jugga's final act of sacrifice. With the passage of time Jugga learns to transcend a narrow idea of communal harmony and his mind is now ruled by pity, compassion and love. His individual consciousness in the end matures and develops into a national consciousness, rather a purely humanistic consciousness. Thus, the dominant theme in this novel is indeed that of humanistic concerns. The partition was not only a political tragedy but also a human tragedy where the core of human values and faith was shaken. When partition became imminent all communities - Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs - blamed each other but the fact remains as Khushwant Singh states in the novel: "Both sides killed. Both shot - and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped" (1).

The dehumanizing process of partition shadowed beliefs, goodness, brotherhood and all other good values. The harrowing experiences of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs alike were such that there was a severe destruction of human values. People were divorced from their beliefs and indulged in heinous acts in a collective frenzy caused by evil designs Khushwant Singh has very artistically made the novel a mirror of the age which reflects not only its external feature but also its inner face.

Khushwant Singh is the champion of the cause of humanism. In his novel he reveals the inhumanity inflicted on the various sections of the society. In his novel he portrays the class-hatred, race-hatred and inhuman cruelty. Singh has great faith in man. As a committed writer, he deals with the theme of humanism in *Train to Pakistan*. His *Train to Pakistan* not only presents reflection of actual life, but also arouses our sympathy. In it, the impact of partition on a small village, Mano Majra is shown with accurate realism. Here the village serves as the 'microcosm' of India. Singh is spoken of as an apostle of social humanism. It is the value of love that Khushwant Singh celebrates in his novel. In this sense V. A. Shahane aptly observes:

The value of love is the essence of his novel *Train to Pakistan* in spite of its portrayal of dark, rigid realities and grim horror. *Train to Pakistan* is Khushwant Singh's masterpiece and is as central to his achievement as *The Serpent and the Rope* is to Raja Rao's or *The Guide* to R.K. Narayan's (Shahane 1972:73).

Train to Pakistan differs from most of the novels on partition in respect of canvas and unity of time, place and action. It has great unity of time and place. Its action centers in the vicinity of Mano Majra and it covers a period of not more than a month.

In fact the novel opens with foreboding of ill omen:

The summer of 1947 was not like Indian summers. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. It was hotter than usual, and drier and dustier. And the summer was longer. No one could remember when the monsoon had been so late. For weeks, the sparse clouds cast only shadows. There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins (1).

With the arrival of the 'ghost trains' in Mano Majra, the calmness of the village gets shattered. The tense situation is aptly articulated by Khushwant Singh in the opening paragraph of *Kalyug*: "Early in September, the time in the Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual ... children did not know when to be hungry ... Goods trains had stopped running altogether ... Instead, ghost train went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra" (81). Imam Baksh who has borne the death of his wife and only son is so shocked that he forgets to do his evening prayer for the first time in his life. The decision of partition shook the roots of togetherness that was centuries old. It created a mournful numbness and then weep. The people of Mano Majra still had some amount of sanity, wisdom, humanity and fellow feeling. This is clear as one of the Muslims amidst the crowd of Sikhs says, what have we to do with Pakistan? We are born, here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brother. It is hence the peasant folk of Mano Majra; especially the Sikhs cannot deny shelter to the terror-stricken refugees. To them hospitality was not a pastime but a sacred duty. Friendship and philosophy was the be-all and end-all of their life. Their amity and integration is shattered by the ghost train. People in Mano

Majra, though illiterate and superstitious, were God fearing and religious. They had their own code of morality in which friendship was above everything else:

The Punjabi's code was... truth, honour, financial integrity were 'all right', but these were placed lower down the scale of values than being true to one's salt, to one's friends and fellow villagers. For friends you could lie in court or cheat, and no one would blame you. On the contrary, you became a *naradmi* – a he-man who had defined authority (magistrate and police) and religion (oath on the scripture) but proved true to friendship (44).

Khushwant Singh unmasks the hypocrisy and duplicity of the civilized society. Initially, the novel focuses attention on the inseparable bonds of friendship between the two communities in Mano Majra – the Sikhs and the Muslims. The Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs live in amity and harmony in the village. The houses in the village are a cluster of flat-roofed mud huts with low-walled courtyards which open on narrow lanes. The villagers out of respect and love call the Muslim Mullah, Chacha Immam; Bhai Meet Singh. There are the sweepers whose religion is uncertain. The women after their mid-day meal are seen rubbing clarified butter into each other's hair, discussing births, marriages and deaths. Apart from this picture of harmonious rural life, there is also a harmony in the social and cultural life of Mano Majra. There is a central point of gravitation in the village – 'Slab of Sandstone'. All the communities of the village venerate it. It is the local deity, the 'deo' to which all the villagers – Hindu, Muslim and Sikh – repair whenever they are in special need of blessing. Thus, the religious diversities are overcome by the centre of pristine and divine power. From the point of the present study; it is a point of worth consideration that the people of Mano Majra feel a sense of unity in their religious attitude to life.

This unity is a living force in Mano Majra. When the Muslim weaver's wife and their only son die within a few days of each other, and his eyesight becomes worse and he is unable to work, and is reduced to beggary with a baby girl, Nooran, the villagers bring him small offerings of flour, vegetables, food and cast-off clothes. This defines their humanism as M. Tarinayya writes: "There is no feeling whatever of their giving and receiving it an 'offering' is for they respect him as much as they love him" (Tarinayya 1970:194).

The head constable's visit had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a part of butter. As Muslims sat and moped in their houses, the Sikhs were sullen and angry too. As the village gets divided, the Muslims and the Sikhs gather in separate groups and talk of inhuman savagery of each other. The last Guru of Sikhs had warned them that Muslims had no loyalties and hence they have developed the attitude of "Never trust a Musalman".

Still then, the rumours and hearsay, however, do not divide the village. They have age-old friendship. The communal harmony remains intact. However, sensing danger to their Muslim brothers from the outsiders coming into the village, especially the refugees from Pakistan, the Sikhs of Mano Majra advise the Muslims to leave the village for the refugee camps as long as the storm of communal warfare doesn't settle down. When the Muslims are asked to leave Mano Majra for refugee camp, lest they be tortured by refugees, Imam Baksh is moved. Here Khushwant Singh writes:

Imam Baksh wiped a tear from his eyes and blew his nose in the hem of his shirt.

'What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived among at you as brothers'. Imam Baksh broke down. Meet Singh clasped him in his arms and began to sob. Several of the people started crying quietly and blowing their noses (133).

Khushwant Singh draws our attention to the tenacity of the bonds of friendship between the Sikhs and the Muslims of the village in an all-enveloping wave of communal discord. All the villagers of Mano Majra come to the conclusion, after much deliberation, that in the interest of the Muslim themselves, it will be better for them to leave the village. The Lambardar says, "It is for your own safety that I advise you to take shelter in the camp for a few days and then you can come back" (135).

Sikh and Muslim villagers fall into each other's arms and weep like children. On the eve of the departure of Muslims not many people slept in the village that night. They went from house to house talking, crying, swearing love and friendship, assuring each other that this would soon be over.

The departure of Muslims from Mano Majra is symbolic of human solidarity and faith. It is so gratifyingly pathetic to see Sikhs greeting Muslims with "Salam" and the Muslims wishing them back with "Sat Sri Akal". All fell into each other's arms and cried. This is the best example of ethical humanism ever.

In fact the partition plunged India into a blood-bath. But all this is given hint of and not directly shown as the sample village Mano Majra has witnessed no communal riots, no act of bloody vengeance. By and large, they are still committed to peace and brotherhood. But the partition shook the roots of togetherness that were centuries old.

The departure of the Muslims of Mano Majra splits the composite culture of the village. Khushwant Singh portrays this split symbolically through the love story of Jugga and Nooran. In this context Jagdev

Singh writes: “What strikes us in the love story of Jugga and Nooran is the way human love breaks the barriers man in his ignorance has erected – barriers of caste, sub-caste, religion and nationality and responds to the subtle vibrations of the heart and seeks fulfillment”(Singh 2001:72).

Jugga does everything he can to assert the nobility of his self. Interestingly enough, this noble task is given to Jugga by the novelist only to express his rage against the power-hungry politicians. Jugga transcends himself. Jugga’s sacrifice is an act of self-redemption. Khushwant Singh’s enduring faith in the values of love; loyalty and humanity make the novel a classic. Jugga is humane. The avenger’s plan to cause a gruesome accident on the train and massacre its passengers bound for Pakistan is averted by Jugga, a confirmed ruffian with human heart. He is stuffed with the so-called innate goodness of man. Jugga is killed by his co-religionists. His heroic death is a sacrifice, an act of self-immolation that unveils the hypocrisy and duplicity on which the so-called civilized society thrives. The train to Pakistan reveals the humanity in Jugga. The love of Jugga and Nooran is no ordinary love. Khushwant Singh invests it with symbolic significance. The love of Nooran has a sublimating effect on a hardened criminal like Jugga. It is through Jugga, the heroic spirit of man is revealed in the novel. Though, he is unique, he is the most convincing character. As Harish Raizada observes:

Through a creation of the author’s imagination, Jugga is one of the most convincing and credible of the characters portrayed in the novel for in him one find the synthesis of good and bad in the same proportion as human life presents (Raizada1988:163).

Though, Jugga is a noted dacoit he has in him enough of humanism, love and affection. Jugga’s ethical morality is free from religion. His act of self-sacrifice and humanism is his own choice and not imposed by anyone. Jugga’s sense of oneness affected by the love of Nooran makes him to take the *Kirpan* in defense of the Muslims. Significantly enough, Jugga’s struggle and ultimate death to save the train is truly noble act of humanism. However, the ultimate optimism of Khushwant Singh is shown in the end that shows the victory of virtue and love over vice and hatred even in the moments of madness.

Thus, besides the horrors of the partition, the novel is a story of the human factor of love and sympathy. So we can say that *Train to Pakistan* is the finest example of this noblest modern humanism.

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