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Portrayal of Partition and Human Emotions by Khushwant Singh in 'Train to Pakistan'

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Abstract:

The partition of India and Pakistan is a highly debatable event, the decision of partition was taken in haste and the concerns of masses that were really going to be affected were not given enough time to make preparations of the unknown journey they had to take. Thus, they began their independence by being abandoned, looted, killed or ravished by people belonging to different religions. Actually, they became preys of the religious tensions aroused and designed by few fanatic leaders, who created a rift between Hindus and Muslims. Vandals also took undue advantage as they freely looted the masses and killed people. Even, girls and women became an easy victim to be insulted and humiliated as they were publically raped and brutally killed. Humanity seemed to be dead and silent. But, amidst this communal frenzy, still there were few people who retained their emotions and humane values and were not ready to be a part of massacre or riots or vandalism. And amongst them was Jugga or Juggut Singh, who appeared as a real martyr as he went against his own community with unshaken faith and virtues alive in him. On the other hand, there were other non-Muslim Manomajrans who didn't want to hurt their fellow villagers yet, they were dumbstruck by the contemporary events. This paper is an attempt to show a victory of human feelings as the feelings of love, attachment, compassion over the agonies of partition.

Keywords: partition, emotions, martyr, supreme sacrifice

1. Introduction (Khushwant Singh at a Glance)

“Those who want Khalistan, can have it in Ecuador, they can have it in the South Pole but they will not have it in India.”

These lines could be declaration of a literary ‘lion’ that had a daring heart and truthful voice to roar in front of the violent and aggressive mob demanding for Khalistan in 19 April 1978. So, he was,

“Man of many parts, unique in many ways? There isn't another like him. Probably there never will be. His writings are like a Scandinavian breakfast buffet - smorgsbond - so varied they are in style, content and gravity... one may like him or hate him, but one thing about him is without denial, like the Qutab Minar or India-Gate, he has become an institution.”

In fact, he is one of those rare and eminent writers who have a courageous and open attitude towards his readers to expose the stark realities of life and who have influential and arrogant voice to awake his readers from slumbers. This characteristic of Khushwant Singh has made him an ‘iconoclast’ and multi-faceted personality who,

“ranks among India's distinguished men of letters... who have attained an international reputation. Even a brief account of his achievement as a novelist, short story writer, historian, essayist, journalist, and editor should be enough to establish his status in Indo-English writing and bring out his versatility.”

Khushwant Singh is also known for his clear-cut secularism, wit and a deep passion for poetry. His assessment and comparison of social and behavioral traits of people from India and west is full of outstanding wit. In July 2000, he was conferred the ‘the Honest Man of the Year’ award by Sulabh International Social Service organization for his courage and honesty in his brilliant incisive writing the award ceremony. Then, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh described him a

“humorous writer and incorrigible believer in human goodness with a devil may-care attitude and a courageous mind.”

2. Portrayal of Partition and Human Emotion

The novel ‘Train to Pakistan’, initially ‘won him international acclaim and Grove Press Award in 1954. Mano Majra remains as ‘oases of peace’ amongst ‘a scatter of little villages lost in the remote of frontier.(TP-2) Thus, in the novel initially we find the general atmosphere of the village peaceful and people do not as such mind the presence of people belonging to different religions. They are living together in peace and harmony. Their lives were regulated by the trains passing from the railway bridge with only track and several sidings at the station. Mano Majrans use to start their daily chores and religious rituals and when ‘the mail train rushes through on its way to Lahore, and driver invariably blows the long blasts of the whistle’, it is the time for themullah at the mosque to start his prayer. Then, Sikh priest too wakes up and start to prayer. And then, we find Men working in fields, women are busy in their daily works.

But, after sometime, act of dacoits by Malli and his gang causes a lot of tension. Later, coming of ‘the Ghost train’ from Pakistan stirs the harmony and killings begin there with the murder of Lala Ramlal. The inhabitants of Mano Majra, both Hindus and

Muslims becomes victims of the changed situations. They begin to treat each other as individuals but mere religious beings; a serious threat to their own security and religion. Though, they are unwilling to be a part of communal massacre yet, they remain silent and dumbstruck with the changing events. When the Muslims of Mano Majra are asked to evacuate the village, Imam Bukhsh who is considered to be the most aged and respectable person of the village cries,

“What we have to do with Pakistan? We born here, so were ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers.”(TP-148)the ‘lumburdar’, headman of the village answered,

“Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and grandchildren can live here as long as you like. If anyone speaks rudely to you, your wives or your children, it will be us first and our wives and children before a single hair of your heads touched. But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands. Who will be responsible for what they do?”(TP-147)

Thus, the harrowing and spine chilling events of 1947 had shaken the faith of the innate human being. But, in total contrast to such people, Khushwant Singh has used the character of Juggut Singh to highlight the importance of Love in saving humanity and compassion. His relationship with a Muslim girl Nooran, hints at the futility of differences and enmity on the religious basis. His love for her makes him sacrifice his life for the persons consider him a criminal. The story reaches its catastrophic end when Juggut saves his beloved’s life along with other Muslims refugees. When Nooran comes to know about her father’s decision to leave the country, she gets baffled and shocked as she loves Juggut a lot, who is in police custody at that time. She doesn’t want to leave him but is compelled by the prevailing circumstances. She goes to Juggut’s house and tells his mother that she is pregnant with his child and doesn’t want to leave him but all her efforts go in vain.

At the end of the novel, people make a plan to ambush the train going to Pakistan and it is the same train boarded by the Muslims including those of Mano Majra. The Sikhs of the village, just few days before, are ready to lay down their lives for their Muslim brothers, and then at once gets ready to kill them. They decide to go for killing at the instigation of a Sikh boy who aroused their religious passions to retaliate the bestiality of the Muslims. But when Juggut comes to know about his beloved’s pregnancy and the ambush plan by people, he performs the act of supreme self-sacrifice and saves the lives of people on the train. On one side there are others who are dumbstruck and wants to fail the plan but they are unable to prevent the plot against fleeing Muslims and on the other, it is Juggut Singh who doesn’t fail the only hope of the Police Commissioner, Hukum Chand without any thought of his own safety. He starts to slash the rope meant to stop the train, he falls down the track and the train runs over him and goes to Pakistan. Thus, we find how the most notorious fellow of the village transforms into a real martyr in reality. This transformation is due to his love for Nooran. Juggut Singh or Jugga the criminal converts into courageous human being and sacrifices his life discarding the difference of caste, class and religion. Khushwant Singh, through his classic novel has proved the distinctive goodness of Indian heart. Juggut Singh doesn’t indulge himself in the dilemma of morality or fruitfulness of his actions and left it to his Almighty, ‘Guru’ to discriminate between the right and the wrong or good or bad acts as he believes following:

“For God is True and dispenseth Truth,

There the elect his court adorn,

And the God Himself actions honours,

There are sorted deeds that were done and bore fruit,

For those that to action could never ripen.

This, O Nanak, shall hereafter happen.” (TP-199)

Ultimately, we find Jugga with his innocent noble heart amidst agony, pain and hatred, and how he puts true love above all and emotions of greatness which makes him a distinguished human being even in the partition times. Through his noble character Juggut Singh, the writer has portrayed not only the prevalent situation being overshadowed and won by the magnitude of human emotions. Juggut gets inspired by the hymns of God and this seems to be the novelist’s plea that violence and arrogance can never be conquered by violence and it is true emotions of love and compassion that can pacify the hatred in human beings. Love has the power to convert a criminal like Juggut Singh into an audacious human being who sacrifices his own life to save others irrespective of their caste, class and religion

3. References

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