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**EXPLORING NARRATIVES IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S
TRAIN TO PAKISTAN**

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Abstract:

The present research paper attempts to focus on the narrative techniques employed by Khushwant Singh in his most celebrated historical novel Train to Pakistan published in 1956. It is regarded one of the classics of modern Indian fiction. Khushwant Singh has an extraordinary ability for narration. His perfection to retain details of Indian society and culture keeps the reader engrossed in his stories. His Train to Pakistan is based on the partition of India in 1947. Partition of India is not just a historical event for Indians and Pakistan is, it's a painful emotion a deep wound which still bleeds within. The contemporary writers wrote about this historical event but Khushwant Singh's unique style of narrating in the novel is unparalleled and offers a position among the pioneers of Indian English novelists.

Keywords: *Partition, Narrative, Historical, Classic, Struggle, Sacrifice, etc.*

The original function of literature is to connect, interpret us to ourselves, our roots, our emotional and intellectual values and relate us to the society, culture and country we live in. The literature is a record as well as testimony of human experience in its environment in the given space and period. When we read Indian literature, we read the experiences of India as a country of diverse cultures and multilingual society. Indian writers help in creating a new world which has become an inspiration and source of celebration worldwide.

Fiction in Indian English literature was introduced in the mid 18s. The early novels deal with the stories of fantasy of revolt against British rule. Later on, the melodrama and the life of middle class, their struggle social and historical aspects of India became the centre of attention. This was the time when women novelist and their works were appreciated. During the freedom struggle and after the independence Indian novels and novelists took a special place in the world of literature. Novelists like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan, Arun Joshi and Khushwant Singh brought realism in Indian literature. Their characters and stories narrative techniques and style represents Indianness of India. These novelists contributed immensely not only in Indian literature in English but also in literature in general. Novels like Untouchable, The Guide, Kanthapura or for that matter *Train to Pakistan* stand as the testimony of Indian history and culture.

Khushwant Singh was a realist; he used social realism as a narrative for *Train to Pakistan*. The minute details like the mannerism of villagers, setting of the Indian village even the way educated and uneducated, elder and young, powerful and powerless thinks is so acute. Singh believes in true projection of human and society. He was blamed for his bold and controversial writings. But the way he presented Indian and Indians in his novels are remarkable. His works touches the sublime. His writings create awareness and shows mirror to the harsh realities after independence. Literature for him is not merely toll of entertainment rather it has the power to expose the world. The predominant themes in the



writings of Khushwant Singh are social, political and individual complexities of Indian culture and society. Some of his famous works are *Train to Pakistan*, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, *The Company of Women* and few others are considered the best critique on Indian hypocrisy.

The present research paper intends to highlight the narrative techniques used by Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan*. He has an extraordinary ability for narration. His perfection to retain details of Indian society and culture keeps the reader engrossed in his stories. Khushwant Singh chooses the realistic mode of narration with symbolic and meaningful framework. His portrayal of the characters and creating a realistic world are quite new for Indian readers. His narration reflects Indianness in this novel. The narration has the quality of cinematography in it. Readers can easily visualize the story and easily relate with the characters and setting represented in it.

The novel is divided between four parts called Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra and Karma. *Train to Pakistan* initiates in the summer of 1947, amid the conflict of the separation of India into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. It was the time when political religious and individual atrocities are on its peak. Khushwant Singh created a small village which is away from the chaos outside remaining oases of peace is Mano Majra, a small village on the border of India and Pakistan, composed of mostly Sikh and Muslim families, with only one Hindu family, the family of the town's moneylender, Lala Ram Lal. The selection of characters makes the story more interesting. The cruel money lender was attacked and killed by the dacoits in attempt of robbery, but the way they mention about a young man named Jugga, and his lover, Nooran indicates that the rebel Jugga will play a significant role in novel. Robbers stop at Jugga's house and throw a package of bangles into his yard, and then escape towards the Sutlej River. Throwing a package of bangles is symbolic since it is used to provoke man for their masculinity.

Significantly the story starts when three major events happening at same time at different places in Mano Majra. i.e. murder of Lala Ram Lal, Jaggu pressuring Nooran for physical contact and Mr. Hukum Chand, magistrate and deputy commissioner of the district was getting ready to undress a young prostitute, Haseena. The sound of gunshot pauses the already paused village. The cruelty of Malli and his gang member is realistically described by the writer. The narration of the robbery and after effects shows that it was not just a robbery and murder of Lala but the gang also looted the peace harmony and human values of Mano Majra. The village where no one knows about the outer world, about partition and about communal disharmony. The contrast of the violent India and peaceful Mano Majra in the introductory section of novel clearly indicate oppression and violence during the Partition of India.

The visitor Iqbal is an educated man from Delhi sent to enlighten the people of Mano Majra of numerous petitions for government transformation. Instead, he gets hauled into jail alongside Jugga for Lala Ram Lal's murder, and accused of being a member of the Muslim League. The narration from very first section of the novel creates suspense among the reader. The India was going through a political turmoil while administrative and police is trying to keep villagers away from it. The only connection villagers have with the outer world is the train which runs between India and Pakistan. The Train in the novel serves an individual character and powerful symbol of life, death, chaos and dislocation. Life and daily routine of the villagers was based on arrival. The morning mail train wakes up everyone and lets them know it's time to start their day, while the evening goods train announces it's time for bed. Till the day train arrived with dead mutilated human bodies. They are secretly burnt by the police but the smell of burning flesh is recognised by the innocent villagers. The elders of the village declared its Kalyug. The second chapter Kalyug exposes the animal nature of human. This chapter symbolically represents the inhumanity and declined morality of the Indians during partition. In Hindu mythology Kalyug believed to be the shortest but most sinful and darkest period of humanity. The characters speak about Kalyug in the novel as,



The meeting in the Gurdwara had a melancholic atmosphere. a People has very little to say, and those who did spoke slowly, like prophets. Imam Baksh opened the discussion. 'May Allah be merciful. We are living in bad times.' A few people sighed solemnly, Yes, bad days.' Meet Singh added, Yes Chacha- this is Kalyug, the dark age' (Singh, 84).

Khushwant Singh uses straightforward language with perfect Indian expression using ordinary characters. Readers may feel that they have seen characters like Jugga, Meet Singh or for that matter Hukum Chand among them. Even the name and concepts of chapters is borrowed from Indian mythology. *Train to Pakistan* reveals the realities of partition with religious and scriptural perception of the Hindu. It also interesting to note that before partitions small Indian villages never practiced communal differences. Believers of all religion were equally harmonious to each other. The only dividing factor they have is wealth. Khushwant Singh fetches few characters like Lambardar, Meet Singh and Imam Baksh who belongs to the different religions but appears to be united in the beginning of the novel. Until the arrival of police forces. The peaceful village turns into a battle field. Muslims are told to leave the village and take shelter in to nearby refugee's camp. They are also told that they will be sent to Pakistan safely. The continuous reference of Gurdwara, the mixture of religious chant "Ya Allah. Waheguru, Waheguru and Imam Baksh's sonorous cry (Azaan) are deliberately mentioned by Khushwant Singh to evoke faith and belief among villagers against the Kalyug. The third part called Mano Majra depicts the actual separation between Sikhs and Muslims. It was not just a physical separation, they started thinking differently. The villagers who lived in with generations together became hostile towards each other. As Singh quotes, "The Sikhs were sullen and angry. 'Never trust a Mussulman,' they said. The last Guru had warned them that Muslims had no loyalties. He was right" (Singh, 128).

The hostility, fear, anger, and sense of guilt among Sikhs increases when they see the properties and belonging of Muslims were looted by Malli and his gang members, ironically Malli was appointed as the custodian of Muslim's property by officers. The police are corrupt and ineffective, the justice and humanity were sinking down. The fourth part of the novel called Karma is also based on the philosophy of humanity. The good deeds and virtue are for those who observed Dhrama in its positive capacity since Karma is important in achieving Moksha. The malicious minds of Manu Majra planned train massacre, to take revenge from Muslims of Pakistan by killing Muslim refugees going to Pakistan. Magistrate Hukum Chand wanted to save his beloved prostitute Haseena from the massacre. Their only hope was Jugga, though they informed about this plane to Iqbal also but he chooses to get drunk instead of saving life. While Jugga single handedly saved the train. His scarified his life when the mob wanted to killed the passengers of train. He remained the unsung hero; his death was neither acknowledged nor glorified. Jugga's love for Nooran and his devotion to his neighbours suppresses his own wisdom of survival, his legacy will live on in the child he shares with Nooran.

The impact of partition, according to M. K. Naik, on a small village on the Indo-Pakistan border is shown with pitiless realism of description and the swift tempo of the narrative carries the reader along (Naik, 230). *Train to Pakistan* contributes significantly to the literature of Indian Partition but it can be seen as a love story with a unique blend with the mythological references through the titles of the four chapters. The narration of four parts with four different seasons of India indicates the political, social, and cultural conditions of India. The novel ends with the good Karma of Jugga, his scarifies and selfless love for his people. Throughout his life he is known as a Badmash, villain even arrested for the murder but how he chooses to lead life is what matters the most.



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