

The Symbolic Portrayal of Trains as seen in Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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Abstract

In Kushwant Singh's novel Train to Pakistan (1956) symbols are discrete but it provides multiple perceptions to the readers. The article aims to portray train as a symbol in multifarious outlook. Indian trains have been associated with the titanic destruction during the freedom and partition in 1947. Khushwant Singh's typical partition novel Train to Pakistan, projects the reminiscent images of the "ghost train" during Partition. The trains in the novel reach their termini filled with victims of the bloody partition and communal violence that transformed mass of Hindus and Sikhs to India and Muslims to Pakistan. The episodes of violence with train and loads of dead bodies become the omen outbreak of horrible violence and terrific bloodshed evoking the reminiscence of partition of India also in the novel. The trains have been migrating millions of Muslims and Hindus during the Partition of India in 1947. Indian trains like the Samjhauta Express mired the peace of two nations attacked at Deewana and the Sabarmati Express set ablaze in the killing of the Hindu activists at Godhara led to the Gujarat communal riots in 2002, have a dark History of being associated with acts of communal violence. Thus trains play a vital role in the history of partition and Singh realistically portrays how 'the train' is an absolute almanac and time-guide for the people of Mano Majra.

Key Words; Partition, Communal

Violence, Freedom, Train, Destruction, Horror.

Literature is an influential apparatus among the revolutionary writers to change the social framework. Through his writings Kushwant Singh contributes ideologies to the progress of revolution in the society. Since Singh is best known for his famous work *Train to Pakistan*, and its importance is seriously discussed in the novel. Partition is undoubtedly an inevitable part of Indian independence during the period there are major migrations have occurred through the mode of train. The paper attempts to bring out train as a symbol in the novel *Train to Pakistan*.

Kushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* has projected the communal violence during the partition of India in 1947. Comparing to other literary works on Partition, Singh's *Train to Pakistan* stands first in depicting the incidents of Partition in a realistic tone. Singh has planned to name the novel by using the name of the village 'Mano Majra' at first, but finally the novel is named as *Train to Pakistan* in accordance with the importance of trains in the novel. The novel has been adapted as film by Pamela Rooks and the name of the novel remains same even after the adaptation. It shows the importance of train in the novel.

. . . Mano Majra very conscious of trains. Before daybreak, the mail train rushes through on its way to Lahore., In an

instant, all Mano Majra comes awake... The mullah at the mosque knows that it is time for the morning prayer..., cries in long sonorous notes, 'Allah-o-Akbar'. The priest..., too gets up..., and intones his prayer in monotonous singsong to the sound of splashing water. By the time the 10:30 morning passenger train Delhi comes in, life in Mano Majra has settled down to its dull daily routine... As the midday express goes by, Mano Majra stops to rest. Men and children come home for dinner... When the evening passenger from Lahore comes in..., The women cook the evening meal. When the goods train steams in, they say to each other, 'There is the goods train.' It is like saying goodnight. (Singh 4-6).

The representation of village in the novel *Train to Pakistan* shows the peaceful status of people before partition. Mano Majra's consciousness of train timings, and their interlinked life with the time of the trains, that cross the river Sutlej paint the importance of trains in the village. Every assemblage of the rural community and their affiliation with the train timings are expressed through the lines "Men are in the fields. Women are busy with their daily chores. Children are out grazing cattle" even the animals and birds "bullocks go round and round, Sparrows fly about the roofs, trailing straw in their beaks" (4). These lines clearly portray the life and its attachment towards the trains that cross the village. In daily routine of Mano Majra the train is symbolized as the Peace of the village.

The trains in the novel are represented as the symbol of the human stages in life. "The mail train" symbolizes the birth, the child hood is signified in the novel as "Mano Majra comes awake". "10:30 morning passenger train" (4) is

symbolized as the second stage of human, the youth, the hard working age, that is described as "Mano Majra has settled down to its dull daily routine". "The midday express" (5) is the symbol of middle age, age of retirement from responsibilities and it is expressed in novel as "Mano Majra stops to rest". "The evening passenger" is the symbol of old age that is represented as "idle away the time until the signal for sleep". The final stage of life, the ultimate end death is symbolized as "the goods train", is exemplified in novel as "saying goodnight" (6).

Kushwant Singh has symbolized the train as unexpected gift that carries lots and lots of dead bodies "the Sikhs retaliated by attacking a Muslim refugee train and sending it across the border with over a thousand corpses? They wrote on the engine 'Gift to Pakistan!'" (69). . Lapierre Dominique says that the real train "Ten Down Express" carries full of corpses and it had a note on its back "This train is our independence Gift to Nehru and Patel," (343). This shows that both the countries have exchanged trains with dead bodies as gifts to the neighboring country which is the result of partition.

The Sounds of the train carries information. It may not have particular meaning but it has message to the village. The message of the train is expressed through the individual sounds which are unrelated to the meaning of the word that has been used in the novel. It is evidently expressed through the lines of Singh:

The goods train engine whistled twice and with a lot of groaning and creaking began to puff its way towards the bridge. The storks flew up from the pond with shrill cries of 'kraak, kraak' and came towards the river. From the river they

flew back to the pond, calling alternately long after the train had gone over the bridge and its puff-puffs had died into silence. (13-14)

Even the sound of the train is given a great importance. The groaning sound of the train prefigures the destiny and destruction impending on the village. The train here is symbolized as the dumb foreteller who prophesizes the upcoming dangers to the village. The creaking, kaarking, puffing sounds show the alarm of the train and may be taken as the advice of train in its language. The dialect of the train seems to deliver the message of danger in anxious tone.

One morning, a train from Pakistan halted at Mano Majra railway station. At first glance, it had the look of the trains in the days of peace. No one sat on the roof. No one clung between the bogies. No one was balanced on the footboards. But somehow it was different. There was something uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality. (21)

For the first time the train with loads of dead bodies reached Mano Majra and the same train is implied as peace carried the violence, horror, revenge that resulted in the lives of innocents. It is projected with ghostly quality by Singh. The entire village is puzzled on the arrival of the train and the reaction of the officers by blocking the areas, and not allowing the people to visit the station. This shows how the people are arrested by fear.

Moreover, the train is symbolized as a silent alarm of destruction. The train carries not only the message from Pakistan but also carries Gifts of Corpses to the village.

There was a rumbling sound. They listened again. Of course, it was a rumble; it was a train. Its puffing became clearer and

clearer. Then they saw the outlines of the engine and the train itself. It had no lights. There was not even a headlight on the engine. . . The train came to a halt at Mano Majra station. It was from Pakistan. (149)

The sound of the train has alarmed the people before with its creaking and puffing sounds. This time the train comes silently even without the head lights and the deep rumbling sound of the train is being symbolized as the mourning sound of the train, carries the dead bodies. It also carries the unfortunate upcoming events in Mano Majra. The darkness of the train symbolizes the upcoming dark life of the people in Mano Majra.

Trains in the novel are powerful symbol that evokes several images. The History of freedom and partition is incomplete without the history of train. The episodes of communal violence centered on the trains bring the importance of train during partition. People of India and Pakistan have witnessed many episodes of train massacres. The planned attacks on the trains that carries innocent people is the unforgettable episode in the novel as well in the historical episode of partition.

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