

Exploring Trauma and Healing in Khushwant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan'

Jaini Sohil Shah¹, Dr. Babina Bohra²

Research Scholar, Department of English, SSSUTMS, Sehore India¹

Professor, Department of English, SSSUTMS, Sehore India²

Abstract: *In Khushwant Singh's seminal work, "Train to Pakistan," the treatment of trauma and the journey towards healing form central themes that resonate profoundly throughout the narrative. Set against the backdrop of Partition-era India, the novel delves into the harrowing experiences of individuals caught in the midst of communal violence and upheaval. This abstract aims to provide a glimpse into Singh's exploration of trauma and healing, highlighting the ways in which characters grapple with their past traumas and strive to find solace and redemption amidst chaos. Through vivid storytelling and nuanced character development, Singh portrays the psychological and emotional toll of violence and displacement, while also illuminating moments of resilience and humanity. As we delve into the intricate web of trauma and healing in "Train to Pakistan," we are invited to contemplate the enduring power of compassion and forgiveness in the face of adversity.*

Keywords: *Trauma, Healing, Khushwant Singh, Illumination, Emotional.*

1. Introduction

Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan" stands as a poignant testament to the human experience amidst the tumultuous backdrop of Partition-era India. At its core, the novel is a profound exploration of trauma and healing, offering a nuanced portrayal of individuals grappling with the devastating consequences of communal violence and displacement. This introduction serves as a gateway to understanding Singh's masterful depiction of trauma and healing, as he navigates the complexities of human suffering and resilience in the face of profound adversity. Against the backdrop of historical upheaval, Singh invites readers to embark on a journey through the shattered lives and fractured communities of Mano Majra, where the scars of trauma run deep and the quest for healing becomes a central motif. As we delve into the intricate layers of "Train to Pakistan," we are compelled to confront the enduring legacy of trauma and the transformative power of compassion and reconciliation.

Train To Pakistan is a magnificent novel where Khushwant Singh tells the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events that followed which will be remembered as one of the blackest chapters of human history. Just on the eve of independence India was

partitioned causing a great upheaval in the whole continent. Independence brought in its wake one of the bloodiest carnages in the history of India. The upshot of this was that twelve million people had to flee leaving their home; nearly half a million were killed. It is also on record that over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, mutilated. Thus, thousands fled from both sides of the border seeking refuge and security. The natives were uprooted and it was certainly a ghastly experience for them to give up their belongings and rush to a land which was not theirs. The harrowing and spine chilling events of 1947 had shaken the faith of the people in the innate human beings. It had driven them into a state of wonder over what man has made of man. To Khushwant Singh, this was a period of great disillusionment and crisis of values, a distressing and disintegrating period of his life. The belief he had cherished all his life were shattered. Giving went to his inner struggle and agony, he says:

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the contry... I had believed that we Indians were peace loving and non- violent, that we were more concerned with matters of the spirit, while the



rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. After the experience of the autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe to this view. I became... an angry middleaged man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world... I decided to try my hand at writing.

The sinister and venomous impact of partition and the indignation it spawned in him has been realistically expressed in a scathing irony in *Train To Pakistan*. Originally entitled *Mano Majra*, the novel portrays with a bold and unrelenting realism, the brutal story of political hatred and violence during the turbulent and fateful days that proceeded and followed the partition of British India when the spirit of communal frenzy and a passionate zeal for self-expression were fanning and fumbling within the mass. Every citizen was caught up in the holocaust. No one could remain aloof; no one could be trusted to be impartial. The administration, the police, even the armed forces, was caught up in the blaze of hatred. Mob ruled the streets, burning, looting, killing, dishonouring women and mutilating children; even animals sacred to the other community became the legitimate targets of reprisals.

"*Train to Pakistan*" by Khushwant Singh delves deeply into the themes of trauma and healing amidst the backdrop of the Partition of India in 1947. Singh's narrative paints a vivid picture of the turmoil and devastation experienced by individuals and communities caught in the midst of communal violence and mass migration. Trauma permeates every aspect of life in *Mano Majra*, a small village on the border of India and Pakistan. The characters grapple with the horrors they witness as friends turn against each other, families are torn apart, and the very fabric of society unravels. Singh doesn't shy away from depicting the visceral impact of violence, portraying the physical and psychological scars left behind. However, amidst the chaos and despair, there are glimpses of hope and resilience. Singh intricately weaves moments of compassion, solidarity, and human connection throughout the narrative. Characters like Juggut Singh and Iqbal struggle to reconcile their own past traumas with the atrocities unfolding around them, yet they also exemplify the capacity for redemption and healing.

Through his storytelling, Singh invites readers to contemplate the complexities of trauma and the ways in which individuals navigate their own paths towards healing. He explores the enduring power of memory, forgiveness, and reconciliation in the face of overwhelming adversity. Ultimately, "*Train to Pakistan*" serves as a poignant reminder of the lasting impact of historical trauma, while also celebrating the resilience of the human spirit. Singh's exploration of trauma and healing offers a profound and

compassionate portrayal of the human condition amidst one of the most tumultuous periods in Indian history.

2. Trauma in *Train to Pakistan*

Written in the prospective of the historiographic metafiction, *Train to Pakistan* tries to distinguish between the „past event“ and „present belief.“ With the historical representation of the event, which can be assumed to be loaded with many historical facts and fictions, the novel challenges “any naive realist concept of representation and any equally naive textualist or formalist assertions of the total separation of art from the world” (Hutcheon 6). The history that is often left forgotten is revoked by the postcolonial writer to both recreate the sense of loss as well as forge a path for future. The silenced history now speaks for itself through the writings of postcolonial writer. This new critical insight takes one to the deeper root of one’s personal and national history. The writers dig their buried history to relieve themselves of the trauma that holds them back. A fresh perspective provides novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and shifts attention away from the question of “what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered” (Whitehead 3). In the text, as the characters undergo the traumatic event of partition, the event which can also be considered as a “cultural trauma,” (Kabir 178) the perspective of the characters towards life, religion, brotherhood and compassion undergoes radical change. As the partition significantly affects the cultural psyche of both the nations, India and Pakistan, it takes the proportion of a „cultural trauma“ which seems to alter the cultural existence of the communities of the twin nations. Such a trauma replaces the mutual love and sympathy once held between communities in spite of the religious and ethnic differences. The writer showcases each and every emotion that the characters undergo during the disconcerting event of partition. The partition witnesses the transformation of characters that marks the volatility of human nature. The characters in the text such as Juggut Singh, Nooran, Iqbal, Hukum Chand, Prem Singh, Sunder Singh, Haseena and hundreds of others have their share of pain, torment, suffering and distress owing to partition as they make their “tryst with destiny” (TP 185). The physical as well as mental torment owing to partition where “on both sides villages are plundered and burnt, men and women are mutilated and sexually tortured, and trains of migrants crossing in opposite directions arrive full of dismembered bodies and gory sacks containing sexual organs, ...” (Hai 399) the characters go through excruciating pain that leaves its permanent mark on their hearts and spirits.

Writing from the postcolonial perspective of creating a mythical old order of the world before partition, Singh

depicts the utopian village of Mano Majra as the setting of the novel. The villagers of Mano Majra are unaware of the echoes of partition and reside an uneventful and content life. The secret affair between the protagonist Juggut and the Muslim girl Nooran, the womanizing nature of District magistrate Hukum Chand and the brotherhood between Hindu, Sikhs and the Muslims in the village are all atypical of a village untouched by the vices of unrest. The villagers are unaware of the fact that: By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people- Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs- were in fight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding (TP 2)

The recurrent news of the arrival of more ghost trains and more massacres of Hindus and Sikhs change the hearts of Mano Majra populace. Violence and the grotesque thus become an everyday affair in the village of Mano Majra that once was an abode of peace and harmony. Being severely dejected by the scorch of summer Mano Majra dreadfully waits for rain. But the rain, quite contrary to the hope of people, brings nothing but “earthworms, ladybirds and tiny frogs ... myriads of moths (TP 98) and the terrible flood in the river of Sutlej. As Hukum Chand, the district Magistrate remembers, “A thousand charred corpses sizzling and smoking while the rain put out the fair” (TP 99). Moreover, along with the flood in the river the rain brings the terrifying and unwelcome sight of the massacred bodies of Sikhs and Hindus.

In this context, one can find the inadvertent resemble between the anxious waiting for rain which can be symbolized as the waiting for independence. Like the rain, which though brings a momentary relief to the people, Independence is soon followed by despair, desolation, and devastation in the form of partition. Under these traumatic circumstances, the protagonist Juggut Singh is charged with murder and is put behind the bar. When the Muslims from Mano Majra are forced to leave the village for the sake of their lives, Juggut Singh loses his love Nooran to partition. As they leave the village that had been home since eternity, the pain of the departure echoes in the voice of one of the Muslims who says: “What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers” (TP 133). The trauma of losing one’s home forever is thus echoed in the text. The characters are profoundly affected by both the sudden loss of their homeland and the witnessing of the extreme violence of partition. During this traumatic event, at least ten million people were displaced during the Partition, and one million left homeless including the author Khushwant Singh. Innumerable memories drift in the psyche of incalculable refugees on both sides of the divided nation

whose hearts pain at the idea of leaving their homeland forever.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan" serves as a powerful exploration of trauma and healing, illuminating the human experience amidst the chaos of Partition-era India. Through vivid characters and evocative storytelling, Singh navigates the depths of suffering and resilience, inviting readers to confront the profound psychological and emotional toll of communal violence and displacement. As the novel unfolds, we witness the shattered lives and fractured communities of Mano Majra, where the scars of trauma are etched deep into the fabric of society. Yet, amidst the darkness, there are moments of profound humanity and compassion, as characters strive to find solace and redemption amidst the devastation. Through Singh's masterful prose, we are reminded of the enduring power of hope and healing, even in the bleakest of times. As we reflect on the journey through trauma and healing in "Train to Pakistan," we are left with a profound sense of empathy and understanding, and a renewed appreciation for the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

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