



KUSHWANT SIGH'S *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN* AND BAPSI SIDHWA'S *THE PAKISTANI BRIDE* : A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Partition has been the theme of many novels and short stories in the Post Independent Indian and Pakistani literature. The bloody history of partitions speaks about over million deaths and millions of people were displaced. The two novels- Kushwant Sigh's Train to Pakistan and Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride recounts the horror stories of partition on both the sides.

Key words: Partition, riots, communal, expatriate, disaster, political, arson, massacre, Hindus, Muslims.

INTRODUCTION

Kushwant Sigh and Bapsi Sidhwa are the noted novelists of the modern times, the former is known as a versatile writer from India and the latter is a blooming expatriate writer making a big name in the international literature. The purpose of the present discussion is to compare both the novelists on a single theme depicted in *Train to Pakistan* and *Pakistani Bride* respectively. The theme of partition and love recur in both the novels.

Train to Pakistan was first published in 1956. It is very often considered one of the classics of modern Indian fiction. It is obviously one of the exquisite novels of post partition Indo-Anglian fiction. This novel is clearly an effort at fictional re-creation of socio-historical

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reality of the partition period experienced by the Punjabis in general and Sikhs in particular. It is an exciting novel with its fine descriptions of village and river and an array of life like characters. The action takes place in Mano Majra, a small village but the novel has implications, which reach far beyond the little village on the frontier between India and Pakistan. Khushwant Singh takes his readers to the summer of 1947 and shows how the frontier has become a scene of rioting and bloodshed. The novel is certainly notable for the depiction of partition events where death and violence become very common. and this study is an attempt to show the human tragedy that follows India's Independence.

The original title of the novel *Train to Pakistan* was Mano Majra. This is the name of a place which is the center of the action in the sequence of incidents leading to the final disaster. Partition had its adverse impact on the community in general and the individuals in particular. It is situated half a mile away from river Sutlej which, historically speaking is the Ganges of the Sikhs. Mano Majra is shown as the bastion of Sikh culture. It is obvious from the mannere in which the novelist chooses to give not only the topography of the village but also its demography. Ambuj Kumar writes,

Mano Majra , is truly a representative Sikh village of the Punjab. It has about seventy families, out of which main inhabitants are Sikhs who are regarded as the martial race of instinctively warm-hearted and laborious people.¹

The different communities which lived in perfect harmony suddenly started developing mutual suspicion and hatred. Manavar writes:

Mano Majra is the representative of the whole country. The novel is the only description at micro-level of what happened before and during partition in one particular village.²

Communal riots become the order of the day and different communities engage in mutual attacks, which leave thousands dead. The whole novel thus becomes a tale of death and violence. In the opening page of the novel itself we get a detailed account of the communal riots, which were precipitated by reports of the proposed division of the country into India and Pakistan:

Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.³

The riots broke out mainly in Calcutta where within a few months several thousands were killed. From there, the riots spread north and east and west. In Noakhali in East Bengal the Muslims massacred the Hindus and in Bihar the Hindus massacred the Muslims. Mullahs were reported to have roamed the Punjab and the Frontier province with boxes of human

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skulls of Muslims killed in Bihar. Thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier abandoned their homes and fled toward the protection of the Sikh and Hindu communities in the east. Along the way they collided with panicky swarms of Muslims fleeing to safety in the west.

When the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people by the summer of 1947,—Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs—were in flight. The riots had become a rout. 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. Lala Ram Lal was a moneylender in Mano Majra and he was brutally killed by dacoits—after a violent encounter. The dacoits struck with Malta in the lead role. The village dogs attacked them but they struck the dogs and they ran away.

The dacoits entered the house by force. The wooden bolt on the other side cracked and the doors flew open. One of the men with a gun waited at the door; the other four went in. (17) Though the women implored the gang men to take away all the jewelry and spare them, nothing would stop the men who had entered the house. One of them tore a little boy from his mother's lap and held the muzzle of the gun to the child's face. The women fell at his feet with a request to spare him. They went upstairs and caught the moneylender crouching under one of the charpoys. Soon one of the men tore the moneylender away from the leader and hit him full in the face with the butt of his gun.

He sat on his haunches, crying and spitting blood. Two of his teeth were smashed. But he would not hand over the keys of his safe. In sheer exasperation, one of the men lunged at the crouching figure with his spear. Ram Lal uttered a loud yell and collapsed on the floor with blood spurting from his belly.⁴

Finally the dacoits came out shouting and laughing after committing the crime. In tune with the main theme of the novel even sexual advancements are made on a violent note. When the dacoity was in progress Juggut Singh who was on probation and who was forbidden to leave the village after sunset was in the fields. He was in love with Nooran, a Muslim girl who was the daughter of Imam Baksh, a weaver. The temptation to have sex with the girl became irresistible for Juggut Singh and the description makes it amply clear that it was a violent method that he chose to follow:

There is a reference of animal sexuality in the novel. Juggat's advances towards Nooran are wild and forceful.

Juggut Singh crossed his arms behind the girl's back and crushed her till she could not talk or breathe. Everytime she started to speak he lightened his arms

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*round her and her words got struck in her throat. She gave up and put her exhausted face against his.*⁵

Nooran found it difficult to struggle against Juggut Singh's brute force. In a state of frenzy she dug her nails into his thinly bearded cheeks and bit his nose. When Juggut Singh asked her whether she would be available the next day also, she replied-expressing great concern about her future:

*"You think of tomorrow and I am bothered about my life. You have your good time even if I am murdered".*⁶

Train to Pakistan presents the picture of communal violence in the most realistic manner. The violence started when the news of killings of Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan reached Mano Majra. Though the inspector reported that Mano Majra is free from violence, the magistrate denies it. The Sikhs retaliated by attacking a Muslim refugee trains and sending it across the border with over a thousand corpses. It was their 'Gift to Pakistan' as was made out from what they wrote on the engine. The sub-inspector was at a loss to know why the Sikhs were not willing to show their 'mettle' when the Hindus were making an all out attack. He even suspected that they were getting money from the Muslims even when they claimed that they were their brothers: Man for man, woman for woman, child for child. But we Hindus are not like that. We cannot play this stabbing game. When it comes to an open fight, we can be a match for any people. Reports from Pakistan side of the border, according to the sub-inspector were not at all encouraging. The 'Gandhi-caps' in Delhi are blamed for not reacting sharply to the happenings in Pakistan. They never bothered about what happened to their fellow brethren there: They have not lost their homes and belongings; they haven't had their mothers wives, sisters and daughters raped and murdered in the streets. (The Train.31)

The violence reaches its dubious heights when the Pakistan police and the army took part in the killings to ensure not a soul is left alive. Women killed their own children and jumped into wells that 'filled to the brim with corpses'. Fortunately, trains with corpses were not coming through Mano Majra though the Inspector was sure that it would be impossible to prevent retaliation as there were hundreds of small Muslim villages all around. Hukum Chand suggested that the Muslims should be evacuated without any bloodshed:

*"Let them got out, but be careful they do not take too much with them. Hindus from Pakistan were stripped of all their belongings before they were allowed to leave. Pakistani magistrates have become millionaires overnight. Some on our sides have not done too badly either. Only where there was killing or burning the government suspended or transferred them. There must be no killing. Just peaceful evacuation"*⁷



Meet Singh, the priest in the village expressed his own concerns about the way Juggut Singh took the law into his hands. He was 'a budmash number ten' and was listed as a bad character in the register of the local police station. He had murder in his blood and his father and grandfather were also dacoits and were hanged for murder. What bothered Meet Singh was not that Jugga had committed murder, but that his hands were soiled with the blood of a fellow villager.

If Jugga had done the same thing in the neighbouring village. Meet Singh would gladly have appeared in his defence and sworn on the holy Granth that Jugga had been praying in the gurdwara at the time of the murder⁸

In fact the priest was never aware that Juggut Singh did not have any role in the murder of the money lender and it was carried out by the dacoits where Malli played the key role. Iqbal, the social worker sent by his party to the village was of the view that there was no crime in anybody's blood anymore than there was goodness in the blood of others:

Does anyone ever bother to find out why people steal and rob and kill? No! They put them in jail or hang them. It is easier. If the fear of the gallows or the cell had stopped people from killing or stealing/ there would be no murdering or stealing. It does not. They hang a man every day in this province. Yet ten get murdered every twenty-four hours. No/ Bhaiji, criminals are not born. They are made by hunger, want and injustice.⁹

The lambardar on his part was not at all happy with the way things went: "The winds of destruction are blowing across the land. All we hear is kill, kill. The only ones who enjoy freedom are thieves, robbers and cut-throats."

Iqbal realized that he was increasingly becoming helpless. He would not be able to stop the killing. Everyone—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Congressite, Leaguer, Akali, or Communist—was deep in it. The proletariat was indifferent to political freedom for Hindustan or Pakistan, except when it could be given an economic significance like grabbing land by killing an owner who was of a different religious denomination. All that he could do was to divert the 'kill-and-grab' instinct from communal channels and turn it against the propertied class.

The train was due to leave Chundunnugger after midnight. It would have no lights, not even on the engine. In the closing page of the novel we find Jugga making the supreme sacrifice in order to save his beloved Nooran who was carrying his own child in her womb, and others by cutting the rope to pieces paving the way for safe passage of the passengers.

Train to Pakistan proved Kushwant Singh to be the writer in Indian English writing in English. It turns out to be a magnificent novel written in the background of the partition of India. He has successfully recreated one of the most forgettable pages of our history. The

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novel is an honest attempt to describe the partition and its effect on both countries. Mano Majra stands as a microcosm of India. It represents the whole country and whatever happens in this tiny village is a reflection of what happens in the country at large. We find that hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs are made to flee the places where they lived for years.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani born Parsi writer, who lives in America. But she frequently travels in India sub continent. She has published four major novels- The Ice-Comedy Man, An American Brat. The Crow Eaters and The Pakistani Bride which is also known as The Bride. Bapsi Sidhwa came into focus for her bold writings and the remarkable narrative power.

The Pakistani Bride is one of Bapsi Sidhwa's important literary works that contributed greatly to the English fiction. The novel is set in the Indian Subcontinent dealing with various themes of portion aftermaths of partition, love, honour, disciplining the female body etc. Though the focus is on the 'bride', the novelist has also dwelt on the various socio-political factors that influenced the lives of the individuals in the story. To be precise, the focus of this paper is on the theme of 'partition' described by Bapsi Sidhwa.

The novel opens with Qasim, a ten year old boy marrying 15 year old girl Afsan, Whose father assured Qasim's father his daughter is in marriage in return to the debt he owned. Afsan, after many years, gets adjusted with her young husband and gave birth to six children. Three die and later the remaining three including his favourite daughter Zaitoon die of small fox. Afsan also becomes the victim of the epidemic. Qasim becomes lonely:

"He was inconsolable. His face swollen with tears and his throat hoarse with wailing, he failed his chest with his huge first, but death, swift, premature and grotesquely unfair had to be accepted" (P-13)

Qasim moves to Jallundar in search of a job and becomes a watchman of a bank. It is during this time the partition happens in 1947. Many of his tribesmen leave the place but Qasim stays on. Bapsi Sidhwa describes the horrors of the partition in the second chapter of the novel.

The earth is not easy to carve up. India required a deft and sensitive surgeon, but the British, steeped in domestic pre occupation, hastily and carelessly butchered it. They were not deliberately mischievous- only cruelly negligent! A million Indians died. The earth sealed its clumsy new boundaries in blood as town by town, farm by farm, the boarder was defined. Trains carrying refugees sped through the darkness of night- Indus going one way and Muslims the other. They left at odd hours to try to dodge mobs bent on their

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destruction. Yet trains were ambushed and looted and their feelings occupants slaughtered.” (P-15)

Like Kushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa writes about the bloody days of partition with graphical details. She too writes about the communal riots on the Indian side. The ‘ghost’ train appears in the novel to disturb the harmonious society. Here Bapsi introduces Sikandar and Zohra episode to provide a space for describing horrors of partition and later connects Zaitoon, the daughter of Sikandar to the main plot.

Sikandar and Zohra decide to leave the place as it was allotted to India and the communal tension was growing up. When they heard that there is a train from Ludhiana, he asks his wife to prepare for leaving.

Zohra dragged out their tin trunks and bed-rolls. Listlessly she wrapped odds and ends into clumsy cloth bundles. The calf and the goats were tethered, ready for departure” (P- 17)

Sikandar is not able to carry many things at a time when they are traveling by the packed train. So he asked her to leave behind many things. The description of the train is dramatic.

The train arrived at Ludhiana station, already swarmed with Muslims who had boarded it at earlier stops. Panic-stricken families were abandoning their animals and possession in an attempt to get on. Zohra glanced back at their mound of luggage now scattered and undistinguishable among the mounting litter of tin trunks and bundles”. (P-18)

Qasim who was traveling alone as he lost all his dear ones also preferred to leave by the same train.

Qasim, a holstered pistol slung across his chest, a rifle swinging down his back, walked rapidly towards the engine, scanning the compartments. He fired one but was churned out by the pressure of brown bodies. Afraid that the train might leaves without him, he began to run. Just as it pulled away he hauled himself on the roof of the carriage nearest the engine” (P-19)

The problems and predicaments of the dislocated people are beyond the expression through the words. The novel of sidwa provides such horrible victim narrative:

Compartments and lavatories are jammed with stifled brown bodies; some carry the dead weight of children asleep on a swaying Shoulders. Women hold on to flush chains, they lean on the children cramped into wash basins. The train speeds on”. (P-25)



Because of the carelessness of the British rulers and the poor law and order, the murders and violence became the order of the day. Kushwant Sing's novel is more powerful compared to Bapsi's Pakistani Bride. However we can not undermine the credibility of Bapsi's keen insights into the subject of partition. She too describes the bloody events. The sick mob attacking the train in which Sikander and his family is described in breath taking narration.

Sikander pushed Zohra and the Children off the train and yelled 'Run Hide in the dark'. He watched from on top. Zohra was her way through the swirling bodies. She was almost beyond the range of his vision when he saw an arm clutch at her".

.....A Sikh, hair streaming, lashed a bloody sword. Another slowly waved a child struck at the end of his spear like a banner. Crazy with fury Sikander plunged his knife into the Sikh's ribs.....

A Sikh, sweat gleaming on his naked torso, is holding on breast. She is screaming. Butting a passage with his head, Sikandar Pushes past the woman and stabs her tormentor-(P-28)

The story of Sikandar, his wife Zohra and his child ends in tragedy. Zaitoon is left in the darkness who is later saved by Qasim who finds in her his own daughter. The train moves on despite of horrible killings asserting the inevitability of living. Qasim begins a new life in Lahore finding consolation in Zaitoon. Of course the story of Zaitoon is the focal point on the Pakistani Bride. As I have already pointed out, My paper is an attempt to study Bapsi Sidwa's novels in comparison with Kushwant Singh's with special emphasis on the depiction of partition.

Many Indian novelists effectively described the horrible experiences of the feeling of Hindus and Muslims on both the sides. Manohar Malgonkar's Bend in the Ganges Chaman Nahal's Azadi and Kushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan are the major novels describing the murders, rapes and burning on both sides of the border. The image of 'Corpse train' is effectively used by Kushwant Singh in his Train to Pakistan and Bapsi Sidhwa in Pakistani Bride. Many time we feel Bapsi is under the influence of Kushwant Sign whose novel set a trend for partition novels in India. Her descriptions are similar to Kushwant Sign, she writes about the jammed train with great details.

There is a great deal of similarity in the incidents depicted in Train to Pakistan and Chaman Nahal's Azadi . Nahal writes about the incidents happened on the Pakistani side and similar is Malgoankar's A Bend in the Ganges. Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines recreates history of partition of Pakistan and the communal violence erupted in the wake of partition. Among all

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novelists who dealt with theme of partition, Kushwant Singh is not only a pioneer but also a class apart. The major theme of Bapsi's novel is the broken marriage and the disciplining female body in the closed societies. The reference of partition makes her a comparable to other Indian writers who wrote on partition.

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