



Research Paper

## Trauma and Turmoil in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan: A Critical Study

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**ABSTRACT:** This study seeks to investigate the Indian subcontinent's most savage and chaotic period, when India gained independence from the British. Millions of people were uprooted and relocated across newly established borders as a result of this momentous event, which ended in the division of the British Indian Empire into the sovereign states of India and Pakistan. A great deal of intercommunal strife, tragedies, killings, and rapes were caused by the roaring winds of partition. These frenzies were predominantly driven by religious groups on both sides, not by class or region. Unprecedented, swift, and catastrophic violence that followed caused a variety of repercussions of partition, including family separation, maintaining cross-border ties, coping with trauma, mourning the loss of loved ones, looking for family members, and experiencing dislocation and displacement. This event severely traumatised and uprooted many people in the area, shattering its social and cultural fabric. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, originally titled *Mano Majra*, has been chosen to examine the research topic. It focuses on Khushwant Singh's novel, which expresses his perspective on the division.

**KEYWORDS:** Partition, Nationalism, Trauma, Identity Crisis.

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India's most catastrophic historical events have left an indelible mark on fiction. A variety of partition narratives have been written in literary representations. Before analysing the trauma and pain of partition in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, it is important to critically analyse the conditions at the time of division. The goal of political activity in India during the first decade of the twentieth century was to free the country from colonial powers, but the Muslim League promoted the concept of a distinct independent state for all Muslims in the 1930s and 1940s. Between Hindus and Muslims, there was an ideological divide. As a result of this schism, strong feelings of nationalism arose, promoting national identity as a crucial component of one's identity. The idea of "Pure Land" swiftly disrupted the tranquility between diverse communities, and the most treasured ideal of independent India was devastated. The horrible events that preceded and followed partition had an impact on Hindu-Muslim relations. In several places of India, a series of violent attacks, homicides, rapes, and blood riots erupted. Because of the ideological difference between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, an extreme type of nationalism emerged, emphasizing national identification as the most important component of one's identity. This national identity was determined by one's racial and genetic characteristics. The idea of "Pure Land" quickly broke the composite culture in which different groups used to live before separation. Values and traditions were being eroded. The events leading up to and following the partition bred animosity between Hindus and Muslims, resulting in a series of violent attacks, deaths, and blood riots across India. Yasmin Khan remarks:

Children, the elderly and the sick were not spared and ritual humiliation and conversions from one faith to another occurred, alongside systematic looting and robbery clearly carried out with the intention of ruining lives. It seems that the aim was not only to kill, but to break people. A scorched earth policy in Punjab, which would today be labelled ethnic cleansing, was both the cause and the result of driving people from the land. Militias, armed gangs and members of defence organisations went on the rampage. All this both preceded and accompanied the migration of some twelve million people between the two new nation states of India and Pakistan (Khan 6).

The fundamental cause of the Indian subcontinent's division was religion. It decided the people's nationality. The emergence of the infant nation 'Pakistan' resulted in the destruction of the common national identity, national culture, national music, national mythology, national folklore, national literature, national values, national customs, and national traditions. As people began to associate with other groups, national identity

began to dwindle. There was uncertainty “that ordinary Punjabis were left completely in the dark about whether their homes were soon going to be in India or Pakistan” (Khan 105).

People who wished to find a secure home land faced an identity problem as a result of partition. Political leaders of the day were completely inept. They were unable to assess the dreadful situation that had arisen as a result of the division. On both sides of the boundary, people were unsure which portion of the Indian subcontinent they belonged to. They hurriedly moved to regions that were unfamiliar to them. They were subjected to horrors and labelled as refugees. It was a traumatic experience since they had been rejected by a culture that they believed was safe and would protect them. They felt isolated, but they didn't have an option but to dwell in that gloomy environment. People had to make sacrifices. People suffered emotional and bodily suffering as a result of their shattered identities. Their psyche had been harmed by partition traumas. *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, says:

The partition of India in 1947 was an undeclared civil war, and since then we have had disputed borders in every country of South Asia. The religion - based division of the country anticipated many of the questions that trouble us now across the subcontinent : ethnicity, communalism, the rise of religious fundamentalism and cultural nationalism. Sharply but poignantly, partition posed the question of “Belonging” in a way that polarized choice and allegiance, aggravating old, and new, antagonisms (21).

There has been a plethora of partition literature written. The significant works of Indian subcontinent writers living in India or belonging to the Indian diasporic community writing from abroad about partition include Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975), and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) etc. Besides these authors, the works of a few female authors, who have made significant contributions to the projection of history and fiction, should not be overlooked. These include Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988).

Before analysing Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, it is significant to have an overview of some partition novels. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, by Attia Hosain, is considered one of the most important books of the partition period. This work has a number of unique characteristics. It is the first novel in which a female author tells the story of division. The second most essential aspect is that she is the first Muslim writer to address the issue of division, and the third is that it is exceptionally beautifully written. During the partition, this novel focuses on the problems that Muslim families faced.

*Azadi* by Chaman Nahal is a story that does an excellent job of dealing with the issue of partition, and Chaman Nahal takes it to epic proportions. The author paints an accurate picture of the partition tragedy. The novelist takes us on a journey through the Lala Kanshi Ram family's saga. The separation has harmed the family. The novel's protagonist, Lala Kanshi Ram, acquires dignity and spiritual stature through a painful event at the cost of physical loss. The novel's strongest feature is its treatment of the partition issue and portrayal, which has earned it a reputation as an unbiased document in the history of Indian partition. The narrative transcends the agony of division, which is one of its most notable features. Kanshi Ram, the main character, is used to teach the audience.

Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* explores the issue of separation, albeit from a different angle. Three generations of a Bengali family living in Dhaka are told in this novel. The story is told through the eyes of an unnamed narrator who travels to England, India, and Pakistan. This is both a fictional and a true journey. The novel is divided into two chapters and takes us on a long historical journey from 1939 to 1980. The travel of Tridib's parents to London and the narrator's own visit to England are depicted in the first half of the novel. The narrator tells us about his grandmother, who spent many years of her life in Dhaka before partition. Tridib was slain in a communal riot in Dhaka in 1964, as a result of the communal disturbances that occurred following the partition.

Bapsi Sidhwa's identity as a Pakistani, a Parsi, and a woman writer not only allows us to read *Ice Candy Man* from the perspective of a triple marginalised writer, but it also allows us to read the novel from a non-partisan standpoint because the writer does not belong to either of the two communities involved in partition who perpetrated death and destruction for each other. The novel also aims to show how Sidhwa, who comes from a minority community, has educated readers about the psychological effects of partition on minorities and marginalised individuals. As a result of partition, not only Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were uprooted, but even minorities in India, such as the Parsis, were forced to endure identity crises, feelings of insecurity, and dislocation to a great extent. The novelist has repeatedly illustrated the Parsis' looming worries at the period, when they were a vulnerable minority being engulfed by the other main communities. The partition had a significant impact on the Parsis on the periphery, who began to feel uprooted and homeless, and were compelled to migrate to other areas as a result of the forced conditions. Their suffering was comparable to that of Hindus and Muslims.

By focusing on Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, the paper will examine the theme of trauma during partition. It was the first novel in English to depict a thorough account of the division in India. As a result of his personal experience with the partition holocaust, Khushwant Singh is well-equipped to cope with the impact

of the partition on communities, particularly rural populations. The tale is a wonderful blend of romance and adventure. Juggat Singh, the protagonist, is a thug who falls in love with a Muslim girl. He wants to preserve the refugee train to Pakistan, which also happens to be carrying his beloved. In the end, he gives his life to save the train. Through this work, Khushwant Singh conveyed a message of humanism. His masterful portrayal of love as a force that transcends communal prejudice and hatred is outstanding.

In *Train to Pakistan*, the characters are deeply affected by the trauma of Partition, which mirrors Caruth's idea that "The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely process." (Caruth, "Trauma" 5) Caruth's statement suggests that trauma is deeply rooted in historical events, and those affected carry the burden of a history they cannot fully process. In the context of *Train to Pakistan*, the trauma of Partition is not just an individual experience but a collective one, impacting entire communities. The characters in the novel embody the unresolved pain and loss of the Partition, which is a historical reality that continues to haunt them. To truly understand their trauma, it is crucial to examine the event from a communal perspective, recognizing how the violence and displacement of Partition left lasting scars on society. This broader view helps to contextualize the personal suffering of the characters, aligning with Caruth's idea that trauma is a product of historical events that cannot be fully understood or processed.

In the quiet village on the Indian border, the people used to live in peace. For decades, Mano Majra had been a model of communal peace. It was a subcontinental microcosm of various religions. The local deity, *Deo*, was the village's symbol of social harmony. The narrative, like a history book, begins with an explicit declaration of the severe predicament of the moment:

The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. ... There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins. Some of them had good reasons to feel that they had sinned. ... Muslims said that Hindus had planned and started the killing. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. ... 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 flight. ... one of these villages was Mano Majra (TP 1–2).

The novel is set in the early years of Independent India, when the country was left to its own devices, but with the scars of the country's division into India and Pakistan. However, 1947 was not like past years, since the country's status deteriorated dramatically as a result of the division. The news of division affected millions of Punjabis and Bengalis. These people were the most unhappy, having been uprooted from their ancestral homes and forced to migrate in large numbers. It's impossible to know how many people were brutally murdered during migration or how many vulnerable women were kidnapped from convoys in real time. The scene was dominated by evil. The violence that began in Calcutta spread throughout the country, torturing the people. K.K Sharma and B. K. Johri in *The Partition in Indian-English Novels* remarks:

Khushwant Singh blames both the communities equally for the violence that gripped the subcontinent during the days of partition. He holds Muslim frenzy responsible for the cruelties, but at the same time he finds the Sikhs equally responsible for the massacre (76).

The train-conscious villagers of Mano Majra saw the influence of partition on the late running of overcrowded trains. "Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night" (TP 81).

A traumatic event in this novel is represented through the arrival of the ghost train. The villagers witnessed frantic activity at the station. The horrible tragedy was only told through the pungent smell of burned flesh. "The village was stilled in a deathly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odour was. They all knew. They had known it all the time. The answer was implicit in the fact that the train had come from Pakistan" (TP 88-89). The sad circumstances destroyed the connection of brotherhood that existed between the Sikhs and Muslims in Mano Majra. Muslims were pushed to leave their hamlet and travel to Pakistan by the district administration, particularly the police. The visit of the head constable "had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter" (TP 127). The Sikhs of Mano Majra promised to assist and protect

the Muslims in the village. Imam Baksh, a Muslim clergyman, burst into tears and remarked : ““What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers”” (TP133). The swelled Sutlej presented a terrific sight. The bodies that floated to the surface revealed that “they were not drowned, they were murdered” (TP 151).

The partition of the Indian subcontinent, like other catastrophic historical events, deeply affected the mental and emotional well-being of those involved. As J. Roger Kurtz explains, "We think of trauma as a pathological mental and emotional condition, an injury to the psyche caused by catastrophic events, or by the threat of such events, which overwhelm an individual's normal response mechanisms" (2) In the case of Partition, the mass violence, displacement, and loss experienced by millions not only caused physical harm but also left lasting emotional scars. The trauma endured by the victims was so profound that it overwhelmed their psychological defenses, leaving them unable to fully process or heal from the experience. This understanding of trauma helps to interpret the psychological toll of Partition, which was not just a matter of physical survival but also of emotional and mental devastation.

In the novel, the trauma experienced by the characters is not just physical but deeply psychological, aligning with the idea of Caruth that trauma is "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind"(Caruth 3). The characters, such as Iqbal, Jugga, and Nooran, experience emotional and mental anguish that lingers long after the physical violence of Partition. While the body may heal from physical injuries, the psychological scars left by the violence, displacement, and loss are far harder to recover from.

For example, Jugga's emotional turmoil, especially his internal conflict over love, guilt, and revenge, showcases how trauma impacts the mind. Similarly, Iqbal's attempt to intellectualize the suffering around him fails to prevent the psychological effects of the violence, indicating that the mind is overwhelmed by the horrors of Partition. These characters carry the invisible wounds of Partition, with the trauma deeply embedded in their psyches, which reflects how the mind is affected by a historical catastrophe that cannot be fully processed or expressed.

The novelist tries to share the feeling of trauma through the love story of Juggat Singh and Nooran. Juggat Singh, the protagonist, gets charged with murder and imprisoned in these horrific circumstances. Juggat Singh loses his love Nooran to partition when the Muslims of Mano Majra are forced to flee from the village for the sake of their lives. After reviewing this novel, we can conclude that it played a significant role in depicting the trauma during partition. Its goal is to show the development of characters against the backdrop of death, devastation, and bloodshed that occurred during India's and Pakistan's division. As a result, it delves into the trauma of partition, which separated the Indian subcontinent into two implacable rivals, contemporary India and Pakistan. This paper, thus, intends to focus on the impact of trauma on the psyche of the twin nations, namely India and Pakistan.

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