



A Representation of Solidarity in Khushwant Singh's Novel Train to Pakistan

Abstract

Literature has been a mirror of society since human being started developing their critical skills and creative skills by putting their emotions, expressions and experiences in wordings. It reflects the existing mind-sets of people as well as exists for future references. Literature has significant responsibility to preserve and maintain the record of particular period for the next generation and it has been performing its duty satisfactorily. It helps people to look at the world with the perspectives of ancestors, too. The present research paper aims to observe solidarity in Khushwant Singh's popular novel 'Train to Pakistan'. The novel contains partition as one of central themes. It depicts the pictures of two lands after division. However, researcher finds opposite side of the main theme- partition and he brings out the harmony reflected in different communities living together in Mano Majra, a fiction village on the bank of Sutlej River near the border of Hindustan and Pakistan. Solidarity refers to the harmony, acceptance and love among the people of various communities belonging to different castes, races and religion in specific area of country. 'Train to Pakistan' deals with harmony among three main communities of village Mano Majra Hindu, Sikh and Muslim who have been living together for many years irrespective of their religion and culture. Partition even could not shake their concord feelings at some extents. The paper describes incidents where solidarity is inspected.

Key Terms: Representation of Solidarity

Introduction

India has witnessed a great diversity of faith and religion from the earliest times, but this has not interfered with the peaceful pursuit of the ways of life of different sections. Christians and Jews who came to India in the first century of the Christian era found hospitable reception here. After several centuries, the Parsis and Muslims received equal reception. People of India value the importance of Solidarity and National Integration. The dictum of catholicity of Indian Culture, 'live and let live', has been forged through ages, different religions, races and cultures of the vast country into a united concept of oneness. It was this inherent unity and solidarity, which enabled India to fight against the British might as one man for freedom. National integration is thus an established fact.

Khushwant Singh and 'Train to Pakistan'

Khushwant Singh is India's best-known writer and columnist. Khushwant Singh was born on Feb. 2, 1915 in West Punjab. He got his schoolings in Delhi, Lahore and London. Train to Pakistan was published in 1956 and received award of the Grove India Fiction prize. The Voice of God and Other Stories was published in 1957 and then followed his second novel I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale in 1959. A History of the Sikhs volumes on Sikh history and religion was published in 1963 and received Rockefeller Foundation grant for extensive travel and research.

Khushwant Singh became famous for *Train to Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. *Train to Pakistan* made him internationally known, though he had made a literary reputation with publication of his short stories *The Mark of Vishnu* and other stories. *Train to Pakistan* is novel of partition and its effect on Indians and Pakistanis. The novel is a depiction of human massacre between communities which lived together peacefully before the declaration of independence from British. Freedom struggle made them united and freedom separated them with brutal and dreadful mindsets towards each other. *Train to Pakistan* is divided into four sections like *Dacoity*, *Kalyug Mano Majra*, and *Karma*. Each portion is narrated skillfully keeping in mind the situation before and after the independence which results in separating one land into two segments which have been enemies. The novel is set in fictional village of *Mano Majra* which is located on the bank of river *Sutlej* near the Indo-Pak borders. The story moves around the main characters like *Mano Majra*, *Trains*, *Meet Singh*, *Imam Baksh*, *Juggut Singh*, *Iqbal*, *Hukum Chand*. The life of *Mano Majra* people was disturbed by the murder of *Ram Lal*, one of the Hindus, by *Malli* and his companions. Later, the inspection started for finding real criminal. Last chapters deal with the heavy effect of partition and huge migration of different communities from India to Pakistan and vice-versa. The novel throws light on peaceful life of *Mano Majra* people even in the fearful condition of partition and harmony, which is noticeable though the village was situated on the border of two separated nations. It is unbelievable state where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims live with the feelings of unity and as they thought to be their brothers since long. The novel ends with tragical death of *Juggut Singh* who sacrifices his life to save his lover *Nooran* and Muslims in the name of humanity.

Solidarity in ‘Train to Pakistan’

Partition led the people towards inhuman deeds. The picture of partition is full of massacre, violence and communal agitation. Humanity seemed to be dead. Hindu, Sikhs and Muslims no longer felt the sense of brotherhood amidst them. Cruelty dominated over these major communities. But amongst this atmosphere, there were people who retained their human values and did not take part in killing or mutilation. They showed their humanity in helping suffered and needy people appealing to avoid violent attitude by considering all as members of same God who has been taking care of them. The paper deals with incidents where solidarity is depicted as central theme of the novel *Train to Pakistan*.

Train to Pakistan mainly focuses on the consequences of partition, avoiding the graphic presentation of the horrific events. Roy also talking in the similar manner about the novel says:

... in *Train to Pakistan*, the violence that erupted at the time of the partition is represented in a very unusual way. There is no detailed description in the novel of the train journey undertaken by the refugees- in terms of neither the practical difficulties faced nor the dangers involved. More importantly, we are also not shown the violence happening: for there is not even a reported description of the incidents in the novel. We are just informed about the end result of the violence: the trainloads of corpses that arrive at *Mano Majra*. What is detailed by Khushwant Singh is the after math of the violence... (Roy 36)

The novel starts with the chapter *Dacoity* in which author pens the atmosphere of *Mano Majra*, a fiction village where the story of novel revolves and one of the important characters of novels, where people of different communities live together abandoning their caste, religion and tradition away.

Train is one such character of novel that helps people of *Mano Majra* in harmonizing their daily lives. The life of people in *Mano Majra* is set as per the movement of passenger trains as well as good trains. It interferes between morning alarms to night sleep. Villagers decide their rituals, taking early breakfast and going for their daily chores, returning home for taking mid-day meal and having short power nap, going back towards work, coming back in the evening based on up and down of trains. There was a small colony of shopkeepers and hawkers at the railway station. They were to supply traveler’s foods, betel leaves, cigarettes, teas, biscuits and sweetmeats. This shows the presence of a good cultural understanding in the village. Therefore, train is symbolized as a tool of maintaining integrity among people of *Mano Majra*.

There are about seventy families in Mano Majra and Ram Lal's is the only Hindu family. The village is having equal population of Sikhs and Muslims. They know each other very well and live in peace. Though they worship and believe in different gods, the time of special event or critical situation unite them by praying same stone, which is vividly discussed in following paragraph:

...there is one object that all Mano Majrans even Lala Ram Lal-- venerate. This is a three foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keeker tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the deo to which all the villagers--Hindu, Sikh, Muslims or pseudo-Christian-repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing. (Singh, 2-3)

Hence, they remember local deity occasional which can be considered as an epitome of harmony among them portrayed by novelist. In another part of the same chapter, it is noted that people of Mano Majra depend upon each other in following their routines where they don't feel themselves a member of particular religion which is harmonious nature of villagers reflected in following words:

The Mullah at the mosque knows that it is time for the Morning Prayer. He has a quick wash, stands facing west towards Mecca and with his fingers in his ears cries in long sonorous notes, 'Allah-o-Akbar'. He priest at the Sikh temple lies in bed till the mullah has called. Then he too gets up, draws a bucket of water from the well in the temple courtyard, pours it over himself, and intones his prayer in monotonous singsong to the sound of splashing water. (Singh, 4-5)

This perspective shows the cross-cultural contact and attachment to the society. There is the symptom of cultural and religious harmony in the village where people of different sects, races and religions live together. So, rituals have been finished through believing each other's actions that was the regular task till the effect of partition reaches by some agitated and anti-social activists in the village. These lines as characterize the oneness and sacrifices for village-mates...

"The Punjabi's code was even more baffling. For them truth, honour, financial integrity were 'all right', but these were placed lower down the scale of values than being true to one's salt, to one's friends and fello villagers. For friends you could lie in court or cheat, and no one would blame you. On the contrary, you became a nar admi---a he-man who had defied authority (magistrates and police) and religion (oath on the scriptures) but proved true to friendship. It was the projection of rural society where everyone in the village was a relation and loyalty to the village was the supreme test." (Singh, 44)

Officers even were taking keen interest in proving harmony in the village at the critical time of partition. The following conversation proves the peace-loving nature of officials depicted through novelist:

'Well, Inspector Sahib, how are things?'

The subinspector joined his hands. 'God is merciful. We only pray for your kindness.'

'No communal trouble in this area?'

'We have escaped it so far, sir. Convoys of Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan have come through and some Muslims have gone out, but we have no incidents.' (Singh, 20)

Hukum Chand, a district magistrate has also shown harmonious nature towards Muslims by ordering his subordinates for arrangement of safe migration from Mano Majra to Pakistani refugee camp. He has also deep concern for Haseena to be evacuated.

They never forgot the fact that they had been living together for years and a momentary decision should not be strong enough to break those bonds. Even after the communal tension envelops most of the regions, Mano Majra manages to maintain the peace and tolerance in spite of the heterogeneity of the village:

The riots had become a rout. 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. The only remaining cases of peace were a scatter of villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villages was Mano Majra. (Singh 1)

Gurdwara, a place of Sikh community's religion place, also becomes the center of integration and general assembly for occasional purposes. Though it is frequently visited by few old men and women along with children on the daily basis, it turns into assembly place whenever important decision to be taken for all communities of village. The caretaker of gurdwara is Meet Sing who respects everyone looking in him a part of God. When a stranger from another village, Iqbal got down at Mano Majra station, he enquires about any residential facility is available in the village. Stationmaster responds in following words:

'There is only the Sikh temple. You will see the yellow flag-mast in the centre of the village.'
(Singh, 36)

After reaching gurdwara, Iqbal received warmly by Meet Sing without knowing his caste in terrible period of partition:

'This is gurdwara, the Guru's house-anyone may stay here.' (Singh, 37)

When people finish their routines, they gather at gurdwara to share their sorrows and happiness. At the arrival of Iqbal, people start coming to greet this newcomer in their village. One of the dwellers, Banta Singh comes with milk to offer his hospitality towards young-man. He is so excited in welcoming guests. He insists Iqbal to drink milk which he himself milked his buffalo. At the same time, one of Muslims asks innocently to know the current status of country:

'Well, Babuji,' began the Muslim. 'Tell us something. What is happening in the world? What is all this about Pakistan and Hindustan?' (Singh, 50-51)

Therefore, gurdwara is introduced as a place of uniformity and it is opened for all in any situation irrespective of age, caste, community and religion. This indicates the representation solidarity through character of gurdwara in Train to Pakistan.

Meet Singh to whom villagers address as bhai of gurdwara explains the importance of living together in worse condition of partition. He preaches like orator to gathered Sikhs for maintaining peace harmony among communities instead of taking revenge. He tries to persuade the group by asking questions:

Have they ousted you from your lands or occupied your houses? Have they seduced your womenfolk? Tell me, what have they done? (Singh, 130-131)

All the members, who were ready to take revenge with Muslims, were convinced not to bother Muslims of Mano Majra at least, who had been living like their brothers for many years.

Is there anyone here who could say to Muslims," Brothers, you should go away from Mano Majra"? (Singh, 132)

The story creates more images that are sentimental by hug of Imam Baksh and Meet Singh at the thought of separation. Both cries and others also their eyes wet and wiped. The lambardar consoles Imam Chacha :

"Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and grandchildren can live here as long as you like. If anyone speaks rudely to you, your wives or your children, it will be us first and our wives and children before a single hair of your heads is touched." (Singh, 134)

This shows the deep attachment among villagers. When the Muslims come out of their homes with their luggage to go to Pakistan, the rest of the people in the village come out to see them off. Their departure becomes painful to both the communities. However, they are culturally different, but still their common culture before Partition haunts their minds. Their understanding was so good that one was moved by the other's misery. The novelist gives a vivid picture of their sweet relationship:

The Sikhs watched them till they were out of sight. They wiped the tears off faces and turned back to their homes with heavy hearts. (Singh, 145)

After denial of Pakistani officer to carry extra luggage in trucks and orders the non-migrants to take care of remaining goods of living Muslims, lambardar replies honestly to the officer which presents his touchy relationship with migrating Muslims as:

'No Sahib, You can say what you liken and you can be angry with us, but we will not touch our brothers' properties. You want us to become enemies?' (Singh, 142)

He concludes his conversation with Pakistani officer, which made him almost silent, and forced to leave from Mano Majra at the earliest. His answer against the blame for killing Muslims by Hindus and Sikhs make the reader feel the deep bond among different communities.

'We are brothers and will always remain brothers' (Singh, 142)

Towards the end of the novel, people make a plan to ambush the train taking the Muslims including those of Mano Majra to Pakistan. But when Juggut Singh comes to know about Nooran and the people's plan about the train, he performs the act of supreme self-sacrifice to save the lives of people. Juggut Singh does not care for his own safety and foils the plot to ensnare the train, letting it to roll over his body to Pakistan. Here, Juggut Singh highlights the importance of love in saving humanity and compassion. It was his love, which makes him sacrifice his life for the people who consider him a criminal.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can say that Train to Pakistan conveys a message of solidarity through dialogs and actions of various characters represented by Khushwant Singh. The novel has sign of partition and its effects on peacefully living communities of Hindustan and Pakistan but at the same time love, sacrifice, attachment for village-mates, harmony, peaceful atmosphere of Mano Majra till the end are also integrated aspects which make people united and connected. In nutshell, the novel proves cultural, social, political, religious and solidarity through the pages. It is really a benchmark novel in the canon of Indian English Literature.

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