

Communalism and Moral Values in Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh

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Abstract: *Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan is one of the most significant novels written on the Partition of India in 1947. The novel presents a realistic and emotional portrayal of communal violence, human suffering, displacement, and the collapse of moral values during one of the darkest periods in Indian history. Set in the fictional village of Mano Majra, the novel depicts how ordinary people who once lived together peacefully become victims of hatred and political manipulation. At the same time, Singh also highlights the enduring power of humanity, sacrifice, love, and compassion amidst violence and chaos. This paper examines the themes of communalism and moral values in Train to Pakistan and analyzes how Khushwant Singh portrays both the destructive and redemptive aspects of human nature during Partition. The study further explores the role of characters, symbols, and social structures in conveying the moral and political message of the novel*

Keywords: Communalism, Partition, Moral Values, Humanity, Violence.

The Partition of India in 1947 was one of the most traumatic events in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The division of British India into India and Pakistan resulted in widespread communal riots, displacement, bloodshed, and migration. Millions of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were forced to leave their homes and migrate across newly drawn borders. During this period, human relationships were shattered by communal hatred and political conflict.

Indian English literature has produced several remarkable works dealing with the tragedy of Partition, but Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan occupies a special place because of its realistic and balanced portrayal of human emotions and communal tensions. Published in 1956, the novel is considered a masterpiece of Partition literature. Unlike political narratives that focus on leaders and historical events, Singh concentrates on ordinary villagers and their daily lives.

The novel is set in Mano Majra, a small village on the Indo-Pak border where Sikhs and Muslims live together peacefully. The arrival of ghost trains carrying dead bodies and the spread of communal propaganda disturb the harmony of the village. Through this setting, Singh presents the devastating impact of communalism on innocent people.

At the same time, the novel also explores moral values such as love, sacrifice, tolerance, and humanity. Even during extreme violence, some characters retain their moral integrity and demonstrate compassion and courage. Therefore, Train to Pakistan is not only a story of communal hatred but also a powerful reflection on human morality.

To understand the themes of communalism and morality in the novel, it is essential to understand the historical context of Partition. British colonial policies often encouraged divisions among religious communities through the strategy of "divide and rule." Over time, political tensions between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League intensified.

The demand for a separate Muslim nation eventually led to the creation of Pakistan in August 1947. The announcement of Partition caused fear and uncertainty among people. Communal riots broke out in Punjab, Bengal, Delhi, and several other regions. Trains carrying refugees were attacked, villages were destroyed, and thousands of innocent people were killed.



Punjab became the center of violence because of its mixed population of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Khushwant Singh himself witnessed the horrors of Partition, and his personal experiences influenced the writing of *Train to Pakistan*. The novel reflects the emotional and psychological trauma experienced by ordinary people during this period. Communalism refers to strong loyalty and attachment to one's religious or ethnic group, often resulting in hostility toward other communities. In *Train to Pakistan*, communalism is shown as a destructive force that destroys social harmony and human relationships.

At the beginning of the novel, Mano Majra is portrayed as a peaceful village where Sikhs and Muslims live together harmoniously. The villagers are not deeply concerned with politics or religious conflict. They share daily life, celebrate festivals together, and depend on one another economically and socially.

The village symbolizes traditional Indian society where communal identities coexist peacefully. The people of Mano Majra are united by common humanity rather than religious differences. This harmony suggests that ordinary people do not naturally hate each other; rather, communal violence is often created by political and external forces.

The peaceful atmosphere changes with the arrival of trains carrying dead bodies from Pakistan. These trains become symbols of violence, fear, and hatred. News of massacres spreads rapidly, creating suspicion and anger among communities.

The villagers who once trusted each other begin to view members of other religions with fear. Rumors and propaganda further intensify communal tension. Singh demonstrates how communalism spreads psychologically through fear, revenge, and misinformation.

Khushwant Singh criticizes political leaders and authorities for encouraging communal division. The police, administrators, and political activists manipulate ordinary people for their own interests. The government fails to protect innocent citizens and instead contributes to fear and confusion.

Characters like Hukum Chand represent the moral weakness of political leadership. Although he understands the tragedy of Partition, he remains passive and ineffective. The novel suggests that political ambition and administrative failure played a major role in communal violence.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the novel is the transformation of ordinary people into violent mobs. People who once lived peacefully become capable of cruelty and murder. The attack planned on the train carrying Muslim refugees demonstrates how communal hatred destroys moral judgment.

Singh portrays mob mentality as irrational and dangerous. Individuals lose their humanity when they become part of violent groups driven by revenge and hatred. The novel highlights how communalism reduces people to religious identities and eliminates compassion.

Despite the violence and brutality depicted in the novel, Khushwant Singh also emphasizes moral values and human dignity. The novel presents both the darkness and goodness of human nature.

Humanity is one of the central moral values in the novel. Even during communal riots, some characters continue to show kindness and empathy. The relationship between Sikhs and Muslims in Mano Majra initially reflects mutual respect and cooperation.

The villagers are shocked by the violence happening outside their village because it contradicts their traditional moral values. Their reluctance to participate in communal hatred indicates that humanity can survive even in difficult circumstances.

The love story between Jugga and Nooran is one of the most important aspects of the novel. Jugga, a Sikh, and Nooran, a Muslim girl, represent the possibility of love beyond religious divisions.

Their relationship challenges communal boundaries and demonstrates the power of personal affection over religious hatred. Jugga's love for Nooran eventually becomes the motivation for his heroic sacrifice. Through this relationship, Singh suggests that genuine human connections are stronger than communal identities.

The climax of the novel focuses on Jugga's sacrifice. Although Jugga is initially introduced as a criminal and a rough village youth, he ultimately becomes the moral hero of the story.



When extremists plan to attack the train carrying Muslim refugees, Jugga risks his life to stop the massacre because Nooran is among the passengers. He cuts the rope intended to derail the train and dies in the process.

Jugga's sacrifice symbolizes redemption and the triumph of humanity over communal hatred. His action restores faith in moral values and demonstrates that individual courage can challenge violence and injustice.

While Jugga represents moral courage, other characters reveal moral weakness and hypocrisy. Many educated and powerful individuals fail to act against violence.

Hukum Chand, the magistrate, understands the horror of communalism but lacks the strength to prevent violence. Intellectuals and political leaders often remain passive observers. Singh criticizes society for its inability to uphold justice and morality during times of crisis.

Jugga is the central moral figure of the novel. Initially portrayed as a local criminal, he undergoes moral transformation through love and sacrifice.

His character challenges conventional ideas about morality. Although he is uneducated and rough, he possesses genuine humanity and courage. In contrast, educated and respectable individuals often fail morally.

Jugga's final act of sacrifice demonstrates that true morality comes from compassion and selflessness rather than social status.

Nooran represents innocence, love, and vulnerability. As a Muslim girl in a Sikh-majority village, she becomes a victim of communal conflict.

Her relationship with Jugga symbolizes hope for communal harmony. She also represents the suffering of ordinary women during Partition, who often faced displacement, fear, and violence.

Iqbal is an educated political activist who represents intellectual idealism. However, he is often confused and inactive.

Although he speaks about social justice and political reform, he fails to take decisive action when confronted with real violence. Through Iqbal, Singh criticizes intellectuals who discuss morality theoretically but avoid personal risk.

Hukum Chand is a government magistrate who represents administrative authority. He is emotionally disturbed by the violence but remains morally weak.

His character reflects the failure of political and bureaucratic systems during Partition. Despite understanding the tragedy, he cannot effectively stop communal violence.

The train is the most important symbol in the novel. Initially, trains represent movement, communication, and normal life. However, during Partition, trains become symbols of death and horror.

The arrival of ghost trains carrying corpses symbolizes the destruction caused by communal hatred. The title Train to Pakistan itself reflects the tragic migration and suffering experienced during Partition.

At the same time, the final train carrying Muslim refugees also symbolizes hope and survival because Jugga sacrifices himself to save it.

Mano Majra symbolizes traditional Indian society based on coexistence and communal harmony. The village initially exists outside political conflicts, but eventually becomes affected by national violence.

The transformation of Mano Majra reflects the collapse of social unity during Partition.

The river and recurring images of darkness symbolize fear, uncertainty, and death. They create an atmosphere of tension and reflect the emotional trauma experienced by the characters.

Khushwant Singh presents Partition not only as a political event but also as a moral crisis. Violence during Partition destroyed ethical principles and human relationships.

People who once valued friendship and coexistence became driven by revenge and communal identity. Moral values such as compassion, tolerance, and justice weakened under fear and hatred.

However, the novel also suggests that morality can survive through individual acts of courage and love. Jugga's sacrifice proves that humanity can exist even in times of extreme violence.

The novel therefore presents a dual vision of human nature: people are capable of both cruelty and selflessness.

Khushwant Singh uses a simple and realistic narrative style that makes the novel emotionally powerful. His language is direct, vivid, and accessible.



The novel combines historical reality with fictional storytelling. Singh avoids romanticizing Partition and instead presents violence honestly and objectively.

The use of irony is also important. Characters who appear respectable often behave immorally, while a criminal like Jugga becomes the true hero.

The structure of the novel gradually builds tension, leading to the dramatic climax. Singh's realistic descriptions of violence create emotional impact while emphasizing the tragic consequences of communalism.

Train to Pakistan remains highly relevant in modern society because communalism and religious intolerance continue to exist in many parts of the world.

The novel warns against the dangers of hatred, political manipulation, and extremism. It reminds readers that communal violence destroys not only lives but also moral and cultural values.

At the same time, the novel encourages faith in humanity and coexistence. Jugga's sacrifice demonstrates that individuals can resist hatred and uphold moral principles.

The message of tolerance, compassion, and communal harmony is especially important in contemporary multicultural societies.

Many literary critics consider Train to Pakistan one of the finest works of Partition literature.

Critics praise Khushwant Singh for presenting a balanced perspective without blaming any single community. Instead of portraying one religion as evil, he emphasizes the shared suffering of all communities.

Scholars also appreciate the novel's humanistic approach. Singh focuses on ordinary people rather than political leaders, making the tragedy more personal and emotional.

Some critics argue that the novel exposes the hypocrisy of political systems and educated elites. Others highlight the symbolic significance of Jugga's sacrifice as an affirmation of universal human values.

The novel presents a strong relationship between moral values and human rights. Moral values such as compassion, tolerance, equality, sacrifice, and humanity form the ethical foundation of society, while human rights ensure the dignity, freedom, and safety of individuals. During the Partition, both moral values and human rights collapsed under the pressure of communal hatred and political violence.

In Train to Pakistan, innocent people are denied their basic human rights, including the right to life, security, freedom, and dignity. Refugees are forced to abandon their homes, women face violence and fear, and entire communities become victims of displacement and massacre. The trains carrying dead bodies symbolize the complete destruction of human rights during Partition.

At the same time, the novel demonstrates how the absence of moral values leads to the violation of human rights. When people abandon compassion and coexistence, violence becomes normalized. Communalism transforms individuals into enemies based solely on religion, destroying ethical principles and social harmony.

However, Khushwant Singh also shows that moral values can protect human rights. Jugga's sacrifice to save the refugee train is not only an act of love but also an act of defending human life and dignity. His action represents resistance against hatred and violence. Through this act, the novel suggests that humanity and moral courage are essential for preserving justice and peace.

The comparison between moral values and human rights in the novel reveals that both are interconnected. Human rights cannot survive without moral responsibility, and moral values lose meaning when human dignity is ignored.

Khushwant Singh's portrayal of Partition is deeply realistic and humanistic. The novel does not merely describe political conflict; it examines the psychological and moral transformation of society during communal violence. Singh's analysis of communalism demonstrates how fear, rumors, revenge, and political manipulation can destroy centuries of coexistence.

The perception of morality in the novel is complex. Singh avoids presenting characters as completely good or evil. Instead, he shows that ordinary individuals are capable of both violence and compassion depending on circumstances. Educated and powerful characters such as Hukum Chand and Iqbal often fail morally, while Jugga, a socially marginalized figure, emerges as the true moral hero.



The novel also creates the perception that communal hatred is not natural but socially and politically constructed. Before the arrival of violence, the villagers of Mano Majra live peacefully without strong communal divisions. This suggests that ordinary people value coexistence more than conflict.

Another important aspect of the analysis is Singh's criticism of political systems and leadership. Administrative authorities fail to protect innocent people, while political ideologies become disconnected from human suffering. Through this portrayal, the novel emphasizes the need for ethical leadership and social responsibility.

From a modern perspective, the novel continues to offer important lessons about secularism, tolerance, and human dignity. It warns society against religious extremism and encourages readers to uphold moral values even during times of crisis.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a powerful exploration of communalism, violence, and morality during the Partition of India. The novel vividly portrays how communal hatred destroys social harmony and human relationships. Through the experiences of the villagers of Mano Majra, Singh reveals the psychological and emotional impact of Partition on ordinary people.

At the same time, the novel also celebrates humanity, love, and sacrifice. Characters like Jugga demonstrate that moral values can survive even during periods of extreme violence. His heroic sacrifice represents hope and redemption in a world dominated by hatred.

The novel remains an important literary and historical document because it reminds readers of the dangers of communalism and the importance of compassion and coexistence. Its message of humanity and moral courage continues to be relevant in contemporary society.

Thus, *Train to Pakistan* is not merely a Partition novel; it is a timeless reflection on human nature, morality, and the struggle between hatred and humanity.

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