

---

## Partition, Violence, Displacement and Trauma in Khushwant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan'

Chetra Bahadur Darlami Magar<sup>1</sup>

Article Information : Received : March 19, 2024 Revised : April 29, 2024 Accepted : June 09, 2024

---

### Abstract

Partition of British India is an unforgettable painful experience for many people in India today. In 1947 the British government divided India into two halves: India and Pakistan before leaving India. It caused violence, separation, and displacement among people living in the contemporary harmonious community of Hindu, Muslim, Shikh, and Christian in India. It further caused traumatic feelings among them. In this context the paper attempts to study the separation, dismemberment, displacement of Muslims to Pakistan; and traumatic feelings among the people of 'Mano Majra' through the textual analysis of Khushwant Singh's novel 'Train to Pakistan'. 'Mano Majra' was a peaceful remote village with perfect harmony among Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Pseudo-Christian people living together on the bank of the Sutlej River, Punjab in India. Imam Baksh, Bhai Meet Singh, Lala Ram Lal, and other villagers were living in co-operation in 'Mano Majra' before the India-Pakistan partition. It is the setting of Khushwant Singh's novel 'Train to Pakistan'. Hukum Chanda (Magistrate), Sub Inspector, Haseena Begam, Juggut Singh, Nooran, Malli, and Iqbal are other major characters in the novel. The novel shows the completely harmonious society in the village before partition. However, the partition caused the complete division and disruption of harmonious societies in India including 'Mano Majra' leading to violence, displacement, separation, and trauma.

**Keywords:** Harmony, Partition, Displacement, Violence, Trauma

---

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, Birendra Bidhya Mandir Campus, Tikapur

Corresponding Author: [chhatra.darlami@gmail.com](mailto:chhatra.darlami@gmail.com)

ISSN : 2091-2161

©The Author(s)



Published by Autar Dei Chaudharain Research Centre (ADCRC), Mahendra Multiple Campus, Nepalgunj, Banke

The open access article is distributed under a Creative Common Attribution (CC BY-NC 4.0) licence.

### Introduction

1947 was the year of the division of British-India into two nations: India and Pakistan. It was the great wound and tear in the history of the united India. On the other hand, it was also the year of celebration for the birth of the new nation Pakistan for the people of Pakistan. However, the partition caused great violence murdering and killing thousands of innocent Muslims, Hindus, Shikhs, and other people in India. Millions of people migrated from one place to another place and one nation to another nation in search of their safety. It gave a very deep and unforgettable traumatic feeling and suffering in their life. Khushwant Singh's novel *'Train to Pakistan'* is also a beautiful novel portraying the harmonious community of Mano Majra village and how it was completely ruined after the partition in 1947.

### Literature Review

There are many research studies conducted on partition. Yet very few research studies have been conducted on the novel *'Train to Pakistan'* from the perspective of partition, displacement, dismemberment, and trauma. Some of the research studies related to it are as follows:

Partition, violence, displacement, and trauma are interrelated with each other. Among them, partition is the division of one state into two or more states or nations. It establishes two or more nationalities. In this context, Rada Ivekovic claims, "Partitions perform a regional political configuration through achieving independence for new states. They often institutionalize inequality (an injustice), whether inner or outer, or both" (11). It means that partition is the birth or independence of a new nation. The cause of partition is to institutionalize injustice to get independence. It justifies existing inequalities in the state which leads a country into division. If the partition cannot resolve the solution of the problem it may lead to further partition. She further adds, "They usually settle for a transition period or a 'temporary' arrangement during which further partitions may happen or drag on. The partition may be thought of as temporary and therefore entails prompt recognition by neighbors and accomplices in the divorce (11-12). She means if the partition is not justified, then it may lead to further partition. In this context, we can take the example of British India's partition into India and Pakistan and the further partition of Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh. Chopra in her article 'Partitioned Lives in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*' expresses that inter alia about common people's experience of partition. She thoroughly surveys the two novels and finds there were massive killings, rapes, and butchering of common people in the partition violence. She also believes, "It is the unthoughtful decision of partition and hollow

love of 'nationalism' that let the mischief off and out "(175). She thinks that the wrong decision and the hollow love of leaders for the Muslim state (Pakistan) and Hindu state (India) divided British India into two separate nations. Thus, partition is not only the breaking of one nation but it is also the superficial vision and the cause of the birth of many nations and nationalities.

In the context of Khushwant Singh's novel 'Train to Pakistan, Raj states that he wrote a beautiful novel about the connection between the person, nation, memory, and forgetting relating to partition. He says that the writer's narrative shows the critical conditions of thousands of refugees at the time of partition and the history of independence of the nation. He uses his memory to portray the sufferings of victims during partition and the conditions of the time. It also reveals the analytical purchase of his memory. He thinks, "Memory, as an analytical category, can potentially be used to insert personal narrative to challenge the hegemony of official history. This understanding of memory dominates current research on the partition" (31). It means that the writer has used his memory to record and reflect the suffering of the people during the partition in his novel. Similarly, Chew thinks that "much earlier, Khushwant Singh had brought his fine novel, Train to Pakistan (1955), to its close with Juggut Singh's death-defying attempt to save a trainload of Muslims from destruction" (Chew 170). He perceives the novel from a humanistic perspective and says that in the love of Juggut Singh for the Muslim girl Nooran and his attempt to save his beloved from the planned attack of Shikhs he sacrifices his own life. Furthermore, he saves all the Muslims going on a train to Pakistan in an attempt to save his beloved. According to Pandey, 'Train to Pakistan' is a perfect example of structural trauma. He states, "Singh presents Mano Majra, which is intended as a microcosm of India as an archetype of secular heaven where people of diverse religions live in a harmonious coexistence (132). The novel presents not only the perfect structural harmony among Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and pseudo-Christians in the village 'Mano Majra' but also the secularism and microcosm of India. The partition caused the displacement of Muslims and Hindus which further caused structural trauma among them and Indian society. Thus, the first researchers find his novel as a fine novel from the perspective of portrayal of memory and the latter observes the novel from a humanistic perspective and Pandey claims that there is structural trauma in the novel.

Trauma can be classified into personal trauma and social trauma. Regarding personal trauma, Cathy Caruth claims, "Trauma as it first occurs is uncertain, but the survivors' uncertainty is not a simple amnesia; for the event returns, as Freud points out insistently and against their will (qtd. in Pandey 124-125). She means that trauma is not simply remembering. It is the sudden hunt of memory. She further adds that the trauma may remain in the condition of

latency and it is "triggered by a similar event" (125). Trauma only remains in the dormant state until it is stimulated by a similar incident. Personal trauma is limited to individuals whereas social trauma affects the group of the society. They are different from each other in volume and number. However, both of them are different from cultural trauma since they are not ritualized. Alexander puts forth his opinion about social trauma, "References to trauma, and representations about it, are not just individual but social and collective... They are fundamental concerns of everyday life, matters for reporting in daily newspapers and websites, and they powerfully affect contemporary conflicts at the individual, institutional, national, and global levels (98). The volume of social trauma is huge as it affects the whole society at the same time. It is taken as more serious trauma than personal trauma in the media. In this way, trauma can affect people individually and socially in a collective way.

Dismemberment and displacement are two similar issues connected with partition and trauma. Membership as Wanat states refers to the interdependent connection of people and society whereas "dismemberment may be seen as 'de-membership' in the sense of social disintegration, geographic depopulation or dehumanization, and environmental devastation"(149). Dismemberment is seen as the separation from the society or group. Displacement refers to the forceful or unwilling transfer from one place to another place. Partition caused the displacement of millions of individuals or families in India in the India-Pakistan partition in 1947. Displacement causes not only the displacement of place but also the displacement of the mind. Guha thinks of displacement as "a sudden up-rootedness, an unlearning and relearning of identity. Migration is often accompanied by a feeling of unavoidable disorientation" (15). Thus, displacement is the disorientation and up-rootedness of the people from a particular place. It leads to separation and traumatic feelings.

## **Departure**

The above-mentioned researchers have defined partition, displacement, dismemberment, and trauma independently or in connection with Khushwant Singh's *'Train to Pakistan'*. Yet there is still a need to study Khushwant Singh's novel *'Train to Pakistan'* from the perspective of partition, displacement, dismemberment, and trauma together.

## **Methodology**

Partition itself does not have a positive message. When a country is divided into two distinct nationalities and further leads to the birth of two different countries, it causes disturbance in the former harmony of the contemporary societies. In the history of the partition of British

India, there was the shock of sudden and unexpected violence in the societies which made millions of people victimized and separated. It often caused traumatic feelings in the divided and separated communities of India and Pakistan for several years later. For the research study, the researcher has used Gyanendra Pandey's theory on remembering partition, violence, and trauma in the context of Partition of India from the perspective of partition, violence, displacement, and trauma.

### Textual Analysis

During the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, British India went through a crack into Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. It caused partition with the violation. It was not the partition of a nation into two new nations only. Indeed it resulted in the massacre, rape, and butchering of thousands and fled as refugees of millions of people. Ultimately, it brought deep shock and trauma with terrorizing violence. Khushwant Singh's novel 'Train to Pakistan' is a perfect depiction of how a small remote village 'Mano Majra' in Punjab could not remain unaffected by the trauma of partition violence. The village had a small harmonious community consisting of a family of Hindu Lala Ram Lal's house and two nearly equal numbers of houses of Sikhs and Muslims before partition. It remained traumatized after the crack of British India.

Trauma is the shock that emerges from any kind of violence, massacre or genocide. It is a kind of deep shock that traumatizes our minds. It also traumatized the writer's mind and resulted in the creation of literature like 'Train to Pakistan'. In the discussion of it in a broad sense, Caruth states, "Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrences of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena"(181). Traumatic events are disturbing uncontrolled and repetitive. A similar kind of incident triggers the experience of trauma. Earlier India-Pakistan partition was not expected because of the intensity of the violence among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The violence also strikes the mind of magistrate Hukum Chand and he lives with its trauma. As he reached to observe the train with refugees from Pakistan, he was extremely shocked by the full of dead bodies, children, youths, men, women, and old people lying on the train. He had never seen such before. The horrible scene of the massacre reoccurred in his mind with great shock as Khuswant Singh mentions:

"The sight of so many dead had at first produced a cold numbness. Within a couple of hours, all his emotions were dead, and he watched corpses of men and women and children being dragged out, with as little interest as if they had been trunks or bedding.

But by evening, he began to feel forlorn and sorry for himself. He looked weary and haggard...He tried to shout but could only open his mouth... His voice stuck in his throat... Hukum Chand began to moan and then with a final effort broke out of the nightmare with an agonized shriek. He sat up with a look of terror in his eyes (55-56).

The terrorizing situation of the deaths in the ghost train at Mano Majra reminded Hukum Chand of the death of his aunt. He also began to see his dead daughter in the face of paid Muslim prostitute girl Haseen Begam. He left her without sex with her. The massacre of the Hindus and Shikhs left him distorting and disturbing and with traumatic feelings.

The feeling of displacement, dismemberment, and traumatic shock occur at the time of separation from the place of their birth and ancestral land. Partition causes such feelings at the time of departure from their land to a new land and its shock remains latent in their mind and will be triggered in the future. Therefore, displacement is not only displacing from the place, it is also a trauma as "Apart from a physical displacement, there would have been a traumatic mental displacement, a sudden up-rootedness, an unlearning and relearning of identity. Migration is often accompanied by a feeling of unavoidable disorientation, and the circumstances of 1947 would have pronounced this feeling (Malhotra, 15). Partition causes displacement and dismemberment of thousands of families at the same time. In most of the cases, the displacement is involuntary and forceful. It fosters traumatic feelings. The displacement of Muslims from Mano Majra village uprooted them from their thousand years of ancestral land. It not only caused a great suffering of separation but it would also cause traumatic feelings in the future to Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and the Shikhs who have been living together with them as brothers and sisters in Mano Majra. As Khushwant narrates in his text, at the time of taking decision and the time of separation the two leaders of Muslims and Shikhs could not bear the separation as "Imam Baksh wiped a tear from his eyes and blew his nose in the hem of his shirt. 'What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers.' Imam Baksh broke down. Meet Singh clasped him in his arms and began to sob. Several of the people started crying quietly and blowing their noses (80). After expressing sorrow the two leaders of the two groups all began to sob. "Sikh and Muslim villagers fell into each other's arms and wept like children (81). And the women also began as "The women sat on the floors hugging each other and crying. It was as if in every home there had been a death" (82). The separation of two communities living together in the same village for hundreds of years in brotherhood will give them the traumatic feeling of displacement, dismemberment, and separation.



During the India-Pakistan partition, millions of people fled from one place to another. It left many individuals, pairs, children, and families separated. As the government record states "During this period some 7,200,000 Muslims emigrated from India while 5,500,000 Hindus and Sikhs fled from Pakistan " (Khalidi 341). It left many lovers and beloveds with traumatic feelings. The love between Juggut Singh (Shikh dacoit) and Nooran(Muslim daughter of weaver) was familiar in the society of Manomajra. The decision of the magistrate to evacuate Mano Majra village left the pair with traumatic feelings for each other. As Juggut Singh was in prison on the suspicion of killing Lala Ram Lal, he was not at home at the time Muslims left the village. When Nooran heard about it, she went to Juggut Singh's house. Juggut's mother did not accept her and told her to leave his son alone. "Nooran felt heavy and lifeless. 'All right, Beybey, I will go. Don't be angry with me. When Jugga comes back just tell him I came to say Sat Sri Akal.' The girl went down on her knees, clasped the old woman's legs, and began to sob. 'Beybey, I am going away and will never come back again. Don't be harsh to me just when I am leaving.'" (82). Then she told me that she was pregnant and 'I cannot leave. Jugga has promised to marry me' (82). After that, the mother promised her that Juggut Singh would come to marry her wherever she was. Then Nooran left his house in the hope of meeting her lover. They are just examples of one pair who was separated from each other due to partition. The separation leaves many individuals including societies affected with the traumatic feeling.

The effects of trauma also make people feel shocked and inactive. They cannot work properly. They are also distressed and irresponsible in their duties to the people, society, and the nation. Hukum Chand was the magistrate of Chundu nagar. He had the responsibility to maintain peace and order in his place. However, ordered by the sub-inspector irresponsibly to free the murderer Mali to cause more damage to the Muslims as revenge, "First, take Malli and his men to Mano Majra. Release them where the villagers can see them being released" (71). ... "The officer told the villagers that he had decided to appoint Malli custodian of the evacuated Muslims' property. Anyone interfering with him or his men would be shot" (86). To free a murderer Malli from prison means to cause more violence to the Muslims. It is an illegal and irresponsible task of the magistrate Hukum Chand.

Social structure is one of the important bonds of society which keeps various communities within a single harmonious balance. When the harmonious social structure breaks unexpectedly, it results in structural trauma. Pandey claims, "Train to Pakistan' is a perfect example of structural trauma. Singh presents Mano Majra, which is intended as a microcosm of India as an archetype of secular heaven where people of diverse religions live in a harmonious coexistence" (132). The village is a perfect representation of secular and harmonious India as

he narrates, "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 keekar tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the *Deo* to which all the villagers—Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or pseudo-Christian—repair secretly whenever they are in a special need of blessing" (8). There was not any bad feeling and jealousy and enmity towards each other. All of the villagers were living as family members. However, the train loaded with refugee corpses compelled them to evacuate Muslims from Mano Majra. Accordingly, the magistrate told the sub-inspector to do it. The whole village was in shock and despair. The villagers forbade all Muslims from crying and pain with the separation. Later some Sikh refugees arrived there and they inspired the villagers to attack on departing train and kill all the Muslims on the train as revenge. The same villagers including the refugees became ready to attack Muslims including their sisters as the text mentions:

At least one man. The Guru asked for five lives when he made the Sikhs. Those Sikhs were supermen. We need more than five. Who else is willing to lay down his life?' Four of Malli's companions stepped over the threshold. They were followed by many others, mostly refugees. Some villagers who had only recently wept at the departure of their Muslim friends also stood up to volunteer. Each time anyone raised his hand the youth said 'Bravo,' and asked him to come and sit apart. More than fifty agreed to join in the escapade. (95)

The inspiration of the Shikh refugees within some hours stimulated them to go against their neighbors for many years. It is the destruction of social structure and harmony. It ultimately leads to the structural trauma that strikes the people of both religions in the community and even the nation.

The partition caused violence and it further led to displacement, dismemberment, and feeling of trauma among the people of India. Millions of people were murdered, raped, butchered, and displaced and had to be victims of trauma forever. The train filled with dead bodies coming from Pakistan to the Mano Majra railway stop caused great shock and distracted the mind of Magistrate Hukum Chand. He remained in great trauma after it. The partition and violence caused in 1947 displaced the whole Muslim community from Mano Majra and left them with great traumatic feelings. It also caused structural trauma to the whole society as well as to the whole nation after the destruction of the harmonious community in the village. Thus the partition and violence in the country left Hukum Chand in personal trauma, and also left the villagers in social trauma and the destruction of a harmonious society caused the whole nation with structural trauma, and the displacement of the Muslims.



### Conclusion

Partition, itself, is not a positive term for the people living in a collective society. So, the partition of British India was not a good incident. It tore up one nation into two nations: India and the new nation. The history of India and Pakistan justifies and glorifies the division in their ways. They completely overlook and leave out the reality and the dark sides of partition at the same time. No histories of India and Pakistan give space for it. The unmentioned reality of the partition was the violence, rape, murder, displacement, dismemberment, and the trauma in the life of common people.

The partition was not the real intent of common people to break down their harmonious society. It was only the superficial decision of hollow and selfish political leaders at that time. The people were not ready for the situation of partition and possible violence. The later situation showed that the political leaders did not have the experience and maturity to command the incident of partition. Therefore, the unprecedented partition broke out into sudden and unexpected violence. The political leaders could not save the lives of common people because they thought that it was the more suitable political decision of partition for them to take based on religion. It caused enmity to the people of other religions in their society and the evil persons misguided and took advantage of the situation by causing violence. Millions of common people Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian became victims of violence. They were victimized by kidnapping, rape, murder, killings, and butchering at that time. The violence ended with the displacement and dismemberment of the people living in a harmonious society in India. It also left and hurt millions of people with traumatic feelings. The unprecedented and insufficient thought and plan to divide British India into India and Pakistan was not only a historical incident but also the cause of violence, displacement, dismemberment, and traumatic incidents for many people. The incident of partition of India suggests for the future partition that the partition can cause violence and tragic events like murder, kidnapping, and rape along with separation, displacement, and dismemberment of people from the society. Therefore, if it is to take partition, it should be properly thought out, well-planned, and sufficiently worked to control the situation with a long-term vision to save the lives of common people at the time of partition.

### Works Cited

- Caruth, Cathy. "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History." *Yale French Studies*, no. 79, 1991, pp. 181–192. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/2930251](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2930251). Accessed 2 Sept. 2020.
- Chew, Shirley. "Tearing the Punjab." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1989, pp. 169–171. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3992229](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3992229). Accessed 4 Sept. 2020.
- Chopra, Radhika. "Partitioned Lives in Khushwant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan' and Manju Kapur's 'Difficult Daughters.'" *Indian Literature*, vol. 54, no. 3 (257), 2010, pp. 164–175. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/23349470](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23349470). Accessed 3 Sept. 2020.
- Ivekovic, Rada. *Partition as a Form of Transition. Partition: Reshaping States and Mind*. Frank Cas. 2005.
- Khalidi, Omar. "From Torrent to Trickle: Indian Muslim Migration to Pakistan, 1947—97." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1998, pp. 339–352. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/20837002](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837002). Accessed 11 Sept. 2020.
- Malhotra, Aanchal. *Remnants of a Separation: A History of Partition through Material Memory*. Harpercollins. 2017.
- Pandey, Birendra. *Southern Post Colonialism: The Global South and the New Literary Studies*. edited by Sumanyu Satpathy. Routledge. 2009.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering partition: Violence, nationalism, and history in India*. Vol. 7. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Raj, Dhooleka Sarhadi. "Ignorance, Forgetting, and Family Nostalgia: Partition, the Nation State, and Refugees in Delhi." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2000, pp. 30–55. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/23166533](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23166533). Accessed 15 Sept. 2020.
- Singh, Khushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. Penguin. 1956.
- Wanat, Matt. "Dislocation, Dismemberment, Dystopia: From Cyberpunk to the Fiction of Wendell Berry and Ann Pancake." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2015, pp. 147–170. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/43549875](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43549875). Accessed 20 Sept. 2020.