

PROSPECT OF PEACE IN INDIAN PARTITION FICTION: A HUMANIST PERSPECTIVE

Munmun Giri

Assistant Professor
Dumdum Motijheel College, Kolkata,
India

Abstract

The history of Indian partition is of paramount importance to mankind. The precipitous shame and violence inflicted upon humanity, therefore, is not only chronicled by the historians, literature also relives and recreated partition by fictionalizing this colossal desecration of human values, characterized not only by the gory carnage but also by rape, large scale burning of dwelling and a mass spreading of religious and ethnic hatred. India, which has a composite tradition of peace and co-existence, seems to be 'lost' in the whirlwind of fundamentalism, disbelief and terror. It is true, that India's pursuit of peace is not determined by her self interest, but by the idealism which has ever remained a substantive inspiration for a 'common good'. It is most significant that Indian literature on the partition, particularly, fiction is a triumph of the spirit of humanism and not a conduit for escalation of the religion of hatred and separateness. In all the major works of fiction in Indian languages, the focus is not in revenge, bloodshed, rape or massacre, but on recognition of humanistic truths of love and mutual respect, tolerance and peace. The academic objective of this paper is to present a detailed textual analysis of Khuswant Singh's Train to Pakistan. Such a study is bound to be interdisciplinary and it will borrow from history, ethics, culture studies and philosophy as the overall theoretical base.

Key Words: Human Values, Composite Tradition of Peace, Tolerance, Fiction, Ethnic Hatred.

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- Munmun Giri

Introduction-

Peace can descend on man only when to recall the Vedic vision, man realizes that there are more than human dimensions of his self, when he lives in harmony with all that is, from the sky to the earth, from the bird to the beast. (167)

The above observation by Som Raj Gupta, in an article, “The Call of the Forest”, published in the *Culture of Peace*, reflects the spirit of the Indian concept of peace. India has ever remained a salad bowl of different tastes, languages, cultures, and religions, because India has a strong belief in Peace and Humanism. Accordingly, it is the very heterogeneity of the Indian culture that makes it historically possible for different religions and cultures to survive and to mutually enrich themselves for building up a tradition of Peace. Moreover, this humanist approach of Indian philosophy has a worldwide attraction from time immemorial. Mother Teresa, Sister Nivedita and many other great men and women from all over the world settled life long in India to discover this spirit of peace in India. A tradition of Ahimsa, Bhakti, and love has mesmerized poets, philosophers and thinkers repeatedly. However, it is unfortunate that India had to suffer political unrests and riots, many times because of this pluralistic, peaceful and ‘soft’ social structure. If unity in diversity is her beauty and charm, frequent riots are black spots on that beauty.

Peace in modern India has been disrupted many times since the partition of the country in 1947. So partition of the Indian subcontinent still has meaning in terms of the present situations. The incidents of 1984 Delhi communal attack, 1984 Bhagalpur, Bihar riot, demolition of Babri Mosque in 1992, riots in Surat, Ahmedabad and Bombay, riot in Assam in 2012 and more recently the riot in Dadri, MP in 2015- all makes us dubious about the country as a land of love and peace. “The heterogeneity of religions in Indian subcontinent” as observed by Alok Bhalla in the article, “Memories of a Lost Home” published in *Partition Dialogues*, “which had made it historically possible for all of them to survive and to enrich their own particular religious heritage” (Bhalla:11) has faced a great challenge in human history.

However, the history of this partition has different experimental realities. That is why, while the historians in India have remained overwhelmingly concerned with the causes and its consequences, it was the creative artists who tried to establish the triumph of humanity

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and discover the prospects of peace from the debris of violence and hatred. Accordingly, the writers of partition literature, to be more particular, have a common venture to the goal of unity of mankind for peace and prosperity of the Indian tradition and culture. They have the same message as Priya Kumar observed in the introduction of her book, *Limiting Secularism*, “... fictions through their return to a painful past open up possibilities of living together in the present” (xxv).

In a word, partition to the Indians means a heart blocking description of violence. Between June 3 1947, the date of the announcement of division and August 15, 1947, roughly fifteen million people was displaced. On 9th August, 1946, a staff reporter of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* gave an account of terror, “... in some parts of Calcutta corpses still litter the streets as I write. ... Elsewhere an estimate of total casualties is given, but it is unhappily already clear that they are to be counted by thousands rather than by hundreds”. Jisha Menon in her introduction to *The Performance of Nationalism* (2013) gives a sensational account of the aftermath of the partition:

From mid-September to late October, 24- foot convoys, each consisting of 30,000 to 40,000 people, marched 150 miles to cross the border into India. Roughly 32,000 refugees had been flown in either direction; nearly 133,000 people had been moved to India by steamer and country craft boats. The disputed death toll ranges from 200,000 to 2 million. People died as a result of communal clashes, floods, starvation, exhaustion, and the proliferating cases of famine and cholera caused by unhygienic conditions. Approximately 83,000 women were abducted, raped and killed. Innumerable children disappeared. ...Thousands of people were forcibly converted; many others voluntarily opted to convert in order to stay in their homeland. At least 500,000 people were massacred on the trains referred to as “gifts” that people were sending across to the new nation. (7-8)

Any account measuring the total loss will remain incomplete, because there must be a huge number which remained untraced. Therefore, the common images of partition are that of pain and penury, agony and anxiety, insanity and animosity, indignity and inhumanity. It designates nothing but the destruction of humanity. The present researcher, therefore, attempts to make a reappraisal of the Indian traditional concept of humanism to look into the very depth of the two significant texts on the Indian partition, which focus the triumph of humanity and peace against hatred and violence. The academic objective of this paper is to present a detailed textual analysis of *Train to Pakistan* by Khuswant Singh. Such a study is sure to be interdisciplinary because it will borrow from other disciplines such as history, philosophy, culture studies etc. as the overall theoretical base.

Humanism and Peace in the Upanishads and the Bhagvad-gita-

Although, the word ‘humanist’ derives from the fifteenth century Italian term, ‘umanista’ describing a teacher or scholar of classical Greek and Latin literature and the ethical philosophy behind it, the spirit of Humanism was already in the limelight of the ancient Indian civilizations and philosophy in the form of its quest for a general love and peace for humanity. The Indus Civilization, more than 4000 years ago, flourished in the north-western parts of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, around the main river of the Indus, strengthened the ground of a universal cultural pattern of good living for human beings. The city pattern and the concept of the good human life remind us Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) where the ideal society is shown based on humanist ideals. The deep faith in the ability of human beings as the measure of all things can be seen reflected in the human figures excavated from the valley. Vedic period (1500 BC) was a broad field of experiment over Humanism on the way of knowing ‘Atman’ or ‘Brahman’. The later Vedic texts like *Brahmanas* showed an awareness of the problems of the nature and the destiny of man by concluding that serving human is serving the God. The *Upanishads* are the revelation of the subtlest essence of our being and prove that human life is nothing but a continuous movement towards peace. By peace, the *Upanishads* reflects, the absolute protection of self. In *Siksa Valli*, Section 12, Chapter 1, it is noted, “Salutation to Brahman, Salutation to Vayu; Thou indeed art the perceptible Brahman. ...I have spoken of the right, I have spoken of the true. ...Aye, that has protected me. That has protected the speaker. Aum, Peace, Peace, Peace.” (trans. Radhakrishnan, 527). The Lokayata system (1000 BC) of Indian philosophy known as Charvakas believed in peace in the utmost fulfilment of this real life. Without any intervention of the God, they thought, man alone can make his own life graceful through enjoyment, education and good work.

Peace has always been taken as an inseparable part of the wholeness of the human entity in Indian philosophical thought and therefore, all branches of the Indian philosophy spoke of spiritual uplift of human life. Sankhya, probably the earliest of Indian philosophy attempted to discover the mystery of harmony in this world which is supposed to be a sum total of ‘Purusa’ (pure conscious) and ‘Prakriti’ (three gunas). The world creates only when Prakriti and Purusa, two opposite in nature unite by reflecting one another. This shows that peace lies in unity in diversity. This philosophy analysed the true nature of the human mind, the reason of his suffering and also the way of emancipation. The Yoga appeared more humanist in its clarification of ‘avidya’ or ignorance which controls the Karma of a man. The followers of Yoga were, therefore, expected to practise a definite system of moral and religious restraints such as non-injury, truthfulness, purity, sincerity, sex-control and mental peace.

Consciousness is knowledge and knowledge is liberation. Bhagvad-gita, the religious book of the Hindus shows that the very consciousness of Lord Krishna is the supreme knowledge which makes man free from suffering. Non-violence, the prime condition of peace, according to the Bhagvad-gita, Text 4-5, Chapter 10, means that “one should not do

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anything which will put others into misery or confusion” (trans. Swami Prabhupada,452). Thus, non-violence ensures the future spiritual happiness of the people in general. The ethical philosophy of the Bhagvad-gita shows that the abode of peace lies in the performance of the moral duties that are allotted to man in society. He should tie himself in the bond of love with fellow beings and thereby worship the God.

Peace and humanism in Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism-

In the sixth century BC, Goutam Buddha in Tripitak, spoke of Humanism and peace. It was the sorrow of the human beings that compelled him to reject the royal happiness of the palace and search for peace in human life. We learn from some of the earliest Pali Buddhist Suttas that after his renunciation, the Sakya monk Sidhartha went to Uruvela, near Gaya to practise ‘Dhyana Yoga’. Here, he expressed the purpose of his journey which was of absolute reading of peace, “Still in search of the right, and in quest of the excellent road to peace beyond compare, I came in the course of an alms-pilgrimage through Magadha to the camp township of Uruvela and there took up my abode” (trans. D.Chattapadhyaya, 8). In his ultimate realization, Lord Buddha, therefore, designates sorrow as opposite to peace. Sorrows have their source in the earthly cravings while peace liberates human beings from such earthly bonding.

The true spirit of Buddhism in practical life was vivified in the life and reign of Samrat Asoka (c 272-232BC). Asoka aimed at creating an attitude of mind among his subjects in which social behaviour on the basis of humanism had the highest priority. The ideology of ‘Dhamma’ and ‘Shanti’ reflect his stress on tolerance, non-violence and mutual respect for each other in human society. He denied war as a power of human civilization and therefore, after the war of Kalinga, all his efforts were dedicated to the spread of Shantih.

Mahavira, the spokesman of Jainism proves to be a seminal Humanist philosopher who thinks that each creature on this earth has the right to live. The sanctity of life in all its forms constituted the basis of his moral values. The object of the Jaina religion is to free the soul from karma. The five ‘anuvratas’ (vows for the layman) and ‘Mahavratas’ (vows for monks) not to kill, not to lie, not steal, to abstain from sex and to renounce property – all are to reduce conflict and settle universal peace in human society. Thus, Ahimsa or non-violence is like a rain cloud in the forest fire of suffering.

Sikhism is generally held to derive from the teaching of the first Guru, Nanak (1469-1539) who taught a doctrine of salvation through Divine Name. His oral musical messages in Punjabi attracted a larger section of people in India, because simple ‘Bhakti’ or devotion does not need any external arrangements for God worship. He proved that God is present everywhere, immanent in all creation, both within and without everyone. On the way of Bhakti, Kabir, actually, showed the way of internal peace which is very important for building up an automatic atmosphere of peace processing in a society.

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The Bhakti Cult and Humanism-

During the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, an emotional and passionate ‘Bhakti’ (ecstatic devotional religion associated with the singing of humanist hymns in common tongue) replaced the old approaches of sacrificial rites and monastic meditation. Their pure devotional songs often acted as social reformation and maintaining peace and brotherhood among the human beings and also had the message of serving the human is serving the God. We can take names of Jnaneswara (1271-96), Tukaram (1598-1650), Ramdas (1608-81), Joydeva, Sree Chaityanya, Ramananda, Kabir, Tulsidas, Mira Bai, Surdas and others.

Peace and Humanism in Modern India-

Humanism in modern India in the nineteenth century, marked a continuous process of social reformation, embedded with the nationalist movement on the one hand and also a spiritual development on the other. Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar awakened the blossom of humanity through humanistic education, women’s education, banning the curse of Satidah and child marriage. Ramakrisna (1834-86) and Vivekananda (1863-1902) evolved a new definition of religion which was not confined in supernatural concepts, rather, found its fulfilment in the service of common life. Vivekananda showed that we can serve God by serving the needy and the wretched ones within this ‘sansar’ if we take the whole universe as a big family. He had a firm belief that God is not invisible, but visible through every creature, because each creature is a part of God. Accordingly, peace comes there, when one feels satisfaction in serving others as he gets the rare opportunity to serve the God through him. Moreover, he reiterated the word, ‘faith’- ‘faith in ourselves’, ‘faith in God’ to show that faith is the prime source of peace in human life. Faith is exclusively an Indian concept of Humanism, which teaches us that a human should not be satisfied by performing only the role of a ‘nara’ (a human being), but he should become the ‘narayana’, the divine power which is already in man. Arabinda Ghosh (1872-1950) was a worshiper of humanity throughout his blessed life and activities. He showed that India is that exclusive country, where culture is valued not from the perspective of power and politics, but to the extent that it encourages a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body with a mission of divining human nature towards peace. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the first Nobel Laureate in India had a great contribution in promoting the message of peace and harmony among common people. A follower of the *Upanishads*, Rabindranath’s approach to religion was that of a humanist. In the *Religion of Man*, he wanted to establish a bridge between man and the God. He searched for the humanity of God and the divinity of man. For him, selfless work is the only source of peace and peace is another name of liberation.

The man who fought for peace in modern India is Mahatma Gandhi (1896-1948). His whole life was a freedom struggle against violence. Inspired by the Bhagvad-gita and the Bible, M. K. Gandhi dedicated his life to selfless Karma which was to follow Ahimsa and establish peace in the world. Critics say that he was a saint who became a politician.

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Nevertheless, it is a fact that he was more a saint, a Humanist, a philosopher than a politician. He was truly a 'Mahatma' who wanted to save his country from the clutches of the foreign rule. He showed that Ahimsa is not just personal ethics, but a politically effective commitment because if there is no ethics in politics, the concept of the nation will have no meaning. Gandhiji proved Ahimsa as a 'truth force' before which falsehood and violence must bow down. His concept of Satyagraha, which was a unique and the successful political theory of Ahimsa compelled the Colonial Rule come to an end. The follower of Gandhi, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan (born circa 1890- ?) had a remarkable leadership in the non-violent struggle during India's freedom fight in 1930s and 1940s. After 80 years of active work (including 30 years of imprisonment) in the cause of freedom and justice, Khan can legitimately be described as the greatest exponent of nonviolence in the world. He had been nominated for Nobel Prize several times for his indomitable struggle for the justice of the oppressed people not only in Pakistan, his country but throughout the world.

However, by peace, the Indians realize an individual consciousness of humanism, an emotional attachment of morality and a sublime state of spiritual satisfaction. The Indians believe that when the aim of individual peace is achieved, conservation of social values and morality cannot be far behind. When each individual in a society loves peace, the maintenance of peaceable relations with the groups appears very natural and long lasting. John Ferguson in the article, "Religion and Peace" published in *World Encyclopedia of Peace*, rightly observed, "War has been a major human activity through history. It is not surprising that many of these "prophetic" challenges have been for the limitation or control of war, or the assertion of peace as the will or way of God, or the establishment of values such as social justice within the structures of a peaceful society" (328). Indian partition literature revives this assertion of peace by establishing the triumph of humanity. The present researcher, therefore, has the aim to explore the Indian partition fiction in the Humanist perspective to prove that Indian literature on partition, particularly fiction is a triumph of the spirit of humanism and peace, and not a conduit for escalation of the religion of hatred and separateness. In all the major works of fiction, both in Indian languages as well as in Indian English, the focus is not on revenge, bloodshed, rape or massacre, but in recognition of the truth that human civilization can prosper only on the wings of peace, tolerance, mutual respect and love.

Peace, Nature and the Common Human Life in *Train to Pakistan*-

Published as *Mano Mazra* in the United States by Grove Press, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) won the first prize in a Grove Press competition for fiction in India. The book had constant critical reviews in different journals in U.K. and USA. *Times Literary Supplement* (16th August 1956) had a favourable review of the text and the book kept on publishing in different languages across the world.

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The author, Khuswant Singh repeatedly refers to the concept of peace in *Train to Pakistan*. The text opens with a hint that the peaceful harmony between the man and the nature is going to be disrupted very soon because “The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers.... It was hotter than usual, drier and dustier” (1; ch.1). The Indian concept of Humanism believes that peace comes only when the man and his activities are in tune with the nature. Like a mother, nature protects all creatures on this land before an impending danger. The simple and innocent people of Mano Mazra, therefore, feel ashamed and explain such changes in the climate as the punishment from the God.

The riot during the partition of India must be called ‘unusual’ because it occurred in a country which had ever welcomed the visitors with a great alacrity and ever remained the leading role model in maintaining peace in the world for its great vision of spiritual freedom. Questions still haunt the Indian mind about who attacked and who were attacked. The author emphatically said, “The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped” (1; ch.1). He actually wanted to say that it was a loss, not of any particular community, but of human civilization as a whole. The verbs like ‘killed’, ‘shot’, ‘stabbed’, ‘speared’, ‘clubbed’, ‘tortured and ‘raped’ are arranged in a quick succession so as to depict the truth that although these verbs in normal situation are unfit for any living human being, are now easily applicable for the human beings in that unusual situation of the riot in 1947. The writer’s deep concern for humanity is oozing out in the organization of these verbs. After living together for centuries, both Hindus and Muslims saw each other leaving their house and property for some unknown destination in broken heart and mind. It was as if, a stoic submission to the injustice towards humanity.

The author introduces Mano Mazra, “The only oases of peace were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villagers was Mano Mazra” (2; ch.1). It is the peaceful character of the village that is emphasised by the writer and it is because, perhaps, that he chose the name of the village as the title of the text for its first publication. The tiny village has peaceful co-existence of different religions like Hindu, Sikh, Muslims, Harijans having no religion and Christians. Such natural is their co-existence that they all take participation in each other’s festivals and rituals. They believe in each other’s gods for escaping from danger and diseases. The author writes, “It is the local deity, the *deo* to which all the villagers- Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or pseudo Christians- repair secretly whenever they are in a special need of blessing” (3;ch. 1).

The days of peace in Mano Mazra are disturbed with the arrival of the ghost train in broad daylight. Consequently, the movement of the soldiers and the armed policemen makes the innocent villagers curious. Women gather in the house of Banta Sing (lambardar), a collector of revenue and the men go to the temple. The only men who usually voice at village meetings are Imam Baksh, the mullah of a mosque, and Bhai Meet Singh of the Gurudwar. Imam Baksh, who is above sixty is venerated in the village for his philosophical look and

righteousness and “Meet Singh was a man of peace. Envy had never poisoned his affection for Imam Baksh” (84; ch. 2). Both the pious men feel apprehensive of a bad time.

In a situation of complete confusion, people of Mano Mazra assemble in the Gurudwara for discussion for an amicable and peaceful solution. But, one insolent lad begins to stimulate the villagers to take revenge on Muslims. He has no regard for age or status. He declares, “For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussulmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot two. For each trainload of dead they send over, attack two. That will stop the killing on the other side...” (157; ch .4). Meet Sing who believes in peace and nonviolence objected by saying, “What bravery is there in killing unarmed innocent people?” (157; ch.4) But, the whole crowd present in the Gurudwara murmur approval to the arrogant lad’s argument. Meet Singh feels helpless to convince the crowd anymore because revenge becomes more important to them than peace or nonviolence. The old Bhai, Meet Singh feels loneliness and fatigued. He expresses his feeling to Iqbal, “What difference will my telling them make? They know what they are doing. They will kill. If it is a success, they will come to the gurudwara for thanksgiving. They will also make offerings to wash away their sins” (177; ch. 4). However, the realization of Meet Singh makes one point clear that most of the people in Mano Mazra cannot rely on nonviolence as they fail to realise the true spirit of nonviolence. They cannot think of the matter more deeply than looking only on the surface. Violence immediately arouses revenge and revenge to retaliation. There is no end of such process until the point of the total destruction of the civilization comes in. At such a moment, people rarely think about the sin or repentance. All appear meaningless and trivial to them.

The urgency of peace project in India is never carried on seriously. Peace is always taken as a matter of religion, absolutely a private matter. It is never granted to be instituted in India with an ambition of growing consciousness of peace for the well being of human life among the common mass. Therefore, although, India is taken to be one of the countries which are serious regarding peace and disarmament, its internal peace is ever remained confined within the religious scriptures and prayers. It faced the most heinous civil war in the form of the riot in 1947 and onwards. The author’s observation in this regard as expressed through his spokesman, Iqbal in *Train to Pakistan* is significant. “India is constipated with a lot of humbug...Ethics which should be the kernel of a religious code has been carefully removed” (181; ch.4). It is the ethics which give man the consciousness of both good and bad, blessings and sins, dos and don’ts.

Before his final voyage, Jugga meets Meet Singh for taking his blessing. He wishes to listen to Guru’s word from the *Granth Sahib* for his mental peace. Meet Singh sings a few lines, but, uneducated Jugga cannot grasp the meaning. He requests Meet Singh to tell the meanings. But, Meet Singh cannot conceal his frustration and says, “What have you to do with meaning? It is just the Guru’s word. If you are going to do something good, the Guru will help you. If you are going to do something bad, the Guru will stand in your way”

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(181;ch. 4). Jugga can realize that the meaning of the scriptures is not of utmost importance when the question of humanity comes in. It is the time to save the whole train carrying many Muslims from Mano Mazra to Pakistan. He saves the train with robust bravery and ultimately he collapses and lets the train go over him.

So, my point is that in Indian concept, Peace is supposed to be intermingled with Humanism. Peace is not abstract idea, rather, a state of feeling closely connected with Karma. While the ultimate goal of Humanism is human good in all respects, combining both the material and the spiritual, Peace comes through sacrifice (Tyaag), knowledge (Jnan) and service (Seva). Jugga, thus, proves his knowledge through the sacrifice of his life for the service to humanity.

Conclusion-

Since the beginning of human civilization, a continuous conflict of good and evil has been a part of it. Human has to struggle between two types of forces, the forces of mutual hatred, violence and disunity on the one hand and those of peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, love and unity on the other. While all the villagers in Mano Majra in *Train to Pakistan*, silently approve the proposal of revenge on the Muslims, there are people like Meet Singh, Iqbal, and Hukum Chand, who are tormented by the pricks of conscience as they feel inactive and helpless to restore peace in the locality. It is Jaggat Singh, who appears as an angel of peace, who sacrifices his life to save a trainload of Muslims. This paper is, therefore, a reappraisal of India's long, composite tradition of peace and humanism with an aim that we may not break with tradition and forget about our past in an arbitrary fashion of change or in an irrational way of thinking, because if we do so, we may to some extent lose the thread of our unity and peace and even the identity of our civilization today. This paper, therefore, bears the torch of our noble responsibility of maintaining the tradition of Humanism and peace for the growth of a universal civilization and world peace.

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