

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TRAUMA OF PARTITION IN
TRAIN TO PAKISTAN BY KHUSHWANT SINGH AND DIFFICULT
DAUGHTERS BY MANJU KAPUR**

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Abstract

The Partition of India does not mean only the vivisection of a vast subcontinent but also catastrophe for millions of people. The massive involuntary and unprecedented migration caused communal clashes, massacres and atrocities of all kinds. Both the sides of the boundaries were filled with innumerable refugees- who were rendered orphans by the storm called Partition. This agony of partition has found its echoes in literature in various Indian languages in as many ways as the writers themselves. The present research is concerned with the Indian English novels dealing with the partition of the Indian subcontinent as India and Pakistan, and the purpose of my academic endeavour is to explore Trauma of Partition in Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh and Difficult Daughters by Manju Kapur. Khushwant Singh is one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation. Train to Pakistan is a magnificent novel where Khushwant Singh tells the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events that followed which will be remembered as one of the blackest chapters of human history

Keywords: - Partition, Khushwant Singh, Manju Kapur

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The Partition of India does not mean only the vivisection of a vast subcontinent but also catastrophe for millions of people. The massive involuntary and unprecedented migration caused communal clashes, massacres and atrocities of all kinds. Both the sides of the boundaries were filled with innumerable refugees- who were rendered orphans by the storm called Partition. This agony of partition has found its echoes in literature in various Indian languages in as many ways as the writers themselves. The present research is concerned with the Indian English novels dealing with the partition of the Indian subcontinent as India and Pakistan, and the purpose of my academic endeavour is to explore Trauma of Partition in *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh and *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur.

Khushwant Singh is one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation. *Train to Pakistan* is a magnificent novel where Khushwant Singh tells the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events that followed which will be remembered as one of the blackest chapters of human history. He pours out the agonizing tale of human tragedy and the sinister impact of the partition on the peace loving Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of "Mano Majra", realistically with scathing irony. To Khushwant Singh, this was a period of great disillusionment and crisis of values, a distressing and disintegrating period of his life. Manju Kapur's debut novel, *Difficult Daughters* (1998), which won Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Eurasian region (1999), has attracted a lot of attraction which locates the life of Virmati against a backdrop of political happenings before and after Partition. It does not necessarily reflect upon the violence or communal conflict of Partition, but instead focus on the impact of dislocation during the Partition. The various versions of Partition rendered in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* provides ample and apparent proof that the common concern of highly sensitive writers, who had the first hand experience of the Partition of this subcontinent inspired them to give powerful expression in their novels. Though they deal with the one and the same event of the Partition, they have adopted different perspectives.

To quote Bhattacharya's words:

"The tragedies of partition have been beyond anything that a writer could 'invent'. But where is the creative expression of all these happenings? It would be somewhat odd to say that the writers have been too dazed by recent history to make it their material. In contrast, the two World Wars are adequately reflected in the best literature of the West; the writers have lived through history undazed." 1

Both of these novelists depict inhuman cruelty, brutality and holocaust witnessed during Partition in their fictional discourse. They also depict the agony and the plight of dislocated people who had been the victims of the larger religious and political game. There is almost identical concern about the organized and random violence that occurred during the freedom struggle and the aftermath of Partition. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, originally entitled *Mano Majra*, portrays with a bold and unrelenting realism, the brutal story of political hatred and violence during the turbulent and fateful days that proceeded and followed the partition of British India when the spirit of communal frenzy and a passionate zeal for self expression were fanning and fumbling within the mass. The violence that started in Calcutta swept the country and tortured people. Similarly Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* vividly presents the communal bloodshed occurred in Amritsar, Lahore and Calcutta. Thus both these writers discussing the issue of Partition have different geographical locations as far as the setting of their novels is concerned. But they unanimously condemned basically violence and holocaust caused by dirty political game. As Malgonker quotes:

"The entire land was being spattered by the blood of its citizens, blistered and disfigured with the fires of religious hatred; its roads were glutted with enough dead bodies to satisfy the ghouls of a major war." 2

In the first part of the novel, *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh has repeatedly pointed out that even after the savage blood bath throughout the Punjab, in the wake of independence; *Mano Majra* remained surprisingly free from communal stress and tension. The action of the novel centers around a tiny village called *Mano Majra* on the Indo-Pakistan border during the partition. The chief protagonist of the novel is the village itself. The four sections of the novel – *Dacoity*, *Kalyug*, *Mano Majra* and *Karma* – are variations on a single theme, but each section foregrounds the action of the next and moves the story forward to a deeper vision. The novel begins with a focus on *Mano Majra* but slowly moves to suggest that *Mano Majra* transcends its geographical identity and becomes a metaphor. Its well defined physical and psychological properties become murkier as the narrative progresses towards its end. As mentioned by Manaver:

"Partition touched Mano Majra's at both levels... The dark clouds of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries. Yet

feelings of brotherliness have not disappeared, and they meet for consultation in a scene that is both intensely human and touching." 3

In the first section, "Dacoity" a major metaphor is worked out. The murder of Ram Lal by a gang of dacoits from a neighbouring village sets the tone of the narrative by suggesting an additional dimension to the event. Dacoity has caused dismemberment and has made some innocent persons scapegoats for the action. Figuratively, it stands for the political dismemberment of the country by the British government who blamed the local leaders for causing the partition. In the next section, appropriately called "Kalyug" suggests that the novel has a cosmic vision. In the Hindu concept of epic time, Kalyug comes at the end of the cycle when the old order is destroyed and foundations for a new one are laid. The train that carries corpses from Pakistan to be cremated at Mano Majra suggests a symptom that the old world has died. The third section, "Mano Majra", takes the action to its further intensity. It is built around the image of the village in transformation. There is a perceptible change in not only the appearance of the village, but also in its awareness of the human condition. The last section is "Karma" that gives the novel a metaphysical dimension. Singh seems to suggest that in such an atmosphere of brutality human action is meaningless. The novel closes with such an ironic reversal order. Jugga's act of sacrifice saves the lives of thousands of people, but their fate remains uncertain. Khushwant Singh has depicted the bestial cruelties with objective analysis of the consciousness of people during partition. How the emotions of people are roused by the rumours spread by both the communities about the barbaric deeds of each other, is described by the author through the mounting tension between Sikh and Muslims who had hitherto lived in amity in Mano Majra. But the impact of the partition was noted by the train-conscious Mano Majrans in the late running of the over-crowded trains:

"Now the trains were often four or five hours late and sometimes as many as twenty. When they came, they were crowded with Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan or with Muslims from India. People perched on the roofs with their legs dangling, or on bedsteads wedged in between the bogies. Some of them rode precariously on the buffers." 4

Manju Kapur has covered a long span of time when the Britishers were the rulers and the Indians were fighting against them to liberate India. The fight then was fought unitedly by the Hindu-Muslim and Sikhs. The city of Amritsar which constituted fifty-one per cent of Muslims was dominated by the Hindu and Sikh; and education, finance, trade and commerce and all other important spheres were in their hands. This made the Muslims angry and jealous towards the Hindus and Sikhs. But no major incidents of mass violence or carnage took place in these days. People of Amritsar go to Lahore for higher education and so also people from Lahore go to Amritsar for various purposes.

It is on this background of the undivided Punjab that the story of Virmati, the protagonist of the novel is narrated. It is Shakuntala, an M.Sc. in Chemistry, goes out of the home and begins to lead her life in Lahore in the company of her friends. The aged Virmati is literally carried away by the way Shakuntala is leading her life. It has an ever lasting impact on her tender mind. She too strongly desires to be like Shakuntala. At the same time, as luck would have it, there comes the Professor to live in their house as a paying guest. Virmati and the Professor fall in love with each other and Virmati's tragic journey begins. Possessed by the only desire of possessing the girl, the Professor promises her and succeeds in keeping physical relations with her. It is here that the Professor traps Virmati by giving her frequent visits. It is, as if he forgets his wife, children and family, and lives with Virmati in Lahore. Indumati says:

"In Amritsar we went wild. Wild with enthusiastic welcomes for those who made it to safety, wild with grief for the loss of a sister city that was steeped in blood. The Mussulmans chopped our people's heads off, raped our women, cut off their breasts, all of which they claimed was in retaliation for what the Hindus were doing to them." 5

The marriage of Virmati and Harish causes tremendous tension in both houses. Virmati is allowed by Harish's wife and mother but her relatives and parents close their doors on her. The first wife of Harish and his mother treat her so badly that life after marriage becomes a hell for her. When she goes to her mother's home she is humiliated and asked her not to show her face thereafter. Virmati thus finds herself sandwiched between her in-laws and husband on one side and her own family members on the other side. As a result of all this she experiences a strong feeling of being alienated from the society. The husband however tries to keep her happy to the best of his capacity. Now she decides to become aggressive in order to take revenge upon Ganga, Professor's first wife. It is on this background that the communal poison begins to work and the Hindus and Muslims become enemies of each other. Suraj Prakash, the father of Virmati becomes a victim of violence and dies a tragic death and so her grandfather. Virmati is so much disturbed that she undergoes a miscarriage and loses all interests in her married life. She is then sent once again to Lahore for higher education in the field of philosophy. There, instead of studying, she wanders here and there in the company of her friends and attends meetings of the political organizations. In 1946, the things become more and more complicated and there is unrest all over the country. The novelist writes:

"The Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were agitated. Many Muslims don't want Pakistan. Dr. Khan Sahib says, 'I have no desire to understand Pakistan.' Abdul Ghaffar Khan says, 'How can we divide ourselves and live?' Dr. Syed Hossain, Chairman of the National Committee for Indian Freedom at Washington, states that unity has been a historical fact from the time of Akbar. Sir Khizar Hyat Khan accuses the British of being the

father and mother of Pakistan. Still, the idea of Pakistan seems more of a reality day by day.” 6

Train to Pakistan juxtaposes the plight of Mano Majra before the summer of 1947 with their plight after the partition. During this period, the people of the whole village pass from the state of happiness and steadiness to that of bitterness, disturbance, insecurity and uncertainty. The train in novel implies the harrowing process of the change, the awful and ghostly experience of human beings involved in a historical impersonal and almost dehumanized process. The most pathetic and impressive is the last scene of kindness and sacrifice of Juggat, a thief and murderer, who realizes the fury of Sikh fanatics and save Muslims leaving Mano Majra by preventing Sikh fanatics from ambushing the train carrying Muslim refugees to Pakistan. The puny politicians failed to gauge the devastating impact of horror and holocaust on the minds and lives of millions of citizens. The country, which won her freedom from the shackles of mighty British rulers through non-violence, could not contain within humanistic tradition.

Thus, *Train to Pakistan* is the story everyone wants to forget, yet one cannot overlook this stark reality of our past. However, the novelist does not focus on the political realities and the predicament of the victims of the partition in the form of loot, arson, rape, abduction, mutations, murders and displacement. Rather, he chooses to narrate the disturbing and agonizing impact that this event has on those who have not been the direct victim of the partition and yet been affected deep at the psychological and social levels. Partition comes to divide the people of the some community leading to tension amongst them. Moreover, the author reveals the awakening of the conscience of a few like Jugga who had been otherwise ill-reputed. Though the author avoids focusing on the very event and its leading to the worst ever holocaust in the recent history, he does not fail in making the readers experience the horrors of the partition and its ugly face. He does so because he being a Punjabi Sikh, suffered from the division of his homeland. Thus, his treatment of the sufferings of people affected by the partition is authentic and realistic and even today it is displayed in the communal disharmony frequently occurring between the Hindu and the Muslim communities. This is certainly a great hindrance towards shaping the healthy political consciousness of our country. Khushwant Singh gives a pathetic portrayal of this ghastly scene:

“There were also men and women with their clothes clinging to their bodies; little children sleeping on their bellies with their arms clutching the water and their tiny buttocks dipping in and out. The sky was soon full of kites and vultures. They flew down and landed on the floating carcasses. They packed till the corpses themselves rolled over and shoved them off with hands...” 7

There are a good number of daughters in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* right from the first chapter to the last. Some of them are very docile, humble, traditional, cultured and some of them are exactly opposite to them by being very revolutionary, modern, ultramodern and even non-hesitant to keep immoral and illicit relations with other man. Right from the first chapter to the last page there has been a strong undercurrent of the politics of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. The daughters as well as all other characters are born, in the pre-independent India. But when the independence of India comes within sight, all these are disintegrated and are found in their separate camps and compartments. Now they begin their fight for the interests of their castes and communities. The final result is the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. Gur Pyari Jandial aptly describes the novel in the following words:

"Difficult Daughters successfully recreates India's painful passage into a new nation and a new world. This world is interwoven with Virmati's story of rebellion and her quest for independence. Through courage and resilience Virmati scurries and so does India. We find in Kapur's treatment a radical retelling which emphasizes the strength and endurance which are essential for survival in a violent world. The novelist uses the backdrop of partition to build the story of absorbing passion but it is a partition in more ways than one. The social changes of the time also alter something deep insight the individual and this Kapur tries to express." 8

Her novel touches myriad issues like revolt against deep rooted family tradition, the search for selfhood, woman's rights, marriage and the battle for Independence at both fronts-personal and national. The novel depicts the triumphs of the spirit, the longing to beat the odds, to conquer weakness and to move forward.

Both these novelist depict inhuman cruelty, brutality and holocaust witnessed during Partition in their fictional discourse. They also depict the agony and the plight of dislocated people who had been the victims of the larger religious and political game. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is confined to one Punjabi village Mano Majra where this tragedy occurred while Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* vividly presents the communal bloodshed occurred in Amritsar, Lahore and Calcutta. Thus these writers discussing the issue of Partition have different geographical locations as far as the setting of their novels is concerned. But all the writers unanimously condemned basically violence and holocaust caused by dirty political game.

Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* mainly deals with Muslim and Sikh relationship cultivated for centuries in a small village of Punjab. Hence his interpretation can be considered as Punjabi or Sikh version of Partition. But his message is obviously universal that it is a warning to the people of the subcontinent that repetition of such event would prove highly destructive and devastating. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

presents the story of three generations represented by Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. Right from the first chapter to the last page there has been a strong undercurrent of the politics of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. But when the independence comes the family disintegrated and they are found in their separate camps and the final result is the Partition of the subcontinent. This novel It deals with the suffering and struggle for Independence of women like Virmati and Ida. But there is parallel story of India's struggle for freedom and pangs of Partition

In conclusion, it is evident that all these novelists depict inhuman cruelty, brutality and holocaust witnessed during Partition in their fictional discourse. There is almost identical concern about the organized and random violence that occurred during the freedom struggle and the aftermath of Partition. The novels depict powerfully the horrible developments resulting in the Partition, the triumph and tragedy of the hour of freedom, the screams of the victims renting the morning air, the dawn of freedom greeting the subcontinent in the pools of blood, the barbarous cruelties heaped on men and women, catcalls of the crowd and innumerable women being carried away naked, struggling and screaming at the top of their voice. By making use of history in their fictional creations, the writers selected for the study have not only narrated untold his/stories but have provided their versions of different events by re-narrating them in their works.

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