

Chapter 4

Religious intricacies in *Train to Pakistan*

An in-depth study of Indian culture and civilization if taken with an interior insight can certainly lead to debate the homogeneity of it by highlighting the fact that India is indivisible, unitary and single in its culture and civilization. The fact of the matter is that there are many 'Indias' even in one 'India'. Pluralism is the kernel feature of this land of diversity.

Indian culture and civilization are founded on the cardinal principles of tolerance and sacrifice. These two cardinal principles have been the inspirational force to man and woman of the Hindu fold from time immemorial. The Vedantic philosophy is deeply rooted in the notion of divinity in all living organism that highlights the universal creed on this planet. Soul that is indestructible is *Brahma*. Swami Vivekananda is also of the opinion that one who serves creatures serves the divine. Divinity inherently exists everywhere and this divine current is running throughout this universe, hence the immanent nature of this divine power is unquestionable in Indian thought. Moreover, almost all Hindus believe in omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent power that is working like a divine current within and without. Influenced by this Vedantic philosophy Indians are imbued with a sense of tolerance and self-sacrifice. Apart from it the Indians believe in the co-existence of the opposite powers- Good and Evil which are struggling in this world and a person's heroism lies in either to defeat evil or to convert it into goodness, therefore from the religious stand point Indians feel pleasure not in restful rusty position but they experience pleasure in suffering, self-sacrifice and altruism for the well being of the others who are living with them in this world. This universal concept of religion leads them to deep ecology that provides a true light to a sacred and pious life as well as it fills life with fresh inspiration, courage, meaning and purpose. But contrary to it, in the binary process, the fundamentalists entertain a different view which causes confrontation as well as a serious loss to virtual meaning of religion. The philosophy of non-violence is inextricably mixed in Indian religion, culture and civilization. The first law in chapter 2 of G.H Buhler's Translation of "The Laws of Manu" of *Manu Sanhita*:

Learn that sacred law which is followed by men learned (in the Veda) and assented to in their hearts by the virtuous, who are ever exempt from hatred and inordinate affection.¹

According to Vedas those who are from the bondages of hatred and inordinate affection are virtuous people as they are not indulged in sinful feeling and thinking. Abhorrence leads to aggression, hence Indian philosophy promotes love and not hatred, resultantly it stresses on non-violence which is a powerful characteristic of Indiannes. Swami Vivekananda was the upholder of this Indian philosophy and he made his illustrious remarks at the first World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893:

Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons winding their way to the same goal.²

Swami Vivekananda, a champion of the Vedanta creed, was deadly against the feeling of hate and violence in which lies the ultimate destruction of mankind. The same view was espoused by Mahatma Gandhiji who said in a speech on December 20, 1926:

There is nothing on the earth I would not give up for the sake of the country excepting of course two things and two only, namely, Truth and Ahimsa (non violence). I would not sacrifice these two for the entire world. For to me Truth is god and there is no way to find Truth except by the way of non violence. I do not seek to serve India at the sacrifice of Truth or God. For I know that a man who forsakes Truth can forsake his country, and his nearest and dearest ones.³

In a meeting of Gandhi Sevak Sangh in 1936, Gandhiji emphasising on truth and non-violence preached the people that he had nothing new to say but Truth and the principle of non-violence were as aged as the hills and mountains. He further reiterated that in his pursuit of Truth he had discovered the principle of non-violence. In this way both Swami Vivekanand and Gandhiji advocated non-violence which is one of the traditional values of Indian life.

The historical background of non-violence can be traced in the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Yoga Sutras and other Scriptures of Hinduism. The Atharva Veda underlines:

Peace be the earth, peaceful the ether, peaceful heaven, peaceful the waters, peaceful the herbs, peaceful the trees. May all Gods bring me peace. May there be peace through these invocations of peace. With these invocations of peace which appease everything, I render peaceful whatever here is terrible, whatever here is cruel, whatever here is sinful. Let it become auspicious, let everything be beneficial to us.⁴ (Atharva Veda: X. 191. 4)

These two pillars-tolerance and sacrifice-provide a solid foundation to the principle of non-violence which is an essence of Indian culture and religion. Assimilation has been the greatest feature of Indianness which has absorbed all the people coming from the foreign lands. The Mughal warriors who came from the west and virtually conquered the whole of Northern India by and large consolidated their administration here and with the passage of time they completely assimilated with the Indian culture and traditions and became Indians. Rabindranath Tagore said in one of his poems:

Shak Hoon dal Pathan Mughal ek dehey hollo leen

(Shak, Hoon, Pathan and Mughal—all absorbed in the one body of Indianness)

Though the Mughals were conquerors in India earlier, but later on, they found themselves as an integral part of the Indian culture and civilization. Literature during the Mughal period was assimilative in nature and the writers were firmly writing against fundamentalism in both the religion. To Tagore, India before the British rule was a ‘melting pot’ in which people of different

creed, caste and religion mixed together comprising a single unit with different colours but indivisible at the same time.

The Britishers used the strategic design to divide the people by talking of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims. It created a kind of fear among the minorities that their interests will not be served in Independent India which was dominated by Hindus. Intellectuals like Jinnah showed them the dream of Pakistan as their homeland. This increased the cleavage between the two communities which is reflected in Partition Literature.

The literature produced during the partition reflects the segregation that took place and also reflects the failure of body politic to bring about any assimilation. Two different streams of thought got converged into political interest groups resulting in a fear psychosis between both the communities.

Partition fiction in English and in English translation records man's bestiality and savagery. Two communities living together in peace and harmony for centuries started killing each other in communal pride, prejudice and hatred. The vast volume of partition fiction in English and in English translation is a testimony to the fact that how human disaster has taken place during the gruesome period of Indian partition.

A person's mind is shaped by different influences and counter influences which work on him during the course of life. The same is true in case of a literary artist as his mind also bears indelible print of uncountable experiences meted out to him during the course of life. While presenting his perspective he tries to be objective to the greatest extent but somehow some kind of subjectivity creeps into his work rather stealthily. Khushwant's Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) reveals his broad and human perspective. *Train to Pakistan* is set against the background of partition and covers the sad happenings of a few weeks of the fateful days of August and September 1947, in a small village named Mano Majra.

Religion is one of the obsessions of Khuswant Singh. Being a highly enlightened soul, he seems to be aware of the fact that religion never preaches hatred and violence. He believes in the integrating and unifying force of religion. But it is rather disturbing that human society often gets divided on religious grounds all over the world. Not only this, there is more of violence and destruction in the name of religion. The so called believers in a religion perpetrate untold suffering and inhuman cruelties on their fellowmen with whom they have been living since ages in a bond of mutual friendship and love. It is interesting that the so-called low and humble folks

are well aware of the right spirit and essence of religion. This is reflected in their thoughts and actions while interacting with persons belonging to another community. But such persons fall easy victims to design and manoeuvrings of cunning priests and mullahs who interpret outer manifestations and behaviours as the essence of religion, like growing beards and moustache in a particular fashion, wearing a particular headgear and dress, and the manner of sitting and direction while chanting prayers. To Khuswant Singh, these outer manifestations do not constitute any religion or faith at all. In fact people at large are free to adopt these things according to their likes and conveniences. He believes that the search of truth is the essence of every religion regardless of difference in manner and search. This truth is manifested in every life in the form of some tender and noble qualities like love, pity, mercy, and forgiveness. By adopting these qualities in thought and action, man can march towards his ultimate goal.

The bond of fraternal feeling, existing between the Sikhs and the Muslims in Mano Majra, was shattered by the unfortunate developments. The act of manipulation performed by the district authorities, of the police in particular, created rift to force the Muslims to leave the village and to go to Pakistan. The visit of the head constable “had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter.” (Singh 178) The Muslims were scared. They remembered the atrocities inflicted upon them in Hindu India, and suspected the Sikhs with kirpans:

Muslims sat and moped in their houses. Rumours of atrocities committed by Sikhs on Muslims in Patiala, Ambala and Kapurthala, which they had heard and dismissed, came back to their minds. They had heard of gentle women having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place. Many had eluded their would-be ravishers by killing themselves. They had heard of mosques being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on the premises, and of copies of the holy Koran being torn up by infidels. (Singh 178)

This completely shattered the feeling of the bond of love existing between the different communities in the village. The Muslims thought of Pakistan as a safe land – a place where they

could live without the feat of the bearded Sikhs: “For the first time, the name Pakistan came to mean something to them – a haven of refuge where there were no Sikhs.” (Singh 178)

Khuswant Singh adopts a very objective and impersonal approach in dealing with the complications falling within the ambit of religion in *Train to Pakistan*. He does not blame a particular party, community or group for this bloody episode in Indian history. If the ghost-train and the events of the following day were any guide to the Muslims, the Sikhs, too, were reminded of the atrocities inflicted upon them by the cruel Muslims in Pakistan. They could see that the present horrors were not new—they were a part and the repetition of many mischievous plans. The teachings of the last Guru came readily to their mind of not trusting the Muslims. History taught them how they and the Hindus were put to innumerable insults by the Muslims; how time and again their children and women were tortured. Thus the present terrors did not surprise them:

The Sikhs were sullen and angry. ‘Never trust a Mussulman,’ they said. The last Guru had warned them that Muslims had no loyalties. He was right. All through the Muslim period of Indian history, sons had imprisoned or killed their own fathers and brothers had blinded brothers to get the throne. And what they had done to the Sikhs? Executed two of their Gurus, assassinated another and butchered his infant children; hundreds of thousands had been put to the sword for no other offence than refusing to accept Islam; their temples had been desecrated by the slaughter of kine; the holy Granth had been torn to bits. (Singh 178)

The Muslims were always at pains to offend their religious feelings. Their women also became the victim of Muslim fury. It appeared to the Sikhs and the Hindus of Mano Majra that the dark pages of history were repeated again. Women became the victims of Muslim wrath. The Sikhs knew well that the Muslims “were never ones to respect women. Sikhs refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into hands of Muslims. Those who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered.” (Singh 178) The Hindus and the Sikhs were fleeing from Pakistan to save their lives. The Sikhs found the Muslims beastly and ungrateful. But Khuswant Singh is very rational in presenting the picture of communal frenzy by blaming both the communities equally for the

violence that gripped the entire sub continent during the days of Partition. He holds Muslims frenzy responsible for the cruelties but at the same time he finds the Sikhs equally responsible for the massacre. He says very clearly that the Sikhs grow rash quickly: “Logic was never a strong point with Sikhs; when they were roused, logic did not matter at all.” (Singh 179) And this very attitude was on display through the behaviour of the Muslim officer when he took exception to the Lambardar’s yealling Muslim brothers and in an outrageous outburst shouted: “Shabash! Yesterday you wanted to kill them, today you call them brothers. You may change your mind again tomorrow.”(Singh 193) The lambardar’s answer that “...We are brothers and will always remain brothers” (Singh 193) expressed the feelings of the village folk.

The furious reaction of the Muslim officer significantly revealed the feeling of hatred nursed by the man. His ‘taunting’ expression revealed his inner feeling of the lava of hatred in his heart. His strong feelings were equally matched by the feelings of the Sikh officer who answered in a very retorting manner to Bhai Meet Singh when the later told him that the lambardar was right:

You are quite right, Bhaiji, there is some danger of being misunderstood. One should never touch another’s property; one should never look at another’s woman. One should just let others take one’s goods and sleep with one’s sisters. The only way people like you will understand anything is by being sent over to Pakistan: have your sisters and mothers raped in front of you, have your clothes taken off, and be sent back with a kick and spit on your behinds. (Singh 194)

The Sikh officer’s angry burst pointed to what was happening in Pakistan and in the process exposed his own heightened feeling of wrath. The irony in fate was revealed when the Sikh officer appointed Malli and his companions the custodian of the evacuated Muslim’s property, and the villagers were warned not to interfere with him or his men. “Malli’s gang and the refugees then “unyoked the bullocks, looted the carts, and drove the cows and buffaloes away.”(Singh 196) The matter was further worsened by the arrival of a group of young Sikhs. The youth burned in anger at the events taking place in Pakistan. The leader of the group, a boy in his teens with a little beard glued to his chin drew attention of the people of Mano Majra to the

atrocities inflicted on the Sikhs by the Muslims in Pakistan: “Do you know how many train-loads of dead Sikhs and Hindus have come over? Do you know of the massacres in Rawalpindi and Multan, Gujranwala and Sheikhpora?” (Singh 221)

The young man informed the audience that the only way to stop violence in Pakistan was to return violence for violence. Singh very vividly portrays the revengeful mentality of the extremist in the following dialogue:

‘For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot two. For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across. For each road convoy that is attacked, attack two. That will stop the killing on the other side. It will teach them that we can also play this game of killing and looting’. (Singh 222)

But Bhai Meet Singh the priest of the *Gurudwara* of Mano Majra saw no reason as to why the Muslims of Mano Majra be punished for the crimes their fellow brothers were committing in Pakistan. He was of the opinion that only the guilty should be punished in a legal way. But the youth subdued him with a violent series of angry outbursts: “What had the Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan done that they were butchered? Weren’t they innocent? Had the women committed crimes for which they were ravished? Had the children committed murder for which they were spiked in front of their parents?”(Singh 222) Bhai Meet Singh tried his best to convince the youth by reminding the youth of the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh who said that no Sikh would touch a Muslim woman. But the youth in turn reminded Meet Singh of the fact that how the Guru was deceived and stabbed by one of the Muslims of his army. Meet Singh argued in vain that it was a sin to kill innocent people. The leader spoke to the villagers in the *Gurudwara* about the train which was scheduled to carry Muslim refugees to Pakistan: “Tomorrow a train load of Muslims is to cross the bridge to Pakistan. If you are men, this train should carry as many people dead to the other side as you have received.”(Singh 224) The leader in a very meticulous way planned to blow up the train on the bridge and asked for volunteers. Ironically Malli entering the *Gurudwara*, volunteered this barbarous act. The man wanted all those present to pray since Meet Singh did not wish to lead the prayers. The words of the prayers had an element of irony:

In the Name of Nanak

By the hope that faith doth instill,

By the grace of God

We bear the world nothing but goodwill. (Singh 226)

The leader, who spreads a map on the bed to explain his strategy of blowing up the trainload of innocent Muslim refugees, claims ironically that he bears nothing but goodwill for all men. He then reveals his diabolic plan that the following day they would “stretch a rope across the first span of the bridge” (Singh 227) and that when the train passes under it, the people sitting on the roof would be swept off. He then asks the volunteers to be ready with their swords to kill the passengers on the train. In this way it can be very clearly observed that how different groups of people moulded and misinterpreted the religious preaching in order to suit and meet their own selfish needs.

Khuswant Singh suffers from deep sense of anguish and pain while recreating the harrowing and disturbing situations which had taken place in the wake of the Partition in his masterpiece *Train to Pakistan*. He is sad over the fact that the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims- all had fallen victims to the insidious designs of power-hungry politicians, selfish bureaucrats, greedy landlords and moneylenders. He recalls how people of these communities fell out with each other, ignoring preaching of great Gurus, Saints and *Fakirs* who always believed in the unity of life. He is shocked to notice that persons having real understanding of religion fail to meet the demand of the hour. Undoubtedly Bhai Meet Singh, the priest of *Gurudwara* at Mano Majra, Imam Baksh, the Mullah of the mosque situated there, and Iqbal, the pseudo westerner and the social reformer guided by idealist zeal, seem to be the embodiments of two main religions. However, these persons fail to counter the threat posed by some Sikh evacuees, Malli and his accomplices. These persons could do nothing to safeguard the interest of religion except shedding incompetent tears.

Only dreaded dacoit Jugga puts into practice the true spirit of Sikhism, on his release from jail. He makes supreme sacrifice by averting the sabotage plan of Malli and his men. It is true, he undertakes this bold adventure to save his Muslim mistress Nooran who had his child in her womb. But this kind of consideration cannot be expected from a criminal like him who is

often accused of violence, murder and such other heinous crimes. It would have been easier and more convenient for him to ignore Nooran's earnest desire and request made to his mother. But he rises like a true Sikh in the midst of adversity. He visits the local *Gurudwara* to have blessings of the priest and then he visits the sight of the sabotage plan was to be executed. While trying to slash down the rope tied against two pillars of the railway bridge, he incurs serious bullet injury. After slashing the rope, he falls down between the rails, and is run over by the train. It seems that the novelist thinks that none but Jugga represents the true spirit of Sikhism practiced by the great Gurus. By resorting to dare-devilry, he is able to reincarnate the two ideals of Sikhism-sacrifice and love.

Khuswant Singh doesn't wear moral blinkers with which to view the characters of his novel. However, he seems to be interested in establishing a scale of values by which his characters could be understood and judged. At the top of the scale is human integrity and ability to measure up the situation in which they are trapped. These things certainly help him evolve an attitude towards death and self sacrifice. Death is ultimate reality; man has to take a stand towards it. He has also to reveal his attitude and approach towards his formal religion by observing and practicing certain norms of morality. Sikhism is inter-woven in the plot of *Train to Pakistan* to some extent. This is obvious from the portrayal of Jugga in the local *Gurudwara*. The dacoit, Jugga has never stepped inside it before, but at the time of setting out on his final mission, he meets Meet Singh, the priest of the *Gurudwara* to receive the word of God from him. Being a man of no education, it is not clear whether he is able to understand the meaning of the verse read out to him:

He who made the night and day.

The days of the week and the seasons.

He who made the breezes blow, the waters run,

The fires and the lower regions.

Made the earth— the temple of law.

He who made creatures of diverse kinds

With a multitude of names,

Made this the law —
By thought and deed be judged forsooth,
For God is True and dispenseth Truth.
There the elect his court adorn,
And God Himself their actions honours.
There are sorted deeds that were done and bore fruit,
For those that to action could never ripen.
This, O Nanak, shall hereafter happen. (Singh 255)

When he asks Bhai Meet Singh whether the verse just chanted by him is good, Meet Singh answered: ‘All the Guru’s word is good (Singh 256). When Jugga further asks him to explain its meaning, the Bhai tells:

‘What does it mean? 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. If you persist in doing it, he will punish you till you repent, and then forgive you.’ (Singh 256)

Jugga too realizes the futility of knowing the meaning of the verse. To him action is more important than thought. He tells the priest “Yes, what will I do with the meaning?” (Singh 256)

Mullah Imam Baksh is popularly known as Chacha Imam among Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. He is the priest of the local mosque. He is sincere to the religious duty assigned to him. Absence of his sonorous cry and non-announcement of the name of God to the inhabitants of Mano Majra, indicate that tragedy struck the village. Meet Singh, even though has taken on the functions of the priest of the *Gurudwara* merely out of laziness, and as the easiest means of making a living, retains the spirit of religion by this simplicity and humility. His sense of morality is simplistic and confusing. This is obvious from his advice given to Jugga. His open moralizing carries conviction because it comes from a man who obviously believes in it. His

faith comes from a tradition unadulterated by the influence of education and rationalism which have dehumanized Iqbal.

Iqbal, a better philosopher than a social worker, meditated seriously on life and religion. He found religion hollow and devoid of values. He believed that:

India is constipated with a lot of humbug. Take religion. For the Hindu, it means little besides caste and cow-protection. For the Muslim, circumcision and kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and hatred of the Muslim. For the Christian, Hinduism with a sola topee . For the Parsi, fire-worship and feeding vultures. Ethics, which should be the kernel of a religious code, has been carefully removed.” (Singh 246)

Iqbal’s concern for social harmony and peace meets a sudden death when arrested and put behind the bars. He reveals his inability to confront the rioting mob which knows nothing but violence. On being released from the jail Iqbal met Meet Singh in the *Gurudwara* and learned of the diabolic plan to attack the refuge train. He asked Meet Singh to “do something” to stop such hideous crime to take place. Meet Singh said that he could only pray to God; others, including Iqbal, could do something to stem the rot. “Me? Why Me? asked Iqbal with a startled innocence, what have I to do with it? I do not know these people. Why should they listen to a stranger? ” (Singh 243) Iqbal was involved in the dilemma of the self. He had no moorings, and he felt incapable of positive action. He was not able to take any positive action because he was overcome by chaos within and without. He could not face violence and believed that self-preservation was the best policy in times of disorder and so faced with such a situation he ignores the miscreants. To justify his stand, he reasons that the miscreants do not like to verify who is guilty, innocent or neutral; they treat everyone in the same manner with their neutral bullet. Connivance is the best remedy in the given situation:

....Your duty is to connive with those who make the conflagration, not to turn a moral hosepipe on them- to create such a mighty chaos that all that is rotten like selfishness, intolerance, greed, falsehood, sycophancy, is drowned. In blood, if necessary. (Singh 246)

Iqbal's approach to life is guided by personal concern. He wishes to attain name, fame and celebrity through his social work. He considers it rather foolish to embrace martyrdom and death in peacekeeping operation and social harmony. Of what use to him would be honour, if it comes to him posthumously. Such death seems to be unrewarding to him. He reflects:

.... In that case you could feel good and leave to enjoy the sacrifice; in this one you were going to be Killed. It would do no good to society: society would never know. Nor to yourself: you would be dead. That figure on the screen, facing thousands of people who looked tense and concerned! They were ready to receive the lesson. That was the crux of the whole thing. The doer must do only when the receiver is ready to receive. Otherwise, the act is wasted. (Singh 245)

Thus, despite all his nobility and concern for social welfare, he is reduced to a vacillating cynic lacking in strength and action. He is too much in love with himself. Great deeds cannot be expected of such a man despite the purity of thought. Death is grim tyrant to him. On the other hand, Jugga never thinks of death and does not talk about it in course of the story, because he is full of life and vitality. When he has to choose between his own death and that of Nooran, he does not hesitate in taking a decision. He goes off to save the train, knowing it well that there is no escape for him. Unlike Iqbal, he is not given to brooding and vain reflections. He dies exactly the way he lives, full of confidence and vitality.

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