

## Chapter 3

### Moral Paradox in *Train to Pakistan*

The word morality derived from the [Latin](#) word *moralitas* is suggestive of the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and [actions](#) between those that are good or right and those that are contrary to it or bad or wrong. A *moral code* is a system of morality in a particular [philosophy](#), [religion](#), [culture](#), and *moral* is any practice or teaching within a socially accepted moral code. *Immorality* is the active opposition to morality (i.e. good or right), while *amorality* is variously defined as an unawareness of, indifference towards, or disbelief in any set of moral standards or principles.

*Ethics*, also known as *moral philosophy*, is that branch of [philosophy](#) which addresses questions about morality. The word 'ethics' is "commonly used interchangeably with 'morality' ... and sometimes it is used more narrowly to mean the moral principles of a particular tradition, group, or individual."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, certain types of ethical theories, like [deontological ethics](#), sometimes distinguish between 'ethics' and 'morals': "Although the morality of people and their ethics amounts to the same thing, there is a usage that restricts morality to systems such as that of Kant, based on notions such as duty, obligation, and [principles](#) of conduct, reserving ethics for the more Aristotelian approach to practical reasoning, based on the notion of a virtue, and generally avoiding the separation of 'moral' considerations from other practical considerations." (Blackburn, Oxford 240)

In wider sense, 'morality' may be taken as reflective of [codes of conduct](#) or social [mores](#). It does not connote objective claims of right or wrong, but only refers to that which is considered right or wrong. [Descriptive ethics](#) is the branch of philosophy which studies morality in this sense.

[Normative](#) principle of morality stresses on what is actually right or wrong in an objective way, hence it deontological in its nature without being affected by any particular belief or

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<sup>1</sup> John Deigh in Robert Audi (ed), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1995.

culture. In this way [normative ethics](#) is that branch of philosophy which treats morality in an objective and impartial way.

The [Socio-cultural evolution](#) emerges out of the flow of modern morality leading to various kinds of socio-cultural development. The Socio-biologists espouse the view that morality flows out of the evolutionary process emerging from the individual as well as from the group or the associate living. Some Socio-biologists contend that the set of behaviours that constitute morality evolved largely because they provided possible survival and reproductive benefits known as increased evolutionary success. Consequently moral feelings or emotions such as empathy and guilt emerge out of the responses of the behaviour acceptable to the society.

Taking morality from this point of view, it reflects its relativism divorced of absolutism, which stressing on behaviour encourages human [cooperation](#) based on their ideology to get ideological unity. Biologists are also of the opinion that the entire social behaviour of animals from ants to elephants has modified their behaviours by getting control over their immediate selfishness in the evolutionary process of their fitness. Human morality being sophisticated and complex in relation to other animals, is essentially a natural phenomenon that evolved to curb excessive individualism that could undermine a group's cohesion and thereby reduces the individual's fitness. Taking this aspect into consideration moral codes are ultimately founded on emotional instincts and intuitions that were selected for in the past because they aided inclusive survival and reproduction for instance, the [maternal bond](#) becomes stronger as it improves the survival of the coming generations.

Looking into the nature of the moral traditions, it comes to the fore that religion and moral traditions co-exist with contemporary secular moral frameworks such as [consequentialism](#), [free thought](#), [humanism](#), [utilitarianism](#), and others. There are many types of religious morals. 'Modern [monotheistic](#) religions, such as [Islam](#), [Judaism](#), [Christianity](#), and to a certain degree others such as [Sikhism](#), define right and wrong by the laws and rules set forth by their respective gods and as interpreted by religious leaders within the respective faith. [Polytheistic](#) religious traditions tend to be less absolute. For example, within [Buddhism](#), the intention of the individual and the circumstances should be accounted for to determine if an action is right or wrong.'(Morgan. 61, 88–89) A further disparity between the morals of religious traditions is

pointed out by [Barbara Stoler Miller](#), who states that, in Hinduism, "practically, right and wrong are decided according to the categories of social rank, kinship, and stages of life. For modern Westerners, who have been raised on ideals of universality and egalitarianism, this relativity of values and obligations is the aspect of Hinduism most difficult to understand". (Miller 3)

Religions provide different ways of dealing with moral dilemmas. For example, there is no absolute prohibition on killing in [Hinduism](#), which recognizes that, it "may be inevitable and indeed necessary" in certain circumstances. (Menski 5) In monotheistic traditions, certain acts are viewed in more absolute terms, such as [abortion](#) or [divorce](#). However, in the latter case, a 2008 study by the Barna Group found that those within religious traditions have a higher divorce rate than those in non-religious demographic groups (atheists and agnostics). (Barna Group 19Nov.2011) Of course there is no positive association between religion and morality. Philosopher [David Hume](#) stated that, "the greatest crimes have been found, in many instances, to be compatible with a superstitious piety and devotion; Hence it is justly regarded as unsafe to draw any inference in favour of a man's morals, from the fervour or strictness of his religious exercises, even though he himself believe them sincere." (Hume 30) However the overall relationship between faith and [crime](#) is ambiguous. A review of studies on this topic in 2001 found that "The existing evidence surrounding the effect of religion on crime is varied, contested, and inconclusive, and currently no persuasive answer exists as to the empirical relationship between religion and crime." (Colin. J 3) Recent researches in the field of [criminology](#) also reveals the fact that there is an inverse relationship between religion and crime, where as some studies give conformation to this connection.

There can be seen a diversity in the contemporary moral positions, such as those on [murder](#), mass atrocities, and [slavery](#). For example, [Simon Blackburn](#) states that "apologists for Hinduism defend or explain away its involvement with the caste system, and apologists for Islam defend or explain away its harsh penal code or its attitude to women and infidels". (Blackburn, Ethics 13) In regard to Christianity, he states that the "[Bible](#) can be read as giving us a carte blanche for harsh attitudes to children, the mentally handicapped, animals, the environment, the divorced, unbelievers, people with various sexual habits, and elderly women". (Blackburn, Ethics 12) Whereas contradictorily the [Old Testament](#) God apparently has "no problems with a slave-owning society", considers birth control a crime punishable by death, and "is keen on child

abuse".(Blackburn, Ethics 10,12) Blackburn also notes morally suspect themes in the Bible's *New Testament* as well.(Blackburn, Ethics 11-12)

Now taking different standards of morality into consideration in the context of various socio-cultural backgrounds, situational morality promoting existential nature of life also draws our attention. After examining and evaluating different kinds of moral norms, let us see how the concept of morality is interpreted and used in Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*.

In addition to giving an understanding of human actions and pointing out that everyone is responsible for the atrocities committed under the pretext of partition, Khuswant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* creates a background on moral commentary which bubbles up through the main characters in their thoughts and actions. Hukum Chand is the regional magistrate, and the most influential character in the story. It becomes apparent that he is a morally conflicted man who has probably used his power over the years with much corruption. He is often described with a dirty physical appearance as if he is overwhelmed with unclean actions and sins, and is just as often trying to wash himself of them, similar to Pontius Pilate after Christ was condemned.

Hukum Chand is a major figure on the dramatic stage of *Train to Pakistan*. He at first appears as the typical Indian representative of bureaucracy British-governed India. The Three levels of governmental strata are depicted: Hukum Chand belonging to the upper level of punjab district administration, the sub-inspector of police comes from the middle level and constables belong to the last level of this hierarchical, administrative structure. Hukum Chand is a type as well as an individual, a person as well as a bureaucrat, and, in various ways, an evolving character.

The descriptions of Hukum Chand's actions and attitudes are worth observing in the due course of the novel. Hukum Chand "heaved his corpulent frame" (Singh 24) out of the "large American car"(Singh 24) and "ambled up to the sub-inspector and gave him a friendly slap on the back."(Singh 25) both offer them were closeted in the drawing room and discussed in animated tones the complex situations and the challenges facing them. The drawing-room atmosphere and is in marked contrast to the ghastliness of the incidents which dominate their minds and discussions.

Hukum Chand, the district magistrate plays a very pivotal role in the novel. Walsh writes: “Mr. Hukum Chand, magistrate and deputy commissioner, for all tastes for skin-lotion, perfumed talc and young girls hired from venal guardians, his administrative cunning and corrupted conscience, yet surprises us with an authentic basic human kindness-even a sort of innocence.” (Walsh 99) Hukum Chand is perhaps one of the best drawn characters in the novel. Married to an unattractive and illiterate woman, he always feels devoid of spiritual love as he fails to develop intimate love relations with his wife. As a result of which he always looks for love and sex elsewhere. Cowasjee writes: “Through the portrayal of Hukum Chand, Khushwant Singh shows how the much maligned Indian bureaucracy was itself, caught between the hatred of a people and the and bungling of politicians.” (Cowasjee 24)

Hukum Chand considered Hindu women to be unlike other women. When it was reported that the Muslim mobs had tried to molest Hindu women, they had killed their own children and jumped into well that was completely filled to its surface with corpses, Hukum Chand’s reaction was as follows:

Our Hindu women are like that: so pure that they would rather commit suicide than let a stranger touch them. We Hindus never raise our hands to strike women, but these Muslims have no respect for the weaker sex. (Singh 29)

It is interesting to hear from Hukum Chand more about how he looked at partition and its impact. He was in favour for getting out the Muslims peacefully if possible because of his selfish motives. He was of the opinion that bloodshed would not benefit anyone. According to him antisocial elements would be benefitted by looting and killing the innocent people whereas the government would blame officials like him for the killing. This was the main reason of his being against killing or destruction of property. But at the same time he gave instruction to the inspector to be cautious and careful and not to allow the Muslims to take too much with them:

Hindus from Pakistan were stripped of all their belongings before they were allowed to leave. Pakistani magistrates have become millionaires overnight. Someone on our side have not done too badly either. Only where there was killing or burning the government suspended or transferred them. There must be no killing. Just peaceful evacuation. (Singh 30)

So from the above incident it becomes quite clear that Hukum Chand, no doubt, has dual personality and is completely void of any morality as such. That there is a wide gap between his verbal and practical approach towards life which becomes very clear from the fact that he is revealed as a womanizer. His confrontation with Haseena has an exotic touch and presents the raw or the immoral side of Hukum Chand. His mode of entertainment included the reminiscence of Punjabi feudal traditions which included liquor, music and girls. So making a very wise use of the mixture of Indian and Western cosmetics he prepares himself for an enjoyable evening, but is completely baffled by the sight of the two geckos getting ready for a fight on the ceiling of the rest house. The induction of the gecko motif in the scene between Hukum Chand and Haseena is a beautiful presentation of novelist's art of atmospheric and symbolic portrayal. Hukum Chand's ethical issues are shown in one of repeated encounters he has with two geckos, which likely represent Muslims and Hindus in conflict, on the verge of fighting each other. When they start fighting, they fall right next to him, and he panics. The guilt he gets from not helping when he has more than enough power to do so literally jumps onto him. The geckos crawled, made odd sounds, and abruptly paused before they collided- a strange sight as the description reflects:

Before Hukum Chand could move away they fell with a loud plop just beside his pillow. A cold clammy feeling came over him. He jumped out of bed and stared at the geckos. The geckos stared back at him, still holding on to each other by the teeth as if they were kissing. The bearer's footsteps broke the hypnotic stare with which the magistrate and the geckos had been regarding each other. The geckos ran down the bed and up the wall back to the ceiling. Hukum Chand felt as if he had touched the lizards and they had made his hands dirty. He rubbed his hands on the hem of his shirt. It was not the sort of dirt which could be wiped off or washed clean. (Singh 33)

Alcoholism is another tool Hukum Chand uses in attempt to clean his conscience. He feels the guilt of his actions by day and is relieved of them by night, when his alcohol is able to justify his visits with a teenage prostitute who is of the same age as his deceased daughter. Khushwant Singh like a very skilled artist is able to present the tormentation of Hukum Chand in a very vivid manner. As the girl began to sing a very popular movie song- "In the breeze is flying.... My veil of red muslin....Ho Sir, Ho Sir"- (Singh 37) Hukum Chand remembered his daughter

humming it. A delicate feeling and a disturbing thought pierced his projected entertainment and drove him to resort to larger gulps of liquor. Yet he could not suppress his sense of scrupulousness:

He stared at the girl who sat sheltered from the light. She was only a child and not very pretty, just young and unexploited. Her breasts barely filled her bodice. They could not have known the touch of a male hand. The thought that she was perhaps younger than his own daughter flashed across his mind. He drowned it quickly with another whisky. Life was like that. You took it as it came, shorn of silly conventions and values which deserved only lip worship. (Singh 37)

In all his confictions, he is able to acknowledge that what he is doing is bad, but is still unable to promote good. Women were brought to him and he paid for their service generously as the novelist paints the picture of his behaviour in these words:

He brought the girl's face nearer his own and began kissing her on the back of her neck and on her ears. He could not hear the goods train any more. It had let the country side in utter solitude. Hukum Chand could hear his breathing quicken. He undid the strap of the girl's bodice. (Singh 40)

Posing overtly to be a man of justice but in reality he never hesitates in filling official records with half truths. A vivid example of this fact can be seen in the incident where even before he receives the full details of Iqbal, he instructs the inspector to enter against Iqbal's name that he is the son of 'Mohammed Something-or-other or just father unknown.'

Hukum Chand's interest in saving Muslim lives should not be considered to be an act of humanity. There are mainly two reasons that he is interested in saving Muslim lives. Firstly, he is concerned aboard the maintenance of law and order lest his official position is compromised. This duplicity in his attitude is clearly revealed in his conversation with the sub-inspector:

We must maintain law and order. If possible, get the Muslims to go out peacefully.... No, inspector Sahib, whatever our views-and God alone knows what I would have done to these Pakistanis if I were not a government servant-

we must not let there be any killing or destruction of property. Let them get out, but be careful they do not take too much with them. Hindus from Pakistan were stripped of all their belongings before they were allowed to leave. (Singh 29-30)

Secondly, towards the end of the novel it appears that his intention is to save the Muslims being butchered in the train going to Pakistan and this is the reason why he releases Jugga and Iqbal. But the main reason was that his illegitimate love Haseena was to travel by the same train and Hukum Chand wanted to save her. So in both the cases we see that it was not out of his duty and moral responsibility that he was trying to save the life of the Muslims but out of sheer self-interest that he was trying to save the Muslims which reflects moral paradox in his behaviour as it takes place between his thinking and doing.

Iqbal is not free from this charge of moral paradox as with his arrival in Mano Majra creates a kind of mild sensation in the village. Being unknown, about Mano Majra and without any place of shelter Iqbal approaches Bhai Meet Singh, the village priest of the *Gurudwara* for shelter and Meet Singh takes it for granted that he is Iqbal Singh. In fact he doesn't have to say what Iqbal he is. "He could be a Muslim, Iqbal Mohammed. He could be a Hindu, Iqbal Chand, or a Sikh, Iqbal Singh. It was one of the few names, common to the three communities." (Singh 55) He was a pseudo westerner. He posed himself to be a social worker and had come to that village as he knew that something should be done to stop the bloodshed going on the eve of partition. He had an instinctive feeling that trouble and disaster would occur at this place since it was a vital point for refugee movements. He had his own views on morality and a host of other things:

'Morality... Is a matter of money. Poor people cannot afford to have morals. So they have religion. Our first problem is to get people more food, clothing, comfort. That can only be done by stopping exploitation by the rich and abolishing landlords. And that can only be done by changing the government.'

(Singh 57)

But at the same time he was also quite aware of the fact that criminals are not born but are



made by the circumstances like hunger, want and justice prevalent in the society. The population explosion of the country was also a cause of great concern to Iqbal as he gives vent to his ideas in the following words:

The whole country was like an overcrowded room. What could you expect when the population went up by six every minute — five million every year! It made all planning in industry or agriculture a mockery. Why not spend the same amount of effort in checking the increase in population? (Singh 65)

Iqbal is a communist and, therefore, shares the villagers dislike of Congress, yet he too is the victim of Marxist illusion that class struggle will replace 'idiotic' communal friction. All men are brothers. This is the communist cry-but it was also the motto of the Sikhs in the emergence as a martial community. The paradox of this defeats Iqbal; and in the event he is inadequate and inert. He is even prepared to allow a massacre of the Muslim trainload if it will help in the ultimate class struggle and the victory of communism. Even worse than this a Machiavellianism is the cowardice; he is one of those 'milquetoast' intellectuals pilloried in Singh's pages-who can do nothing except theories. Iqbal found himself in a predicament and was not in a position to do anything to save the situation:

Could he stop the killing? Obviously not. Everyone — Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Congressite, Leaguer, Akali, or Communist — was deep in it. It was fatuous to suggest that the bourgeois revolution could be turned into a proletarian one. (Singh 74)

The arrest of Iqbal by the police in connection with the murder of Ram Lal was something which Iqbal was least expecting, resulting in severe injury to his pride mainly because he knew that he was innocent and he was handcuffed and marched off from the *Gurudwara* to the Officer's rest house across the river. Iqbal believed that the march would be heroic, but the mild surprise and cold indifference of the villagers disappointed him, and his ego was considerably deflated. Everyone in the village knew that he had come to Mano Majra after the murder. It was extremely foolish on the part of the police to arrest Iqbal because he had taken the same train that the policeman had taken, resulting in the complete disclosure of the mistake that the police had committed. The irony lies in the fact that after arresting Iqbal the police realized that they had

committed a blunder and would have to invent reasons of arresting Iqbal:

Arresting the social worker was a blunder and a likely source of trouble. His belligerent attitude confirmed his innocence. Some sort of case would have to be made up against him. That was always a tricky thing to do to educated people. (Singh 83)

When the fellow policeman informed the sub-inspector that Iqbal was a stranger staying at the Sikh temple the sub-inspector realized the blunder committed by the policeman as he burst out:

‘I do not suppose you have any brains of your own! I leave a little job to you and you go and make a fool of yourself. You should have seen him before arresting him. Isn’t he the same man who got off the train with us yesterday?’(Singh 77)

Towards the end of the novel when the situation in Mano Majra worsens and Hukum Chand finding no other way of saving his beloved Haseena signs the papers and asks the sub-inspector to release quickly Jugga and Iqbal hoping that any of the two will turn the table and will be able to foil the plan of the extremists. On his way back to the village Iqbal meditates on the tragedy how in India life depends upon one’s following a particular religion. Instead of trying to devise a plan to save the Muslims he feels that his safely reaching Delhi would give him a wide publicity, and that the whole affair would get a political colouring. After knowing from Bhai meet Singh that the train would be attacked that night thought of sacrificing himself in an attempt to avert the tragedy, but paradoxically found sacrifice futile if there was no one to see and admire the supreme act. The height of his morally paradoxical nature can be seen in the fact that he knew that “a few subhuman species were going to slaughter some of their own kind,” (Singh 244) but then he realised that the other community was equally guilty. The Muslims, too, relished violence: “It was not as if you were going to save good people from bad. If the others had the chance, they would do as much. In fact they were doing so, just a little beyond the river.” (Singh 244)

In this episode on moral paradox it appears that the villagers of Mano Majra also suffer from this shortcoming. Through the dialogues of the various characters in the novel we are informed that the three communities i.e. The Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs have lived like a family for hundreds of years. And it is also shown that they were, they are and they will remain unified no matter what the circumstance is. This shallow belief of unity is put to test with the arrival of the ghost train. Soon the 'oasis of peace' becomes a place of suspicion. The attitude of the non-Muslim villagers undergoes complete change. The Muslim villagers were held responsible for the crime of killing the Hindus and the Sikhs in Pakistan on the pretext that their so-called fellow brothers were performing this cruel act back in Pakistan. The irony lies in the fact that a group of Sikhs who claimed to have witnessed the butchery act committed by the Muslims on the other part of the border convinces the non Muslim villagers of Mano Majra that the Muslims are their greatest enemy and the best way to give the Pakistanis a best reply is by killing more number of Muslims than the number of Hindus and Sikhs killed by the Pakistanis. Singh very vividly portrays the revengeful mentality of the extremists 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)

Although Bhai Meet Singh and Chacha Imam Baksh try their best to maintain a cordial and peaceful atmosphere in Mano Majra but in the end they too were somehow subdued and sidelined by the extremists.

Finding no other solution, ultimately the Muslim villagers of Mano Majra decide to leave the village and seek temporary shelter in the refugee camp. The Muslims, pulling out of Mano Majra presented a pathetic scene. The whole of Muslim locality kept busy packing all the night. It was extremely shocking to go away from what they knew to be their home: "The women sat on the floors hugging each other and crying. It was as if in every home there had been a death." (Singh 187) The decision of parting was not easy. It shook the roots of togetherness that was

centuries old. It created a very mournful situation and made them weep bitterly. Their strong sense of belongingness and anguish of being uprooted from their birthplace is reflected through their words and tears. One of the young men says: 'It is like this, Uncle Imam Baksh. As long as we are here nobody will dare to touch you. We die first then....' (Singh 184) Imam Baksh, Meet Singh and several others are weeping and sobbing. Imam Baksh says: 'what have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers.' (Singh 184) This reminds one of Toba Tek Singh's protests against his transfer to India in Saddat Hassan Manto's Urdu short story 'Toba Tek Singh.' When people try to take him to India by force, he fixes at no man's land i.e. a place that belongs to neither India nor Pakistan and dies.

Soon the Muslims began to come out of their homes, driving their cattle and their black bullock carts loaded with charpoys, rolls of bedding, tin trunks, kerosene oil tins, earthen pitchers and brass utensils.

.... There was no time even to say goodbye. Truck engines were started. Pathan soldiers rounded up the Muslims, drove them back to the carts for a brief minute or two, and then on to the trucks. (Singh 196)

The complete collapse of morality is seen on the part of the Non- Muslim villagers of Mano Majra in the scene where the Muslim villagers leave for the refugee camp hoping that their transfer to the refugee camp is temporary and their precious belongings which they have left behind by be properly looked after by their fellow Hindu and Sikh brothers of Mano Majra. On the contrary their belongings after their departure for the refugee camp are being plundered by the hard core and notorious Mali and his gang in front of the eyes of the Hindu and the Sikh villagers of Mano Majra. When this act of destruction is being committed the villagers instead of protesting decides to remain in their houses dumb folded and watch this act of cruelty being performed by the anti-socials with the help of the district magistrate Hukum Chand. Thus Malli and his gang "unyoked the bullocks, looted the carts, and drove the cows and buffaloes away." (Singh 196)

Another incident of moral paradox can be witnessed through the character of Bhai Meet Singh. If one looks into the life history of Bhai Meet Singh in the novel, one will find that he was

a peasant by profession. It was out of sheer laziness that he ceased to be a peasant and decided to become the priest of the *Gurudwara* without any authentic knowledge about the religion and its religious scriptures. From the depiction of his character one can conclude that his approach to life was very philosophic in nature which in practicality is not possible. Although he is presented as a character that believes in communal harmony and universal brotherhood and presents him to be a man who is always ready to undertake any hardship to maintain this communal harmony but in reality he completely turns out to be a man of words rather than man of the deeds. The complete moral paradoxical nature of Bhai Meet Singh can be witnessed towards the end of the novel in the scene where a confrontation between him and Iqbal takes place. When Iqbal implores him, 'Bhaiji, can't you stop it? They all listen to you.'(Singh 243) He replies: "I have done all I could. My duty is to tell people what is right and what is not. If they insist on doing evil, I ask God to forgive them. I can only pray; the rest is for the police and the magistrates." (Singh 243)

All the forgone events, incidents, behaviours and situations in the life of Hukum Chand, Iqbal, Bhai Meet Singh as well as the villagers evidently reflect the moral paradox that is surfaced in day to day life. Khuswant Singh very slyly reveals in his novel *Train to Pakistan* how Hukum Chand exercises his official and political powers to achieve his desired ends without revealing his lusty and lecherous nature. Similarly Iqbal is no exception to it who lives in fantasy and utopian world and poses himself as a social worker without doing any single work of altruism. Bhai Meet Singh being lazy and inactive by nature always tries to appear in the garb of a religious person as priest who preaches a lot but does nothing in practice. The villagers are also trapped in the same vicious practice of moral paradox who without surfacing their cowardice nature becomes dumb spectator of the scene when inhuman activities are taking place in their presence.

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