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TRAIN TO PAKISTAN- FILM AND LITERATURE

Text Link: - http://punjabilibrary.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Train-To-Pakistan_Punjabi-Library.pdf?

Film Link: - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3kUSLdKzU4>

Train to Pakistan tells the story of imaginary Mano Majra, a small village town.

Train to Pakistan film, an adaptation from Khushwant Singh's 1956 classic novel by the same name set in the Partition of India of 1947 and directed by Pamela Rooks was released in 1998. The **film** stars Nirmal Pandey, Rajit Kapur, Mohan Agashe, Smriti Mishra, Mangal Dhillon and Divya Dutta.

Plot Analysis

Train to Pakistan is a harrowing tale of a country divided by religious and political differences. The narrative takes place during the historic Partition of India in the summer of 1947, which is considered one of the bloodiest times in the country's history. This division of India into two separate states caused a nationwide resettlement, thus dividing the previously single country into a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan, with devastating results.

With the division of the country on the basis of belief systems, Singh's narrative marks how entire families were made to abandon their lives and uproot themselves to re-align their lives based on religious allegiance to ensure safety and survival. The resettlement, however, was anything but safe and secure for those caught up in the ensuing violence. Trying to quickly avoid the oncoming troubles, people fled on foot, cart and train. Yet as these refugees attempted to flee the violence, they often became caught up in sanctioning violence themselves or were the victims of violence as Hindus and Muslims fought all over the country.

Many refugees attempted to flee to the far outskirts of the skirmish, where they imagined they might outrun the violence. Ironically, the farther people got from the cities, the more casual the killing became. It is estimated that nearly ten million people were assigned for relocation, and of that number, more than a million were killed in the resulting violence. Amidst the unspeakable horror, the trains continued to run. Moreover, the trains became a way of killing large numbers of people in one place. These "ghost trains" or "funeral trains," as they are nicknamed, are what the narrative's title references.

For many remote villages, such as Mano Majra, supply trains were what kept them functioning. The trains' arrivals and departures were also a part of the daily life cycle of these villages. In time, however, the trains began pulling into stations silently, overburdened with

Source:

1. shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in
2. K. Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1988
3. J. Singh, *Jinnah: India-Partition Independence*, New Delhi: Rupa, 2012.

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human cargo and off-schedule. Initial complacency of people soon gave way to fear and then, at times, violence, as the tensions reached the outer areas.

Narrative

The novel's narrative addresses the people of Mano Majra, a tiny village that relies on trains for its daily needs. Like other villages, the people living in the village are unconcerned with the troubling news about violence and resettlement. The village itself is made up of Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and quasi-Christians, and has existed for hundreds of years in this state of cooperation. Given the diverse population, the village runs on mutual cooperation as opposed to tension and religious/political division. The villagers need one another for survival, and because of this mutual need, are kept secure in their false sense of security.

Life for the villagers of Mano Majra begins to change suddenly when the **first ghost train** arrives. The villagers are shocked at the number of dead and the silent train moving along the tracks. People stop working to watch from rooftops as the train goes by. When the second ghost train arrives in the village, the villagers' lives are altered even further when they are ordered to help bury the dead passengers before the monsoon season begins. Though the order to help bury the passengers is a shocking twist for the villagers, things become achingly real and surreal for them when the Muslims in the village are ordered to evacuate the village immediately. With overtures that harken to the death trains of the holocaust during World War II, the Muslims are stripped of their possessions and only allowed to take what they can carry.

The rest of the villagers, including the Sikhs and Hindus, are then told that there will be an attack on the next train to Pakistan, and that they will assist in the attack. The soldiers will begin the attack with gunfire, and the villagers will then finish with clubs and spears. Adding to the horror of their situation, the villagers realize that the next train to Pakistan will actually be carrying the Muslims from their village, meaning their former friends and neighbours. *Train to Pakistan* is made all the more personal by the fact that Jugga, a Sikh thief, knows that his intended wife, who is Muslim, is one of the passengers on the train. This crisis in faith and belief causes the narrative to explore what the heart is capable of in the face of love, loss and fear. The ethnic cleansing has not begun with the first or second train to arrive in Mano Majra, and Jugga, though a thief and complicit in the killing, must now decide if this baseless violence should be perpetuated based on the fact that it is the only thing the

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villagers now know, or if he should transcend the current mode of thinking and speak out against the violence.

Themes

Train to Pakistan shows how themes of love, religion and allegiance cause mankind to do unthinkable things, things that include both heartbreaking actions and life-affirming ones. Khushwant Singh does not paint any of the villagers above reproach. They are all thrown into a system where the value of human life is based on caste systems, religious beliefs and politics. The villagers are but one part in a hopeless, seemingly endless cycle of bloodshed and history. The relationship between Jugga and his intended, between Sikh and Muslim, shows that, despite the death, carnage and madness, people can choose to be different, to walk a different path, even if that path might be one of self-sacrifice.

Characters

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh describes the division of a unified India into a “Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan”. He recounts the event of deporting Muslims from a village, Mano Majra. The village has a Muslim, Hindu and Sikh population, bordering the newly created Pakistan and divided India. Singh’s characters Hukum Chand, Iqbal and Juggut Singh show three sides of Partition, thus providing multiple perspectives. Hukum Chand is a Hindu magistrate and thus provides a Hindu perspective of the event of Partition. However, he is a government official so his values and actions depict human welfare rather than the bias he has against Muslims. Juggut, on the other hand, is a Sikh rogue. It is Iqbal who stands for all identities. His religious identity remains ambiguous and a point of contention till the end of the novel. He stands for all religious identities. The name, Iqbal, is shared by Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. It is common to keep this name in all three sects. Thus, it is a shared symbol and is used against him as well as for him by the magistrate. He can become part of all three religious communities. Iqbal does not have to “say what Iqbal he was. He could be a Muslim, Iqbal Muhammad... a Hindu, Iqbal Chand, or a Sikh, Iqbal Singh”[1]. In a pre-partition India, this shared symbol is a tool, however, post-partition, such heteroglot symbols (carrying multiple voices) have to be assigned to one group.

The three main characters namely Hukumchand, Iqbal and Jugga reflect three different thinking’s, three different societies. Hukumchand, a magistrate and Deputy Commissioner of the District is a person with two extremely opposite characteristics. He is an experienced and

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balanced bureaucrat, who maintains his administrative and bureaucratic perspective even amidst the most horrible news of bloodshed and mass murders. At the same time with Haseena, a teenaged prostitute, he is a sensual man found of liquor, music and girls to entertain his own self. But the corpses in the ghost train shook him. He was upset, both physically and mentally. In the end, he drowns himself in liquor when he gets the news of the plot of Sikhs against the train taking Muslim refugees to Pakistan. Iqbal is an outsider. He is a city dweller, enjoys being called babu and seems to be influenced by the Western Culture. He has come to Mano Majra as it was exactly on the Indo-Pak border, 'a vital point for refugee movements'. He seems to have put on the garb of socialism. According to him he has come to this place with a purpose to stop disaster and thus to make sacrifice. He has dismounted the train at Mano Majra railway station with a mission to save the village from communalism. But he proves his character otherwise. It is his sarcasm and nihilistic approach that makes the reader realize that he is more a politician than a socialist. Towards the conclusion when he was informed that the train heading for Pakistan with Muslim refugees would be attacked by fanatic Sikhs, for a moment, he thought of a brave self sacrifice. But at the second thought this sacrifice seemed meaningless if there was no one to witness and appreciate his brave act. Very soon he slips out of this world drowned in the dreams of bravery and applauds. Jugga, a well-built strong young man is emotional and sentimental. It is through this character that Singh takes his readers to the focal point of the novel: the triumph of love, humanism and goodness of men at the time of real crisis and challenge. A Sikh by birth, Jugga is madly in love with Nooran – a Muslim girl. He is sent behind the bars in relation to the murder of Lala Ramlal, the money lender. Iyenger calls him a 'self confessed budmash'. After his release, as like Iqbal, he too is informed of the plan to attack the train heading for Pakistan. He gets another information from his mother is that Nooran, with his child in her womb, too was supposed to board the same train. Jugga decides to prevent the attack, even at the risk of his life. He reaches the bridge where the Sikh fanatics have tied a rope across the first span of the bridge to finish off the Muslim passengers sitting on the roof of the train. Up the poll, Jugga starts to slash the rope. Though shot twice, he finally cuts the rope and falls on the track.

Literature & Film

The novelist uses words as the medium of expression and a film-maker uses visuals as the medium of expression. Film is thus seen and heard by its audience. Apart to this there are visible differences of form and style between a novel and a film. But in the words of

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Somdatta Mandal, in spite of all the differences, "...it is a well accepted fact that right from the birth of this new art form in the twentieth century, film-makers had to turn to literature, and especially novels, to go on supplying them with the essential ingredient upon which their narration is based, namely the story. (2005: 45) For a film-maker, adaptation is not conversion but an artistic reconstruction of the original. This is what one experiences in Pamela Rooks' filmic adaptation of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. The film *Train to Pakistan* made its way to the silver screen with the following crew: Film: *Train to Pakistan* (1998) Director: Pamela Rooks Screen Play: Pamela Rooks, assisted by Khushwant Singh Music: Piyush Kanojia, Taufiq Qureshi, Kuldeep Singh Lyrics: Baba Buleshah, Kabir, Amrita Pritam 60 Cinematography: Sunny Joseph Set design: Chhel Paresh Editing: A.V. Narayan, Sujata Narula Cast: Nirmal Pandey, Rajat Kapoor, Mohan Agashe, Smriti Mishra, Divya Dutta, Mangal Dhillon, M.S. Sathya, Suresh Jindal and others. The shooting of the film started about fifty years after the actual tragedy. It became difficult for the production team to find a village of Punjab having Muslim tradition pockets. Finally, a couple of villages of rural Punjab were selected to show both Sikh and Muslim cultured pockets and thus give a look of Mano Majra, a 1947 village on the Indo-Pak border. The film's premiere on 15th August, 1997 was halted by Indian Censor Board. Finally the movie was telecast in 1998 on Star Plus, a television channel. The film was also released in United Kingdom, United State and Sri Lanka and it snatched away appreciations in International Film Festivals at places like Denmark, Beirut, Germany, Hong Kong and Zanzibar. The film could acclaim critics appreciation. Singh's novel was thematically quite strong and appealing and to adapt it on a silver screen was a challenging task. Unlike its counterpart in print the film begins with neither the train, nor Jugga. Instead it begins with Hukumchand heading towards Mano Majra to take the charge as a Divisional Commissioner. In his huge office car, the ageing Hukumchand recollects his past experience at Mano Majra. It is here that he narrates the family background of Jugga. Jugga's father was a dacoit. He was hanged to death when Jugga was still a child. Jugga as a child is shown witnessing his father's death sentence. Must this have affected child Jugga's psyche to follow his father's footsteps! The novel does give details about Jugga's father but not of the child Jugga watching his father's death. Rooks has tried to build Jugga's character played by Nirmal Pandey in the first ten minutes of the film itself. Hukumchand, reminiscing the past and the present of Jugga, also tells the audience about his combat with Mali, a rival dacoit. The two had an open battle before a few years.

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Jugga was injured and also imprisoned. The book says that Jugga was not permitted to leave the village after sunset. But he breaks the law and goes to meet Nooran, his Muslim beloved in the field. But Rooks' Jugga goes to meet Nooran at her place. He is shown sneaking into her house from the terrace. They try to get intimate. Nirmal Pandey as Jugga, the brawny Sikh dacoit seems to be over shadowed by his role of dacoit in the 'Bandit Queen'. Rooks' Jugga's sensual love for Nooran differs a little from Singh's Jugga. Rooks' Jugga hints towards an unexpected end while talking to Iqbal in the prison.

In the concluding scene of the novel villagers are shown watching the flooded swollen river and drifting dead bodies. Khushwant Singh has narrated the scene with blue and grey strokes. He has given details of the bodies drifting in the water and 65 villagers discussing it. In the film this comes as a monochrome (blue and black) long shot in grave moonlight. It shows bodies floating down the flooded river watched by shocked villagers of Mano Majra. Not a single body in this scene is shown from close range and neither the sound of flood is heard. The villagers exchange a few words only. It is the silence and the monochrome shot that adds to the horror. The last scene gives the film a powerful end without derailing from the main story. Two parallel shots are connected here. It has a train, without lights on, without whistling, heading for Pakistan in the dark night. The darkness becomes a metaphor in this scene-a metaphor of the silent sacrifice of a lover. A rope is tied across the first span of the rail bridge over the river to throw down the Muslim passengers from the roof top of the train to the Sikh militants waiting to create a tragic history. Jugga, holding the span, is temerariouly trying to cut the rope. The parallel shot is of Nooran in the compartment of the same train with her blind father. She is shown in dull orange light. Every slash of Jugga's Kirpan on the rope seems to carry Nooran and the whole train a little and still a little more towards hope, towards life, towards sunrise. The scene has Jugga all alone in the dark moonlight and Nooran with other passengers in orange light. It suggests their near future. Jugga, shot twice, finally falls dead on the tracks and the train with Nooran moves ahead safely with life.

Singh's train is an important character in the novel. It is a powerful symbol of both, life and death. But somehow in the film, its frequent entries fail to fulfill its importance. The relation between the train and Mano Majra people is shown in the second scene with Amrita Pritam's lyrics in the backdrop. Pamela Rooks has used the arrivals, departures and passing of the train and its relation with daily life at Mano Majra to give the titles of the movie. But somehow the

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long shots fail to clarify the routine of the village to those who have not read the novel. The train brings Iqbal, the symbol of futile socialism. Still remains unnoticed. The train is noticed only when it comes from Pakistan as the ghost train. The train gets adequate recognition in the last scene of the film where Jugga helps the train carrying Nooran pass to Pakistan safely over his dead body. With a long shot of the train moving ahead beyond the borders, the film ends. The long shots fail to project the train as a symbol of life and also of death except at the end of the film.

Critical Reviews

Sudhir Bose aptly remarks about the film in his review. He says, “It goes to the credit of Rooks that in transforming the novel into film she retains the attributes. In particular, she doesn’t take sides and the film is marked by an economy of style an ‘un-emphatic voice’ even as its images are shot through with underlying tension” (1998 : 38) As for Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan, its quality of realism, accurate presentation of incidents and characters deserve acclamation. K. R. S. Iyenger calls it a nightmare that numbs the sensibilities.

Long Questions:

1. Compare and contrast the character of Iqbal and Jugga.
2. Reflect on the title of the novel.
3. Discuss the themes of Train to Pakistan.
4. What role do Meet Singh and Imam Baksh play in the novel.
5. Analyse the role of women in the novel.
6. How do Hukum Chand and Sub-Inspector try to save the Muslims of Mano Majra?

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