

# A Glance at "Train to Pakistan"

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This selection is a book review of "Train to Pakistan" by Khushwant Singh. The writing touches upon human morality and good vs. evil in the setting of historic political turmoil.

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## Reactionary Morality in the Partition

Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh is a recounting of the Partition of India in August of 1947. This political event concerned the deportation of Muslims from Hindu and Sikh areas into the newly created state of Pakistan. However, Singh's focus with this work was to highlight the issues concerning human morality and provide an understanding of right and wrong in the face of a violent crisis.

The story is set in the fictional village of Mano Majra, which borders both India and Pakistan. The town is predominantly comprised of Muslim and Sikh populations who have coexisted in relative peace for many generations. Singh uses this village as a contrast with the horrifying violence between Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus that is taking place outside of Mano Majra. The Partition dictates that Muslims must be relocated in Pakistan as a means of solving the problem of religious conflict and hostility that has existed in India since the two religions began to encroach upon one another. The Sikhs represent a small, but important, group amidst the two big religious powers throughout the region.

In understanding Singh's focus, the reader must understand that hate and violence characterized both sides of the conflict. As Singh points out:

â Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.â

The very nature of this conflict is one of hypocrisy. The murder, rape, and strife were committed by humans for various reasons, but what is known is that these people were chiefly separated by their religious beliefs. The Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh religious beliefs were used as catalysts for political action. This social movement was done in the name of a god that would denounce such atrocity committed against one's fellow man, yet the violence persisted.

To characterize the moral dilemma at hand during the Partition, Singh uses a variety of different individuals to represent the spectrum of men in times of crisis. Three are used in particular: Hukum Chand, Iqbal, and Juggut. Chief among these three is Chand, a magistrate of Mano Majra, who represents the vast majority of mankind. He is a corrupt and self-serving person who sits idly by rather than join a cause of goodness. He recognizes those that are good and evil within the conflict, but lacks the motivation to do good that is necessary for positive change. Singh uses many metaphors for Chand's plight, such as when he is watching two lizards attack one another and he feels that if he were to touch them his hands would be dirty. Singh often portrays Chand as being blemished and unclean for this reason. He is guilty of allowing horrors to be committed and, to cope with this shame, he regularly visits a prostitute and indulges in his alcoholism.

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Singh's other main actors, Iqbal and Juggut, represent opposite ends of society and the ideological spectrum of human behavior. Iqbal is described as a somewhat effeminate thinker. He's very well educated and, in terms of the tension in his country, is not wholly concerned with god and is atheistic. He's a very pessimistic person that prefers to analyze a situation well before committing to any action, which he sees as futile regarding the current crisis.

On the other hand, Singh uses Juggut to represent the polar opposite of Iqbal. Juggut is a massively muscular, uneducated member of the village. He is mostly known for gang-related behavior and has a history of rash and impulsive action. He is not necessarily a bad person, but his life has certainly been spent doing things that are a detriment to public good and civil order.

Iqbal and Juggut meet one another when they are falsely imprisoned for the murder of the same man. Being in adjacent cells, the two come into contact with one another and the story of the Partition is framed through the reaction of the foiling characters. They both see the injustice of their particular scenarios and begin to apply that same injustice to the events surrounding the Partition.

Upon their release from prison, the two learn plans of a gang's attack on a train carrying Mano Majra's Muslim population to Pakistan. It is here where their ideological characteristics are applied to a real world situation. Defending the train's occupants against a gang's attack means certain death and, because of this, Iqbal's cautious nature prevents him from finding the courage to do what he knows is right. Juggut, however, doesn't think in the same terms as Iqbal. He is impulsive in his decisions and, in recognizing what is right and wrong, instinctively rushes to action and protects the train while sacrificing himself in the process. Iqbal reflects on this and comes to the realization that sacrifices for good things are intrinsically of value, but are marginalized when no one witnesses. Singh exemplifies this by not curtailing the horror of the Partition and showing us his view of such sacrifice through the words of Iqbal:

â The bullet is neutral. It hits the good and the bad, the important and the insignificant, without distinction. If there were people to see the act of self-immolationâ the sacrifice might be worth while: a moral lesson might be conveyedâ the point of sacrificeâ is the purpose. For the purpose, it is not enough that a thing is intrinsically good: it must be known to be good. It is not enough to know within oneâ s self that one is in the rightâ

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