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# Adha Gaon and Train to Pakistan: The Tale of Time

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## ABSTRACT

Partition, one of the most glaring phenomena in the history of the Indian subcontinent that led to the loss of lives and homes is the concern of many sensitive writers. The Paper attempts to analyze and compare the works of two such writers who were participant, sufferers and delineators of this event. Though written in two different languages, both these novels explore the difference made by partition in the lives of innumerable people who got uprooted or killed in the riots where law and administration failed miserably. The writers describe event from their own vantage point which help us in understanding this ghastly happening even better.

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## Introduction

Sickened, from both your temple and our shrine I have been,  
Alike our preachers' sermons and your fond myths I shun,  
In every graven image you fancied God:  
I see in each speck of my country's poor dust divinity.

- Iqbal

In the poem 'Naya Shivala', Iqbal chided both the Hindus and the Muslims for their bigotry and narrowness. It was Partition that set ablaze the fire of communal hatred in the hearts of people. The term 'Partition' describes the vivisection of sub-continent into India and Pakistan. This theme has attracted writers, such as Rahi Masoom Raza, Khushwant Singh, Krishna Shobhali, Manohar Malgaontar, Nayantara Sahgal, Intazar Hussain, Salman Rushdie, Anita Kumar, Bhisma Sahani, Chaman Nahal, etc. These writers have written novels that can be described as Historical Novels. Their novels contain their own vantage point from where they view and interpret this phenomenon. As Hayden White comments:

Novelists might be dealing with only imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real events, but the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of representation is a poetic process.

Historical fiction reveals the truth of its times. Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* are novels that tell the tale of time passing through the Indian subcontinent during Independence and Partition. The writers were so near and so much involved with these incidents. They were not only the eyewitnesses but also the sufferers and participants. The Partition and its holocaust had tremendous impact on contemporary culture, literature and history. Bhabani Bhattacharya comments:

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.

These two novels were written in two different languages and in two different decades after the Independence and deal with the villages of two different Indian states. Despite linguistic and cultural differences, there is an inherent similarity in them that brings them together, that they are concerned with that crucial period of transition of the Indian history when the tyranny of thralldom had come to an end and the new era commenced.

Raza is a remarkable Hindi writer with a number of poems and novels to his credit. *Adha Gaon* (AG) is a touching delineation of the divided psyche of the Shia Muslims of Gangauli village in Uttar Pradesh. The village life has been portrayed with full vibrancy and intensity. The novel depicts the life before and after the Partition. Loneliness and desolation are depicted here in a special historical context. It evokes pungent pain in the context of national aspirations.

The differences of religion do not prevent the villagers from loving and respecting each other. On the contrary, there is also reverence for each other's culture. Funnan Mian, an illiterate Zamindar shows respect and tolerance for Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The delicate fiber of communal harmony also binds men like Gaya Ahir and Maulvi Bedar. However, it is best seen in the friendship between Funnan Mian and Thakur Kunwarpal Singh. These simple, straight forward villagers do not have any desire for Partition. However, the dark clouds of crisis shadow this peaceful, loving village because of the political parties, religious leaders and the educated lot.

Social hierarchy in Gangauli is described by the author. According to Dr. A. K. Singh,

*Adha Gaon* is a 'Shadinama'- marriage document or contract of Gangauli which has a 'full' hierarchy of relationships of 'half' a village.

In addition to the division of the village into Hindus and Muslims, there are subdivisions even among the Muslims as the Saiyads and non-Saiyads, and even further in Saiyads there are Saiyads of Phatakwalla, of Payjamawala, and Lungiwalla. Among women there are 'bahoos', 'begums', 'dulhins', 'aziz dulhins' and 'nafis dulhins'.

In spite of so many differences, Raza has integrated the Hindus and Muslims through the Ganga-Jamuni culture. There exists communal harmony among them. The Hindus, mostly consisting of Ahirs, Chamars and Bhars are loyal to their Muslim landlords and fight for their respective landlords wherever the need arises.

The Fabric of communal harmony is first disturbed when some Muslims of Gangauli return to Gangauli from Aligarh Muslim University after completing their higher education. They are influenced by the Muslim league and Jinnah. Abbas, who has returned from Aligarh, remarks, "Ten crore Muslims of India are ready to shed their blood in return for the perspiration of Quid-E-Azam... let Pakistan be created once, then the Muslims will have bliss." (AG)

The religious leaders also fan the fire of communal hatred among the Hindus. A Swamiji travels from village to village and spreads hatred among the Hindus against the Muslims. He says: "Religion is in danger. Take the water of the Ganges in your hand and pledge to clean our motherland with the blood of the Muslims..." (AG). Thus, he is no better than the Muslim league Activists who want to create a hype of Pakistan with the blatant use of rhetoric.

Raza laments that due to the effect of Partition, the number of Gangauliwalas is on the decrease whereas the number of Hindus and Muslims is on the rise. The evacuation is slow but continuous, almost unending. The village remains the core Raza's concerns, which he expresses through Tannoo who tells Kali Sherwani: "I am not a voter... I am Muslim. But I love this village, because I myself am this village... If God loves his home then can he not understand that we too can love our village in the same manner?" (AG)

Partition brings around socio-economic changes along with a completely new system. It creates an emotional crisis too, as so many youths who leave for Pakistan leave behind their families in Gangauli. A new political Equation emerges. The selfishness of the petty politicians who are elected by caste manipulations are not interested in people. Passuram joins Congress and becomes an MLA. Raza remarks: "He really did not know why he had chosen Gandhi as his leader. Probably for this Gandhi cap... He was not doing any work." (AG)

Raza then points out the solution to the crisis resulting from this chaos. According to him, the Ganga-Jamuni culture can resolve the crisis. The second solution is the love for one's own land. If one loves one's nation, he cannot see it shattering to pieces. In *Bhoomika* (Introduction), Raza observes:

I am from Gazipur. My relationship with  
Gazipur is unbreakable. This is my home also.  
Home! This word...in every dialect and  
language is its most beautiful word.

Raza's Gangauli bears a similarity to Khushwant Singh's *Mano Majra*. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (TtP) is an Indian English novel depicting the reality and cruelty of Partition. It won the **Grove Press India Fiction Prize** for the

year 1956. The predominant quality of this novel is its trenchant exposition of one of the most moving, even tragic events of contemporary Indian history, the partition. The opening of the novel gives a hint of the great human catastrophe:

The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. It was hotter than usual and drier and dustier. (TtP)

*Mano Majra* is a typical Punjabi village smeared in dust, mud, values and culture of the Punjab. It is a small frontier village of seventy families, situated at the distance of half a kilometer from the Sutlej River. This village has somehow saved itself from the flames of communalism and barbarism. The following lines by Thomas Gray depict the state of people of *Mano Majra*:

Far from the maddening crowd's ignoble strife;  
Their sober wishes never learned to stray; Along  
the cool and sequestered vale of life, They kept  
the noiseless tenor of their way.

The Muslim and the Sikhs, who are in a majority here, live peacefully and consider each other brothers. The Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims are so entrenched in this village that they have nothing to do with political developments. The police sub inspector tells the Deputy Commissioner: "I am sure no one in *Mano Majra* even knows that British have left and country is divided into Pakistan and Hindustan. Some of them know about Gandhi but I doubt if anyone has even heard of Jinnah." (TtP)

A glaring example of communal harmony in the novel is Jugga's love for Nooran. Juggut Singh (Jugga) falls in love with Nooran, a Muslim girl who is the daughter of Imam Baksh. He remains true to his love until his every end and even sacrifices his life for the sake of Nooran.

The lives of the people of *Mano Majra* are regulated by trains. The Partition disturbs the schedule of the train that brings dead bodies instead of passengers from Pakistan. Dr. A. K. Singh remarks that this event turns *Mano Majra* as:

A microcosm of vivisected subcontinent,  
caught in the whirlpool of one of the cruelest,  
meanest and bloodiest event in the history of  
mankind that led ten million in flight and  
almost a million dead.

The Muslims leave the village only when compelled by the administration. The *Mano Majras* allow them to do so only when they are convinced that the Muslim departure is in their interest. Imam Baksh states: "It will take us more than one night to clear out of homes it has taken our fathers and grandfathers hundreds of years to make." (TtP)

The crisis in *Mano Majra* is depicted at two levels:

- At the community level
- At the individual level

At the community level, it affects very badly the Hindus and the Sikhs. They have lived like brothers and now this separation is extremely painful to them.

At the personal level, Partition affects mainly the two characters - Juggut Singh and Nooran. Before leaving, Nooran visits Jugga's place, but Jugga is in the jail. Nooran informs Jugga's mother that she is carrying Jugga's child in her womb. Nooran is extremely miserable because she has to leave *Mano Majra* and Jugga.

The news of barbaric torture and killing of non-Muslim by the Muslims in Pakistan instigates the Sikh youth from other villages to retaliate. Such a group comes to *Mano Majra*. There is a call for a crusade in the cords of the Sikh leader at the

Gurudwara who says: "Is there anyone beloved of the Guru here? Anyone who wants to sacrifice his life for the Sikh community?" (TtP). At such time, many people support this group. They hatch a plot against the Muslims travelling in a train to Pakistan.

The massive force of the evil reduces all the social, political, administrative and religious agencies to an absurdity. The police are ill equipped and unwilling to accept the challenge. The administration sulks in helplessly and stands as a mute spectator. An intellectual like Iqbal trembles with fear. The words of Meet Singh have no effect on the people. In the words of Warren French,

Singh's terse fable suggests a profound disillusionment with the power of law, reason and intellect in the face of elemental human passions. (French 818-20)

Jugga's beloved Nooran is likely to travel by the same train, which is to be attacked by the Sikh youth. These Sikhs have stretched a rope across the first span above the height of the funnel of the engine to sweep the people sitting on the roof of the train and then intend to butcher them. Sensing the danger, Jugga stakes his life. Against all warning voices, he climbs and succeeds in cutting the rope with his kirpan. The novelist describes the scene:

He went at with his knife, and then with his teeth... There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre and he fell. The train went over him and went to Pakistan. (TtP)

H. M. Williams calls him "a doomed hero" who "...accepts his doom with an astonishing cheerfulness that is the very reverse of the existential anguish." The novelist has resolved the crisis through the Punjabi culture and its code of conduct. Among its codes, the most significant is its ideal or code of love. According to their code, honor and honesty were, and still are, all right but they were placed at much lower level in comparison to loyalty and faithfulness to friends and village-fellows.

Raza's *Adha Gaon* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* are novels that on one hand describe the bloodiest events of History and on the other hand, also depict the soothing effect of Love. Both these novels have many similarities. Both revolve around Partition. The village is the setting. Communal harmony of the pre-partition period is highlighted. Both novels are community-centered but neither the Sikh community in *Train to Pakistan* nor the Muslim community in *Adha Gaon* point out that the political and religious institutions are the causes of Partition and not the common people. The novels then go on to narrate the killings and ghastliness of Partition and the crisis brought about by it. The novels are also the reflection of the personal experiences of authors and also their feelings and concerns towards their villages and communities.

However, at one level, the authors transcend their community and village and get integrated with the feelings and concern for the religion, cross-fertilization of concerns and crises-consciousness in the tense agonizing tales of villages.

Despite having these remarkable similarities, both novels also have some striking dissimilarities. *Train to Pakistan* results from the guilt feeling of the author whereas Raza has written *Adha Gaon* to justify the stand of his community. In *Adha Gaon*, number of communities is much more as Muslims are divided into a whole range of classes, whereas *Train to Pakistan* has only two communities-Hindus and Sikhs. *Adha Gaon* is based on Ganga-Jamuni culture, which along with love for one's own

land, is depicted as resolution of crisis. *Train to Pakistan* is based on Punjabi culture and individual love is shown to ennoble souls. In *Adha Gaon*, events are depicted with a personal touch whereas the other novel has an objective and detached view. Raza's characters all have their individuality whereas Khushwant Singh's characters are types, e.g., the character of Iqbal has been criticized by Premapati who comments:

...in fact, that the weakest link in the structure of *Train to Pakistan* is Iqbal ...Iqbal represents Khushwant Singh's extra-literary dimension, and to the extent he remained adventitious to the text he was no better than a dispensable commodity, an interpolation dictated by non-textual considerations. (Premapati, 113)

Finally, *Adha Gaon* has the dimensions of an epic whereas *Train to Pakistan* is more like a longer 'short story' or 'novella'.

However, the most remarkable aspects of both these novels is their heart-wrecking narration of Partition. They are the stories of violence, hatred and mass passions that flourished during those turbulent days. They narrate the authors' disenchantment with the...

long cherished human values in the wake of inhuman bestial horrors and insane savage killings on both sides during the Partition of the subcontinent between India and Pakistan in August 1947. (Harish 126)

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