

Feministic approach in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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Abstract

The present paper intends to represent feministic approach in Khushwant Singh's novel, *Train To Pakistan* in the context of postcolonial gender study. In this novel Singh appears to be indifferent in sketching female characters. He has sketched a few female characters that have no voice of their own. His female characters are weak, docile, marginalised and above all the victims of family and colonial oppression and they represent the fate of all Indian women of the time. The main motive of the novelist is to show the conflicting issues like the relationship between the West, the 'Center' and the East, 'Other' i.e. the conflict between the assumed Master and the Slave along with the same conflict between the male, the symbol of power of the family and female, the weak is reflected from the narratives of the novel with multiple textual references. With postcolonial discourse analysis the study has focused many other issues relating to socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic and socio historical background of colonized India. Along with Patriarchal hegemony the author has pointedly narrated the role of other multiple issues like race, gender, ethnicity, partition, separation and communal violence and his meticulous observation has made them viable in the context of the discourse.

Keywords- *Feministic, Postcolonial Gender Study, Centre, Other, Partition, Patriarchy*

Khushwant Singh's most popular and worldwide recognised historical novel *Train To Pakistan* receives its significance not for its treatment of history as a subject in a fictional setting. It is significant for its multiplicity of subjects and issues which are to be reviewed and revisited for the sake of understanding the then colonised Indian subcontinent. This work is also remarkable for its background representing colonial, postcolonial, Neo-colonial, postmodern and the most recent socio-cultural tendencies through the portrayal of lively history of partition. To delineate the history of partition and its consequences the author has taken refugee to a remote border village of Punjab province. The name of the village is Mano Majra where people were living in peace with no

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knowledge of India-Sindhia or Hindustan and Pakistan. Partition did not affect the lives of the peaceful villagers at first but the village peace is thwarted by the arrival of a ghost train with loads of dead bodies and migrants. Within the backdrop of historicity, time and space Postcolonial avenues of race, gender, class and ethnicity in the contextual analysis of *Train To Pakistan* find more extensive, critical and variable critical views or reviews for the multiplicity of expressions and variety of structures both in textual and contextual background of the novel as gender studies. Feminist concern of any text does not discuss and debate only the differences between man and woman and the established notions about women folk as weak, docile, innocent, seductive or irrational and sentimental rather it has distinctly differentiated a conflict and compromise between Eurocentric 'Centre', the symbol of power and excellence and the 'Other', the mimic one; non European women or black women. Postcolonial feminism includes race, ethnicity, gender, and class and colour discrimination throughout the world and in case of India cross cultural and cross religious issues are added problems included as postcolonial cultural studies with the view of class and cast discrimination. Its analyses range across representation of women in once colonised countries and in western location. Some critics have concentrated on the construction of gender differences in both the colonial and anti-colonial discourses; while others have concerned themselves with the representation of women in postcolonial discourses. This critical analysis raises a number of conceptual, methodological and political problems involved in the study of representations of gender and sexuality in the contemporary Indian English fiction.

In defining the theory of postcolonial feminism and its periphery in their book, *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the politics of Literary Criticism* (ed. Belsey and Moore, Macmillan, 1989), Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore have opined that a feminist reader is "enlisted in the process of changing the gender relations which prevail in our society, and she regards the practice of reading as one of the sites in the struggle for change" (p.1). According to them, a feminist reader always questions the presentation of woman in a text and tries to define gender relation and sexual difference in the context of the texts. In postcolonial feminist theory the critics Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford are known for their radical views on feminism. These two feminists have introduced the phrase 'a Double Colonisation' to refer to the ways in which women have simultaneously been marginalised by colonial oppression and patriarchy. In their edited collection, *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-colonial Women's Writing* (Dangaroo, 1986) Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford argue that colonialism too celebrates male achievement in a series of male

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oriented myths such as ‘mateship the mounties, explores, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries’ (p9) while women are subject to representation in colonial discourses in ways which collude with patriarchal values. In fact, the phrase ‘a Double Colonisation’ refers to the fact that women are twice colonised- by colonialists’ realities and representations and by established patriarchal ideologies. In Khushwant Singh’s *Train To Pakistan* the author has represented women not only as a second gender rather she has been made insignificant throughout the narratives except she is a sensual and sexual object. She is born to serve her body to the male sovereignty. She has no home, country and neighbours. She is a citizen of nowhere. On the other hand Orientals are treated as second or mimic by the Occident and the conflict of the two points out the differences of attitudes and the very superiority of the West spreads among dominant classes of Indian society and the same oppression or exploitation is followed the Neo hegemonic classes of the sub-continent.

Khushwant Singh’s women characters appeal to the heart in the sense that they are the victim of the situations. Partitions on religious lines, poverty, colonial exploitations and established social structure have deprived them from their legal right of living as human being. Singh appears to be sympathetic to the weaker sex and he is able to insinuate Postcolonial gender distinction in such a way that his characters especially women or the second gender posit themselves or being defined as ‘Other’ of the ‘Others’ i.e. they are other first to the first world women and next to the male dominated class of their own and even to those of the socially and economically dominant same sex of their society. In *Train to Pakistan* every character appears to be ‘Other’ socially, politically and emotionally and this ‘Other’ is none but the weaker or alien group of people to the rest for socially constructed norms and they are marginalised with the pretext of class, race, religion, sex and gender. This ‘Other’ nominated or identified for the benefit of those who are privileged by the established system. In *Train to Pakistan* Iqbal Singh, an English educated communist, Hukum Chand, an Indian serving as district magistrate under the British colonialist, Lala Ram Lal, a local money lender, Imam Baksh, Meet Singh, Nooran, the daughter of a Muslim weaver, Hasina, a 16 years old Muslim girl from brothel and Juggat Singh, a Sikh Dacoit, Mali and his gangs are ‘other’ to the British first and then they are ‘Other’ to each other in socially constructed multicultural or multiethnic set up of Indian society. This doubly used ‘other’ sets up its footprint in postcolonial critical theory and practice and proves that hegemony pertains everywhere.

The two-nation theory on religious lines has been intensified by the portrayal of the stories of cross-cultural background and Singh is able to represent many other social issues that are connected to

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and referred with it as multiculturalism, political idealism, communal violence, pain, agony, trauma of partition, bribery, hypocrisy, drunkenness, unfair police, bureaucratic functioning and customs, love and sacrifice in his novels. While ruination of common human qualities like innocence, social relation, morality and along with economics, lands, properties, cattle, administration system, securities, the ghastliness of human brutality, people and insanity exposed through simple story of a Sikh Dacoit and a Muslim weaver girl Nooran, the novel finds wider dimension when indigenous oppressions are more than the colonialists and starting oppression and exploitation on man of the same land in the name race, religion, caste, gender and class and it is a fact that ruination and brutality of these indigenous colonialists proved sometimes more dangerous than the western colonialist.

Train To Pakistan does not have a large number of women characters but the novelist has skilfully narrated gender conflicts and complications reflecting the status of peasant women victimised and violated by the social system and partition. To the Indians country is considered as mother or 'Debi' or goddess, and the sons and daughters cry when their country mother is torn into pieces and her chastity is ravished in the name of religion, class, caste, gender, race and ethnicity. Singh in this novel delineates the victimisation of partition and patriarchal dominated environment throughout the text. Women characters in this novel are not only limited but also they are puppets in the hands of neo-colonialists. Women in this novel are engaged in routine menial domestic work, victimized, less important, silent, submissive and co-existed. Singh is often criticized that he has overlooked women in his novel *Train To Pakistan* though he has meticulously articulated several social issues and problems documented from the colonized history of Punjab. Along with violence, partition, massacre of innocent lives, robbery and social disorder, the patriarchal domination over the weaker sex can be traceable from the three episodes- Dacoity, Jugga-Nooran episode and Hasina-Hukum Chand episode.

The social status of woman does not come to a state of low and mean suddenly. It started with the emergence of male sovereignty in the social cultural background and when she came to be treated as a sort of property. Like many other properties a woman could be purchased, loaned or given away. Since then the institution of fatherhood consciously or unconsciously bestows power on the father figure of the family and this concept of patriarchy upholds the gender differences. Though matriarchy ruled the early Vedic society where women had the right to participate in all social activities; even *Swayamvara* would have been arranged for choosing their husbands but marginalisation of women has been a common manifesto of patriarchal society by the passage time. Woman has been

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marginalised in the name social norms and she has been kept apart from the normal order of the society. Singh represents patriarchy in the form of family head in the first chapter of his novel *Train To Pakistan*. Lala Ram Lal, the money lender, the only Hindu family in the village of Mano Majra, is the family head who upholds the entire family power and prestige. The family members address him as *Lalaji* i.e. the added 'ji' is a parameter of his position and power in the family. He is honoured as male protagonist who possesses entire family power. When the gang of robbers began to shout in the name of Lala, a woman's voice answered- 'I tell you Lalaji is not in. He has taken the keys with him. We have nothing in the house' (8) Or 'I swear by the Guru he is out. You have taken all we have. Lalaji has nothing more to give' (9)

Khushwant Singh's sense of humanity finds a definite expression in *Jugga-Nooran* love episode. In love and sex socio-cultural and especially religious differences do not have any place. Juggut Singh, a sikh who loves a Muslim weaver's daughter. They love passionately and sincerely each other and in the established social context their sexual relation is an illicit relation. The novelist's primary intention in this episode is to relate the close bond and differences between the two different religious communities. It is a society of man and woman where love and sex do not have any boundary of caste, creed, religion and colour. The author has very skillfully narrated love story of a Muslim girl and a Sikh man to show that love does not know any barrier of religion. Singh's intention in this novel is to regenerate the importance of cross-cultural and cross-religious love relation and marriage when the country was being divided into two in religious lines. In such uncertain situations it is the patriarchal social system that determines the future of human relations. The heart of the lovers is divided, passion is killed and emotion is dried when they are forced to be separated by the demarcation of the mother land. Nooran wants to stay with Jugga, her love and does not want to leave Mano Majra. Unwillingly she has to accompany her father as she has failed to say about her love for Jugga. Women are puppets and they are enforced to accept these willingly or unwillingly. India is a strange land where superstitions and so-called faiths including illiteracy play a crucial role in determining the parameters of social systems. The complexities of social life are narrated from the conversation between Iqbal Singh and Jugga:

It is not possible to keep Indians off the subject of sex for long. It obsessed their minds. It came out in their art, literature and religion. One saw it on the hoardings in their cities advertising aphrodisiacs and curatives for ill effects of masturbation. One saw it in the law courts and marketplaces, where hawkers did a thriving trade selling

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oil made of the skin of sand lizards to put life into tired groins and increase the size of the phallus. One read it in the advertisements of quacks who claimed to possess remedies for barrenness and medicines to induce wombs to yield male children. No people used incestuous abuse quite as casually as did the Indians. Terms like sala , wife's brother (I would like to sleep with your sister), and sasura, father-in- law (I would like to sleep with your daughter) were as often terms of affection for one's friends and relatives as expression of anger to insult one's enemies. Conversation on any topic – politics, philosophy, sports-soon came down to sex, which everyone enjoyed with a lot of giggling and hand-slapping. (*Train To Pakistan*113)

Singh has not violated the social norms of Indian society in the projection of women in his novels. Women in his novels appear as passive representatives who follow the patriarchal norms and being exploited, marginalized and kept second in gender level; a never ending battle silently runs like the battle of the 'centre' and the 'other'. In postcolonial world there is a continuous battle between the first world and the third world nations with a pledge that the first world nations determine and breed the cultural excellence and the rest follow them. Like patriarchal society the first world nations symbolize the father figure, the symbol of power and with this they dominate the rest. Women in *Train To Pakistan* are passive, obedient and dependent for even a common social activity. They are not allowed to decide on any family and social activity. In Mano Majra social power, prestige and positions like Mullah, Sikh Priest, Train driver, farming, magistrate, sub inspector , etc are bestowed on male members whereas women are engaged in common domestic activities like washing, cleaning utensils, cooking, rubbing and etc. Even in religion patriarchy has a definite position. This power is cantered in men in this novel. It is seen Imam Baksh is a Mullah of preaching Islam while Sikh religion is preached by Meet Singh, a Sikh priest. Position of women can be best reflected from the first chapter of the novel, "Women are busy with their daily chores" (p.5) Or "Women rub clarified butter into each other's hair, pick lice from their children's heads, and discuss births, marriages and deaths." (p.5)

Patriarchal dominance determines the gender relation and thereby the feministic concerns don not find enough space in this novel. Women are not seen to determine what they wish; rather they follow what the male dominated society has propagated for them. This defines the pseudo colonial philosophy projected throughout and the relation between the master and the marginalized expressed through man-woman relationship of the novel. Singh narrates the attitudes of men over women

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through Juggat Singh and Magistrate Hukum Chand. Both the characters have different social position. Jugga, a Dacoit, who loves Nooran, a Muslim waiver's daughter, passionately but his consideration of women as an object of fun and sex determines his attitude, 'Wah, Babuji – great. You must have had lots of fun. The memsahibs are like houris from paradise – white and soft, like silk. All we have here are black buffaloes.' (113)

To Jugga white women are beauties of paradise, the queens of beauty for the skin colour they possess. To him these white women are more attractive and beautiful than indigenous blacks. In patriarchal society woman body is treated as sex object and this established notion has brought out an objective difference between woman as a woman and a woman as an object of sex. The established social order defines that woman's body features are to appease the male sexual pleasures. So, dominance on the second sex begins since their birth when they are objectified as sex objects instead of normal human being and the existing social order enchains them within the periphery of social system. The feminists and social thinkers always speak in favour of equality between man and woman. Many in the post modern times are seen to voice against male dominance but still women are exploited and unhappy for the unequal social system. In Mano Majra they are objectified to be purchased for entertainment. According to the dacoits the village women do not hesitate to exchange their body for jewellerys i.e. bangles, bracelets, anklets and earrings etc. One of the spearmen justifies this as- '*Yes. A dozen of red and blue glass. They would please any village wench*' (6)

The very word 'wench' in place of woman, sister, or lady for village women determines the social status of women. Men look towards women as the subsistence to fun. They expect women body features to please and satisfactions. The spearman describes the body of the weaver's daughter as: '.... large gazelle eyes and the little mango breasts.'(7) 'And cooling to their passions, too.'(7)

Singh has narrated the naked male dominance and utter helplessness of woman through the character of Hukum Chand, a magistrate working for the British and an irresponsible lecherous character. He entertains the body of a Muslim girl of 16 that is his daughter's age. It cannot be denied that women are the enemy of women in Indian society. Haseena stands for those innocent helpless poor girls who are ravished sexually and in such cases women arrange these girls to appease the hunger of the empowered masters of the British. In Haseena's case when she is afraid of the magistrate the old lady scolded Haseena and her apology to the magistrate is the finest example of female servitude of Indian male dominated society, "Government, the girl is young and very shy".

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Differences of class, cast, religion and colour within the same sex have played a significant role in the narrative structure of the novel. Women in this novel are discriminated on different level. It is criticized that Hindu and Sikh women are presented as pure and higher in status where as Muslim women are victimized and ravished by those who are either Hindus or Sikhs. Nooran and Haseena are Muslim women who are victimized in different way. Jugga forces Nooran to sex though they love each other but her love dies when she goes to Jugga's mother for seeking help, Jugga's mother insults her first as a Muslim weaver's daughter and later denies to accept. When Nooran informs to Jugga's mother: 'I can't leave. Jugga has promised to marry me.' (138)

Jugga's mother insults her and reminds her that she is a Muslim first and being a Muslim girl she cannot marry a Shikh. Her love is thrown aside and it is justified not by passion but by custom established by the differences of religion and class. At the advent of separation Nooran with hope goes to Jugga's mother informing that she loves her son Jugga and wants to marry him; Jugga's mother immediately replies: 'Get out, you bitch! ...'You a Muslim weaver's daughter, marry a Sikh peasant...'

The author very skilfully has narrated the attitude of the same sex. Jugga's mother denies accepting Nooran as she is from Muslim weaver's family. In Punjab weavers are not equally treated with the peasant. Even when Nooran Jugga's mother that she is pregnant by Jugga, mother changes her approach as a woman. She lets Nooran's head drop back on her feet, helps her to up and the both sits on charpai (139). However, Jugga's mother clearly says that she is helpless and asks her that she is not able to keep Nooran in her house- 'I cannot keep you here'.

In his personal interview Singh many time admits that in love and sex race, colour, cast and even religion does not affect the density of love making if 'There just has to be desire on both sides, and reciprocation of feelings'. (Absolute Khushwant; All About Sex, p18) In this novel he has introduced the equalities of love between white and black women. When Jugga applauds the white houris of the west Iqbal Singh shatters his ideas about love and sex of the white women and says: 'There is no difference between women. As a matter fact, white women are not very exciting.'(113)

Gender discrimination has been a part of Indian social system since the Vedic period when women lost their political rights of attending assemblies. As the time passed women are not only treated as a sort of property but also they have been placed to as objects of sex and their virginity is described as the highest form of honour and respect in the society. From the assigned customs on women as inferior and weak in compare to men and women are glorified with some abstract ideals

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such as virginity, chastity and so on to make them confined within the four walls of the house with bangles, henna and ornaments. With the beginning of social unrest women's virginity is targeted. Ornaments, henna and bangles symbolize their weakness. In this novel Sub inspector sarcastically said to Juggut Singh, 'Mali is not a woman with henna on his palms or bangles on his wrists.' (171)

Ornaments as customarily assigned to women in the name of respect, love and chastity, promote consciously or unconsciously weakness in them. Women carry out the existing social beliefs expecting better future and love from their husbands. Sundari, the daughter of Hukun Chand's orderly, is advised not to take off the bangles from her hand. The bangles have connection with love and luck. 'Do not take any of the lacquer bangles off. It brings bad luck' her girl friends had said to her. 'Let him break them when he makes love to you and mauls you' (186)

However, Sundari's bangles are mauled not by Mansa Ram, her husband but by the circumstances or frenzy of partition shattered them and her dream died when she was returning by Bus with her newly married husband. She had to face a tragic end when

The bus pulled up and hundreds of people surrounded them. She who had not really had a good look at Mansa Ram was shown her husband completely naked. They held her husband by the arms and legs and one man cut off his penis and gave it to her. The mob made love to her. She did not have to take off any of her bangles. They were all smashed as she lay in the road, being taken by one man and another and another. That should have brought her a lot of good luck! (187)

Virginity, marriage and husband are the three indicators that determine the social position of women in India. Virginity is a symbol of purity or Sati that has to be maintained. The parameter of virginity is a symbol of power and pride to an Indian woman. Indian women suppress their emotion, passion and love before their marriage where as men do not have such parameters. They can be lecherous and can make love and sex with any woman. Social orders and norms are fundamental for women who do not have right to violate them. In the post modern or post independent period the entire system remains the same. It is sometimes said that changes are discernible among the upper class Indian women but this does not empower them rather they have to face different problems in everyday life for being women. Among the middle class and below middle class women nothing has changed even after 70 years of independence. They are more woman than human in the society as they are objectified by them or by the society itself. Average women take more care to keep their objective beauty and chastity for men and the society. To them women empowerment or women

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liberty is an objective narrative of fiction or theory. These women tolerate social injustice as well as indoor family oppression together but have no voice. In such unequal gender differences and discrimination many women are being raped, seduced, trafficked and tortured. Economically empowered and bureaucratic agents of the society enjoy, use and more to say violate these second gender and very often women sentiments do away with sexual and sensual pleasure of the male members of the society. In Hukum Chand- Haseena episode the sub inspector arranges Haseena, a Muslim virgin girl of 16 to please his boss. Haseena dances with love song innocently. She is frightened to his lustful behaviour. When she tries to keep herself aside the old woman scolds her to go near Hukum Chand, the magistrate,

‘Go to the Government,’ pleaded the old woman. The girl turned round obediently and went to the magistrate. Hukum Chand put his arm around her waist.

‘You sing well.’

The girl gaped wide-eyed at her companions.

‘The Government is talking to you. Why don’t you answer him?’ scolded the old woman. ‘Government, the girl is young and very shy. She will learn,’ she exclaimed.

(31)

Women are used, sold, raped, abused and their passion is mutilated by amoral ideologies shaped and established by the so-called patriarchal agents of the society. Hedonistic principles of the West have begotten the law of colonialism and imperialism. In international process of plundering just the front cover has changed but the system remains same as it was before and in the family lives oppression, exploitation, sexual abuse and death of passion become a common weapon. The common ideologies like liberty, equality and fraternity of democracy are still a utopian thought in the postmodern world of 21st century. Khushwant Singh’s female characters stand for the fate of all women who are born slaves to the hegemonic agents of the society.

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