

Representation of Sikh Sensibility in *Train to Pakistan*: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

Sikhs occupy a substantial space in the country's national consciousness despite comprising a relatively small demographic in the Indian population. Understanding the dynamics of representation requires acknowledging the global power imbalances that influence how majorities and minorities, genders and races are depicted. The critical inquiry generally moves beyond a passive acceptance of existing representations and engages with the context in which the texts emerge. This context, in the case of literary portrayals of Sikhs, is marked by a distinct lack of sustained critical scholarship in English. The analytical deficiency underscores the urgency of addressing the widespread absence of Sikh voices in literary representation. Too often, Sikh characters are relegated to the margins, portrayed as lacking subjectivity, serving as silent or negligible presences. Alternatively, they are depicted through reductive stereotypes – either as comic figures whose portrayal reflects negatively on the entire community or as hypermasculine 'warrior-saints' characterized by violence, unthinking rigidity, and stereotypical notions of masculinity. With this context in mind, the present paper seeks to analyze the representation of Sikh characters in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, a Partition novel written by a Sikh author. The aim is to explore the nuances and complexities inherent in portraying this community in the literary landscape. It delves into Khushwant Singh's novel and its construction of Sikh identity, sensibility, and the concept of the Sikh martyr. The analysis explores how these constructs emerge alongside the portrayal of gender and

religious identities in the pre-partition context of Punjab.

Keywords: Partition, Sikhism, Sikh sensibility, Representation, Warrior/Martyr race

Introduction and Aim:

Sikhs occupy a substantial space in the country's national consciousness despite comprising a relatively small demographic in the Indian population. This prominence, however, presents a curious paradox: while Sikhs hold significant ideological weight, their representation in the English-language Indian literary canon is demonstrably scant. Recent years have witnessed increased media portrayals of the community, but these often fall short, perpetuating stereotypes and failing to offer nuanced and accurate depictions. In order to rectify this, a thorough understanding of Sikh history and theology is crucial, as these formative elements inform the principles that shape Sikh identity and daily life. Understanding the dynamics of representation requires acknowledging the global power imbalances that influence how majorities and minorities, genders and races are depicted. We must move beyond simplistic notions of representation as mere imitation, instead undertaking a critical deconstruction of the texts. Recognizing that texts are not monolithic entities but expressions of socio-

ideological forces prevents falling prey to the ethnocentric pitfalls inherent in an exclusivist textual analysis. The critical inquiry generally moves beyond a passive acceptance of existing representations and engages with the context in which the texts emerge. This context, in the case of literary portrayals of Sikhs, is marked by a distinct lack of sustained critical scholarship in English. The analytical deficiency underscores the urgency of addressing the widespread absence of Sikh voices in literary representation. Too often, Sikh characters are relegated to the margins, portrayed as lacking subjectivity, serving as silent or negligible presences. Alternatively, they are depicted through reductive stereotypes – either as comic figures whose portrayal reflects negatively on the entire community or as hypermasculine 'warrior-saints' characterized by violence, unthinking rigidity, and stereotypical notions of masculinity. With this context in mind, the present paper analyzes the representation of Sikh characters in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, a Partition novel written by a Sikh author. The aim is to explore the nuances and complexities inherent in portraying this community in the literary landscape.

To elucidate the context surrounding Sikh representation, a brief historical and doctrinal introduction is necessary. Sikhism, established by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in the late 15th to early 16th centuries, originated in Punjab, India. 'Sikh' derives from the Punjabi word 'sic' and the Sanskrit word 'shishya,' meaning 'disciple.' 'Guru' translates to one who dispels ignorance and illuminates the path to enlightenment. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, guided by a series of mystical experiences, embarked on a mission to unify Hindus and Muslims by highlighting shared

truths in both religions. He did not seek to create a new doctrine but to reemphasize and refine existing, eternal wisdom. Sikhism adopted monotheism and a rejection of idol worship from Islam while drawing upon the Vaishnava saints' perspectives from Hinduism. These are a few examples of the interfaith influences shaping practices in Sikhism. The prominent role of gurus in Hinduism and the human tendency to seek leadership contributed to the perception of Guru Nanak Dev Ji as the founder and leader of a distinct faith. Before he passed away, he designated a disciple as the next Guru, establishing a lineage encompassing ten Gurus over two centuries. Guru Gobind Singh, alongside Guru Nanak Dev Ji, is one of the most pivotal figures. He instituted initiation rites, established a code of conduct, championed equality, and bestowed the title of 'Singh' (lion) upon baptized Sikh men. Before declaring *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* as the last and present living Guru, he had prepared his followers to resist tyrannical authority and endure martyrdom fearlessly.

Consequently, many historical accounts emphasize Sikh propensity for martyrdom and their profound reverence for Sikh martyrs. This paper delves into Khushwant Singh's novel and its construction of Sikh identity, sensibility, and the concept of the Sikh martyr. The analysis explores how these constructs emerge alongside the portrayal of gender and religious identities in the pre-partition context of Punjab. This period served as a crucible for Sikh consolidation and struggle, where individuals defended their own families' honor and that of the nation.

Background:

Khushwant Singh's oeuvre is a vibrant celebration and meticulous

exploration of Punjab's rich cultural tapestry. His writings meticulously weave together the region's dynamic traditions, customs, and evocative language, thereby contributing to the preservation and dissemination of Punjabi culture in the broader Indian literary landscape. As a Sikh writer, Singh possessed a profound connection to both his Punjabi heritage and the Sikh community. This manifested in frequently incorporating Sikh themes and characters throughout his works, culminating in the acclaimed *A History of the Sikhs*, a testament to his meticulous historical research. Beyond his contributions to cultural and religious understanding, Singh's exploration of human relationships in his works is distinguished by its unsparing realism and profound depth. His intricate portrayal of the complexities of love, friendship, and familial bonds meticulously illuminates the inner workings of human nature. These nuanced and resonant depictions offer readers insight into the intricacies of personal connections and enrich their understanding of the full spectrum of human emotions. Notably, his masterpiece, *Train to Pakistan*, plays a pivotal role in shedding light on the human tragedy and communal violence that marred the partition of India.

Nestled on the tumultuous border between Pakistan and India lies Mano Majra, a serene village marked by the presence of its iconic railway station. Within this microcosm, we first encounter Bhai Meet Singh, the portly and unkempt caretaker of the local Gurudwara. His counterpart, the magistrate Hukum Chand, arrives in his ostentatious American car, only to be driven to resignation by the escalating communal discord. Juggut Singh, a towering, uneducated Sikh thief, casts a

menacing shadow over the village, routinely visiting the police station as his penance for petty crimes. A sense of intrigue surrounds Iqbal, a foreign-educated, atheist social worker who earns the respect of the townsfolk as "Babu Sahib." We also meet the half-blind mullah, Imam Baksh, who grapples with his demons while his daughter Nooran carries the burden of an illicit love for Juggut and a child conceived out of wedlock. Juggut and Iqbal are unjustly imprisoned for a crime they have not committed. Upon their release, they stumble upon a sinister plot orchestrated by a malicious gang – the impending attack on a train carrying Muslims fleeing to Pakistan. While the magistrate and police appear paralyzed by the rising tide of violence, Juggut and Iqbal become embroiled in a conflict of conscience. Juggut, a man defined by past transgressions, finds redemption through selfless sacrifice. Iqbal, the rationalist, wrestles with the existential complexities of intervention. Both know that defying the tide of hatred may cost their lives, yet the potential for salvation compels them to act. Amidst the bloodshed and religious fervor, a glimmer of humanity shines through in the forbidden love between Nooran, a Muslim woman, and Juggut, a Sikh thief. Their union transcends societal norms, proving that love can bloom even in the most infertile terrain.

Mano Majra's tragedy ultimately arises from individuals' failure to prevent the inevitable collectively. S. P. Swain observes, "Everywhere there is mass madness and Mano Majra reels under the opprobrious and ghastly scene of communal frenzy after the brutal robbery and murder of Lala Ram Lal, the sole Hindu family in Mano Majra" (85). Only Juggut rises above self-preservation to become the unlikely hero.

His ultimate sacrifice underscores the enduring power of human compassion in the face of overwhelming odds. *Train to Pakistan* stands as a testament to the devastating consequences of religious and political conflict. K. K. Sharma and B. K. Johri also note that:

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* pictures the brutal, realistic story of political hatred and mass passions during the tragic days that preceded and followed the partition of India... Trains were ruthlessly butchered. Men, women, and children were indiscriminate victims of mad communal frenzy: they were molested and killed by armed bands of men. The novel vividly and powerfully depicts the fateful journey of one such train (14).

It may then be said that the novel paints a stark picture of how love and faith, while capable of inspiring both great deeds and unspeakable atrocities, ultimately leave in their wake a world irrevocably fractured. By capturing the emotional and psychological toll of this pivotal event in Indian history, Khushwant Singh brings awareness and understanding to subsequent generations, contributing to the nation's collective memory and historical consciousness.

Analysis:

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* can be readily understood as an endeavor to fictively reconstruct the socio-historical reality of the partition period as experienced by the Punjabi populace, particularly the Sikh community. The narrative unfolds in Mano Majra, a tiny village on Punjab's Indo-Pakistani border. Un beholden to the communal inferno engulfing the subcontinent, Mano Majra stands as a haven

of idyllic interfaith co-existence, where Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus have harmoniously cohabited for centuries. This delayed eruption of violence stems from a curious indifference towards the epochal event of Independence. The nation's impending partition seems distant echoes in the lives of these villagers, a testament to their self-contained world. This isolated tranquillity almost embodies Prime Minister Nehru's ideal of 'unity in diversity,' an essential pillar of Indian identity as he envisioned it (Manavar 29). For the inhabitants of Mano Majra, paramount are the bonds of mutual trust, fidelity to their land, and unwavering solidarity. While concepts like truth, honor, and financial integrity have their place, they pale compared to the sacred tenets of loyalty to kin, community, and one's oath of salt.

Approximately half a mile from the Sutlej River, which holds historical significance akin to the Ganges for Sikhs, Mano Majra emerges as a stronghold of Sikh culture. The novelist meticulously delineates not only the topography of the village but also its demographics, portraying it as emblematic of Sikh communities in Punjab. Beyond its immediate contours, Mano Majra transcends its physicality to symbolize a broader representation of Sikh villages across Punjab. Comprising roughly seventy families, the village is predominantly inhabited by Sikhs, characterized as a 'martial race' renowned for their inherent warmth and resilience. This specific characterization aligns with common understandings of the Sikh community. It underscores Singh's intention to explore the impact of partition on both individual lives and collective identity within this context. Khushwant Singh

depicts the human geography of the village in the following words:

The only Hindu family in the village is that of the money-lender, Lala Ram Lal. The others are Sikhs or Muslims, about equal in number. The Sikhs own all the land around the village; the Muslims are tenants who share tilling with the owners. A few families of sweepers have uncertain religions (Singh 2).

Imbued with unwavering faith in the omnipotence of "Akāl Purakh" (the Almighty), the Sikhs of Mano Majra adhere meticulously to their prescribed religious rituals. The Gurdwara serves as the spiritual fulcrum of the village, drawing the community together on all noteworthy occasions. Whether seeking solace in times of hardship or guidance during auspicious events, the doors of the Gurdwara stand perpetually open, offering refuge and comfort to all in need. This profound veneration necessitates that every Sikh upholds the sanctity and dignity of the Gurdwara. Khushwant Singh, with meticulous attention to detail, paints a vivid picture of this central hub, emphasizing its role as the nerve center pulsating with the lifeblood of secular and spiritual activity in the village community. He says:

He saw the flag mast draped in yellow cloth with a triangular flag above the conglomeration of mud huts. On the flag was the Sikh symbol in black, a quoit with a dagger running through two swords crossed beneath... At the end opposite the entrance was a large hall in which the scripture, the Granth, lay wrapped in gaudy silks under a velvet awning. ... Beside the well stood a four-foot brick column

supporting the long flag mast with the yellow cloth covering it like a stocking (Singh 30-31).

Meet Singh, the village priest endearingly addressed as "Bhaiji," embodies the quintessential Sikh hospitality as he welcomes Iqbal to the Gurdwara with the customary greeting of 'Sat Sri Akal.' His warm smile accompanies the gentle exhortation: "This is a gurdwara, the Guru's house-anyone may stay here. But, you must have your head covered, and you must not bring in any cigarettes or tobacco, nor smoke" (Singh 31). These nuanced details woven into the Gurdwara's description transcend physical settings, evoking the vibrant tapestry of Sikhism – its culture, rituals, and unwavering reverence for the Divine. Similarly, Bhai Meet Singh's insistence on preserving the sanctity of the Guru's house underscores Singh's broader intention to illuminate the core tenets of the Sikh faith, likely catering to readers unfamiliar with its essence. The deliberate and respectful treatment of Sikh religious beliefs throughout the novel is a testament to Singh's deep commitment to his heritage, finding nuanced expression in his literary creations.

While Singh's Sikh characters resonate as representative figures of their respective social types, they transcend mere social realism. They embody multiple facets of the Sikh ethos and philosophy, imbuing the narrative with symbolic undertones. Notably, characters like Juggut Singh, Iqbal, and Meet Singh are imbued with rich symbolism, with their very names hinting at their inherent qualities, later vindicated by their actions. Among the six Sikh characters presented, Juggut Singh stands alone as a potent symbol of the Sikh tradition. He embodies valor, heroic action, rebellious

spirit, and willingness for self-sacrifice. This confluence of traits encapsulates the Sikh sensibility, warrior spirit, and the revered concept of Sikh martyrdom. However, his rustic background manifests in impetuosity, vengefulness, and a pervasive faith deeply characteristic of the Sikh peasantry. Despite his youthful fervor and lack of formal education, Juggut Singh possesses endearing qualities of simplicity, sincerity, and unwavering resolve. He embodies the ideal of the Guru's 'Singh,' showcasing dauntless courage and the willingness to sacrifice for a noble cause, be it love or social justice. His interfaith love for Nooran, the daughter of a Muslim weaver, underscores his alignment with the Guru's advocating for the transcendence of caste and creed barriers. His request to Bhai Meet Singh for prayer, seeking the Guru's blessings before he rushes to save the train, signifies his deep-seated faith in the doctrines of Sikhism. Even as a professional bandit, he finds solace and moral strength in the Sikh temple, a testament to its enduring significance as a spiritual sanctuary. Ultimately, Juggut Singh's altruistic endeavors, spontaneous courage, and self-sacrifice transcend personal motivations. It prevents the massacre of innocents, inadvertently upholding the dignity of the Panth (community) and elevating his love story to a symbol of interfaith solidarity and redemptive sacrifice.

In stark contrast to Juggut Singh, the character of Iqbal represents a divergent facet of Sikh identity. Hailing from Jhelum, Pakistan, Iqbal is drawn to Mano Majra by the cause of land reform. He seeks to raise peasant awareness and advocate for political and economic empowerment. It is Iqbal who brings the news of partition to the village. "I am a social worker, Bhaiji. There is much to

be done in our village. With this partition, so much bloodshed is going on; someone must do something to stop it. My party has sent me here since this place is vital for refugee movements. Trouble here would be disastrous" (Singh 38). Iqbal's self-proclaimed title of 'comrade' subtly hints at his affiliation with a clandestine Communist organization. Physically slight and bearing a somewhat effeminate demeanor, Iqbal's English education further sets him apart from the village populace. His burgeoning reputation as a political agitator makes him a convenient target for Sub-Inspector Sher Singh, who readily pins the blame for Lala Ram Lal's murder and robbery upon him. Adding to the injustice, Iqbal's circumcision, attributed to an infection in England, fuels his misidentification as a Muslim working for the Muslim League, and his identity is changed to Iqbal Mohammed. Despite these fabrications, Iqbal maintains a defiant stance, boldly proclaiming his Sikh identity in the face of adversity.

Iqbal's prolonged exposure to Western culture has estranged him from Sikh traditions to the extent that he brazenly consumes whisky in the confines of the Gurdwara, a flagrant violation that borders on sacrilege. For Iqbal, Sikh identity is a matter of expediency rather than genuine conviction, and the Gurdwara serves merely as a refuge for self-preservation. Fortunately, the unsuspecting priest accepts him at face value, unaware that in his pursuit of modernity, Iqbal has forsaken the outward symbols of Sikhism—his long hair, beard, and the five kakkas, essential emblems of the Sikh faith mandated for all adherents. Reflecting on his return to Mano Majra after his release from police custody, Iqbal contemplates the wisdom of donning these traditional Sikh symbols, particularly in

communal settings where his appearance might misconstrue his identity as Muslim, potentially exposing him to the wrath of vengeful Sikh mobs. He realizes "it was the company of Jugga and the Constable, who were all Sikhs, that saved him from being stopped and questioned. He wished he could get out of this place where he had to prove his Sikhism to save his life" (Singh 142).

Iqbal occupies a fascinatingly contradictory position. While demonstrably Sikh in birth and heritage, he exhibits a palpable disaffection with the outward expressions of his faith, finding them exasperating and burdensome yet expedient for personal safety. This internal conflict exposes the core of his character: a self-seeker driven by the singular pursuit of self-glorification. In this, he serves as a foil to Juggut Singh, whose life embodies the heroic action and sacrificial spirit celebrated in the Sikh tradition. Iqbal, conversely, stands as a metaphorical negation of these very ideals. His name, itself evocative of 'greatness' and 'fame,' underscores his preoccupation with self-glorification. He represents a segment of the Sikh elite, educated and intellectually adrift, for whom academic pursuits have become a comfortable refuge from the call to action inherent in their faith. This disconnect has bred a moral paralysis, rendering them unwilling to extend beyond their insulated worlds and engage in active resistance. Their existence, though not unique to the Sikh community, serves Singh's purpose as a fictional construct. Through Iqbal, the author expresses his 'personal agony' at the pervasive savagery witnessed across communities. Furthermore, Iqbal allows Singh to explore contemporary Indian society's preoccupation with sex, its feigned

spirituality, and its adherence to ritualistic religiosity.

Juggut Singh occupies a dualistic space. He seems to function simultaneously as the novelist's alter ego, embodying a desired ideal and as a foil to the urban Sikh leader driven by sinister machinations. This juxtaposition accentuates the profound disparity between immediate action and mere intellectualization. Juggut's spontaneous heroic self-sacrifice resonates deeply against Iqbal's aloof cynicism and self-absorption. His unwavering faith in Sikh tenets serves as a stark counterpoint to the sacrilegious acts of the rabble-rousing instigator, whose moral core has been consumed by ethnic hatred and justifiable vengeance, personified by the arrival of two "ghost trains" carrying murdered Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan. The scenes are horrible, as Shahane points out: "The train implies the movement of vast communities, torn from their links of nativity, from their places of birth and upbringing and areas of traditional growth in search of a new Jerusalem. It indicates the harrowing process of this change, the awful and ghastly experiences of human beings involved in a historical, objective, and almost dehumanized process" (21). Ironically, the Gurdwara transforms into a shelter for Sikh refugees fleeing Pakistan. At the same time, the Sikh provocateur exploits its sacred grounds as a staging ground for a ghastly genocide masquerading as a holy crusade. Here, the scheme to massacre a trainload of innocent Muslims is concocted, and a mock prayer for its success is conducted—an egregious violation of the Gurdwara's sanctity. It is later redeemed by Juggut Singh, condemned by all as a bandit and troublemaker yet rising to unparalleled heroism in a milieu of pervasive hatred and

inaction. He embodies the tradition of the Sikh Guru Martyrs, who emphasized action as a path to salvation. It is for this reason that Juggut Singh seems to have been "conceived by the novelist (even if partly unconsciously) in the tradition of Sikh Guru Martyrs who have preached action – heroic of course as a means to salvation" (Harrex 180). While vengeance against Malli may initially fuel his actions, Juggut's self-sacrificial act transcends personal motives. In this case, Harrex rightly avers that Jugga "lives up to the Sikh suffix Singh" and proves himself to be a Guru's Sikh (180). The novelist meticulously explores three distinct facets of Sikh identity through the trio of Juggut Singh, Iqbal, and the young Sikh leader inciting violence, an exercise rich in ironic character delineation. This nuanced exploration extends to the portrayal of Bhai Meet Singh, the Sikh priest, who represents yet another dimension of the Sikh character.

Given that a significant portion of the narrative unfolds inside the confines of the Gurdwara, the character of Bhai Meet Singh emerges as pivotal. He embodies the archetype of a granthi, typical of a village Gurdwara, in demeanor and conduct.

He was short, fat, and hairy... Moreover, he was untidy. He wore his turban only when reading the scripture. Otherwise, he went about with his long hair tied in a loose knot held by a little wooden comb, combing his long beard with his fingers. Almost half of the hair was scattered on the nape of his neck. He seldom wore a shirt and was always greasy with dirt; his only garment was a pair of shorts (Singh 69).

Granthi's depiction is undeniably vivid and representative of a particular

segment of Sikh society, but he fails to evoke respect or affection. A former peasant turned priest, he seems to have embraced religion primarily as a refuge from manual labor, viewing it as "an easy way of earning bread with the offerings at the Gurdwara" (Singh 69). Despite possessing rudimentary knowledge of a few Sikh prayers acquired through rote learning, he remains ill-prepared for the demands of his role. He lacks scholarly depth in Sikh scriptures and the intimate familiarity with the community's vibrant history and complex past characteristic of his class. Juggut Singh encounters difficulty persuading him to offer a prayer to counteract the nefarious schemes of communalists. His words to Juggut Singh are pretty revealing:

I do not remember you coming to the Gurdwara any other time. Now, when the scripture is resting, and people are asleep, you want me to read the Guru's word. It needs to be more proper... What have you to do with meaning? It is just the Guru's word (Singh 151-52).

While Bhai Meet Singh ultimately complies with Juggut Singh's request, his initial resistance and hesitant prayer gesture towards the novelist's satirical intent. The Granthi's portrayal serves as a metonymy for the broader critique of a segment of the Sikh clergy, particularly rural granthis, and the Indian priestly class in general. Singh depicts them as lacking in profound scriptural understanding, instead relying on rote recitations to cater to the masses. This emphasis on ritualism, according to Singh, impedes the intellectual and spiritual growth of their devout yet credulous followers, fostering ignorance and fatalism. Lacking persuasive skills, these priests falter when faced with catastrophes, as seen in Bhai

Meet Singh's confrontation with the urban Sikh youth leader. This leader, driven by racial and religious fanaticism, manipulates the congregation's religious fervor to incite violence. The young leader, fuelled by racial chauvinism and religious bigotry, exploits the congregation's piety and naivety, inciting them through his appeal, "The Sikh are the chosen of God. Victory be to our God" (Singh 134). In the ensuing duel of rhetoric, the Granthi's voice is silenced, his impotent fury a testament to his internal conflict and lack of agency. It reflects his helplessness and underscores the priestly class's vulnerability in India, where religion and politics often intertwine. While acknowledging Bhai Meet Singh's shortcomings as a priest, the novelist also recognizes his inherent virtues: open-heartedness, cordiality, religious tolerance, and humility, reflecting the ethos of Sikhism, which stands in stark contrast to the narrow-mindedness and violence advocated by the young leader. A friend to all, irrespective of their caste, creed, or religion, he lives up to his name. Though a Sikh by faith, he is a votary of humanism, which forbids discrimination between man and man on ethnic or religious grounds. This is the message of the great Gurus that he is trying to preach as a priest.

Thus, Bhai Meet Singh embodies the complex internal struggle in the Sikh community. He represents faith's limitations and potential, caught between the allure of traditional rituals and the demands of critical engagement with contemporary realities. His ultimate failure to prevent the tragedy highlights the challenges faced by religious leaders in navigating a world increasingly defined by political manipulation and ethnic tensions. While Juggut Singh symbolizes Sikh valor and sacrifice, Meet Singh

epitomizes Sikh piety, religious inclusivity, and humanism, echoing the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and advocating for universal brotherhood devoid of ethnic or religious bias.

Train to Pakistan delves into the multifaceted tapestry of Sikh identity and sensibility, where the thread of militancy also occupies a complex and nuanced space. While celebrated as a virtue, it is associated with a martial community's self-defense against religious oppression, ethnic annihilation, or external aggression. Singh presents a crucial caveat: when misappropriated to inflame hatred or fuel ethno-religious fundamentalism, militancy becomes a corrosive force. Singh masterfully explores this duality through two contrasting characters: Malli and the self-proclaimed Sikh leader. Malli embodies hot-blooded youth's 'instinctive vengefulness,' driven by a personal vendetta. His descent into banditry and violence showcases the destructive potential of untempered militancy, fuelled by deprivation and resentment. The young leader, on the other hand, represents the collective trauma inflicted upon Sikhs in Pakistan. His militant fervor stems from a desire for retributive justice against Muslim chauvinists. However, his manipulation of the Gurdwara for ghoulish drama and incitement of violence against innocent Muslims exposes the ethical pitfalls of this militant response. Together, Malli and the urban Sikh provocateur revel in the shedding of blood, their militancy evolving into outright communalism. These nuanced portrayals starkly contrast the peaceful message advocated by the Sikh Gurus.

Lambardar Banta Singh serves as a counterpoint, embodying the 'rustic good-heartedness' and spirit of communal

harmony that remains a potent undercurrent in the Sikh community. His unwavering commitment to protecting Muslim refugees despite the escalating tensions resonates as a powerful testament to the Sikh principle of universal brotherhood. He tells his Muslim brothers, "If you decide to stay on, you are most welcome to do so – We will defend you with our lives" (Singh 111). Singh avoids facile moral pronouncements, instead crafting a narrative that grapples with the ambiguity inherent in the concept of Sikh militancy. He underscores its potential for self-defense and destruction, highlighting the context-dependent nature of its ethical evaluation. Through this nuanced exploration, *Train to Pakistan* challenges readers to move beyond simplistic binaries and engage with the multifaceted realities of Sikh identity.

Conclusion:

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* constitutes a multifaceted investigation into the Sikh way of life and sensibility. Juggut Singh serves as a crucial lens through which the author meticulously unveils the intricacies of Sikh ethos, illuminating its core tenets. Singh's iterative references to verses from the Adi Granth, the salutation 'Sat Sri Akal,' and the incantatory cry 'Wahe Guru' are not mere stylistic flourishes; they are deliberate instruments employed to acquaint the reader with the nuances of Sikh religious practice. The depiction of Juggut Singh waving the fly whisk over Meet Singh's head, who recites a verse from a prayer book with reverent gestures, further underscores Singh's self-conscious effort to demystify Sikh rituals. Furthermore, Jugga appears to be crafted as a redemptive figure, intended to vindicate the authentic Sikh way of life and the enduring Sikh faith to both

the discerning elite in the Sikh community and the impassioned youth who prominently display their religious fervor. What salvages the novel from degenerating into a didactic tract on Sikhness is Singh's unwavering commitment to objectivity, his keen use of irony, and profound humanist concerns. Jonathan Harrex aptly observes, "The Sikh element is the most central aspect of Singh's novels," which are fictional histories of the Sikh way of life, religion, and glorious Sikh traditions (180). The exploration of Sikhness is so seamlessly woven into the fabric of the partition narrative that any risk of preaching falls by the wayside.

Ultimately, Singh's deliberate aesthetic distancing and skillful deployment of situational, ideational, and character-based irony elevate the novel to a higher register. Beyond the Sikh context, Singh's works transcend the limitations of religion-ethnic dissertations. He is no mere regional novelist; his keen understanding of the Sikh psyche and consciousness enriches the landscape of the Indian novel in English. Singh's concerns are demonstrably universal, as are his sympathies. His Sikh protagonists, for all their distinct identities and religious convictions, share in the broader Indian ethos through their shared values and aspirations. In this context, Singh's early invocation of the ancient Indian tradition of weapon baptism acquires profound significance. The pervasive use of irony in his narrative serves as a critical tool, castigating the inflated ideals of racial chauvinism and religious intolerance. He spares no one: illiterate Sikh Granthis like Meet Singh, self-important Muslim Mullahs like the Peer Sahib, and even the pretensions of Hindu spirituality. Ultimately, Singh's novels stand as a poignant plea for a world governed by reason, where fundamental

human values of compassion, tolerance, and amity reign supreme in the moral hierarchy. He envisions an Indian polity where individuals, transcending the limitations of caste, community, and creed, embrace a spirit of mutual respect and goodwill. This is a society where people, devoid of fear or hatred, embark on their unique journey toward the ultimate truth of existence.

To suggest that Singh's novels function as mere pamphlets on Sikhism would be remiss. He is not a missionary, nor does he peddle dogma. Instead, he emerges as an artist, albeit occasionally swayed by ethnic or ideological fervor. His portrayal of the Sikh way of life hinges on an instinctive grasp of the Sikh psyche, manifesting in his

depiction of their glorious traditions of fearlessness, valor, and heroic sacrifice. However, even as he renders the Sikh ethos with reverence, his ironic vision lends it a nuanced flavor. While readily debunking Indian pretensions, he does not shy away from satirizing particular misplaced sentiments in the Sikh community itself. As a fictionalized re-creation of a deeply felt experience narrated from the Sikh perspective, the novel naturally channels the Sikh sensibility through its protagonist, who embodies the complexities of lived experience.

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