

## **GENDER INEQUALITY IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN**

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Feminism questions why women have played a subordinate role to men. The difference between the two genders is a result of historical imprinting and social construction down the centuries. Male domination originated in the primitive, societies. Even in the modern world men hold positions of political, social and economic power and the world at large is mostly patriarchal in character while women are in charge of domestic work, child bearing and rearing. They are the victims of male violence at the physical as well as the psychological level. Gender relations are unequally tilted in favour of men. Men are associated with reason, logic, strength etc. While women are linked to body, emotions and absence of reason and logic.

Luce Irigaray a French critic said in the 1980's that knowledge and reason have always been defined as masculine, the feminine faces subordination and is associated with material, improper, without self identity, indeterminate etc.

In studying the relations between literature and the discourses, feminist critic have noted that positive images of female docility and subservience have been advanced by male writers while strong women are often depicted in the canon as "madwomen in the attic" as threats to men. Women are assigned qualities such as a capacity for care and sympathy which qualify them for little more than domestic labour.

French philosopher and novelist Simone de Beauvoir claims that male is believed to be transcendent, the female however is immanent : through motherhood she produces the next generation in a purely animal way. She is excluded from the pursuit of knowledge, her liberty is limited and that too granted to her by someone else.

Gender inequality could be seen and felt by women the world over and more so in the subcontinent which was already reeling under colonialism and its after effects. Train to Pakistan a well known novel by Khushwant Singh portrays the horror, communal violence, revenge; the trauma of partition nation was mindlessly divided by the political leaders and the colonial masters on the basis of caste, communities and religion. Khushwant Singh in

the novel presents a grim situation and atmosphere in the otherwise peaceful and relaxed atmosphere in Mano Majra a small recently marked border village in Punjab inhabited by Hindu's, Sikhs and Muslims, women belonging to all these communities bear the brunt of the horror and atrocities in the wake of partition more than the men as they are objectified and targeted by people from all communities. They are brutally raped and murdered for the sake of revenge.

The aim of this paper is the representation of women in Train to Pakistan facing gender inequality, submissiveness, male dominance, violence, exploitation, working tirelessly without being paid or earning respect. Women in this novel are engaged in routine menial domestic jobs like cooking, cleaning, washing, taking care of domestic animals etc. Economic, administrative, religious and societal hegemony lies with men. Lala Ram Lal is a rich and powerful moneylender having the only 'pucca' house in Marno Majra. The dacoits under the leadership of Malli raid his house. The women of the house though weak and terrified themselves try hard to save the life of the head of the family by pleading with the dacoits even address them as brothers but to no avail and Ram Lal is shot dead by the dacoits. The women's dependency on Ram Lal is all the more the reason for them being frightened for his life.

The dacoits on the other hand with their firearms not only dominate the women in the house but the whole lot of villagers. No one dare challenge them. Their talk, about women folk shows their utter disregard and disrespect. They commodify the females by stating that women in exchange of pieces of jewellery like bangles, anklets, bracelets etc. readily offer themselves to the males who would never be pleased by such things. The females lack self respect is due to the conditioning of their minds. The dacoits describe Juggut Singh's beloved Nooran lecherously and derive pleasure out of it. There are lot of women abuse words mother, sister, daughter used by men throughout the novel showing their utter disregard for women folk.

Magistrate Hukum Chand is no less a lecherous man, staying at the guest house to monitor and control the worsening situation in the border village wishes to be pleased after a long day's work. A young girl, a virgin, Haseena is arranged for him by his subordinates. Haseena faces sexual exploitation at, his hands. Women face their lot meekly and think it to be their destiny. Sundari daughter of Hukum Chand's servant, newly married to Mansa

Ram faces a horrifying situation. According to popular customs she takes great care not to take off her red bangles or let them be broken by mistake but falls prey to the frenzied mob who not only dismember her husband's private part but also gang rape her brutally. Her bangles could not bring her any good luck. There were rumors about communal violence where women were abused for revenge by men from both communities. Women from good families had their veils snatched, stripped and taken to the market place to be raped. Even dacoits while passing through the streets of Mano Majra openly challenge the villagers that they will rape the women and girls of their village if they try to face them. At a later stage in the novel even the happy and peace loving people of the village when roused to take revenge think of harming the weaker sex. Females are not for men living entities like them but objects to be treated badly at will.

Juggut Singh the male protagonist loves and lusts after Nooran a girl belonging to the other community and for whose sake he sacrifices his life in the end. But he also dominates Nooran at all levels physicals and psychological. When the time comes for the Muslims to be relocated from there to Pakistan Nooran visits Juggut Singh's mothers and appeals to her to be allowed to stay back as Jugga had promised to marry her and more so as she was carrying his child in her womb. Jugga's mother is angry at the alliance as Nooran being a Muslim weaver's daughter was inferior class wise and different caste wise. Later on she is sympathetic on hearing of her pregnancy but she as a woman is helpless as she has no decision making power in the patriarchal society. She simply says 'I cannot keep you here'.

Thus Khushwant Singh, by projecting women as the weaker sex, liable to be abused at any time at the hands of their male counterparts, has tried to highlight the atrocities, oppression, discrimination, exploitation, victimization faced by simple village women for no fault of theirs. Their fault lies in their positioning in the Patriarchal society, conditioning of their minds since long and failure to stand for themselves.

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