

# Exploring Decolonization and Colonial Legacies: A Postcolonial Reading of Khushwant Singh's Novel *Train to Pakistan*

## OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:  
ENG-2024-12037702

Volume: 12

Issue: 3

Month: June

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 10.04.2024

Accepted: 20.05.2024

Published: 01.06.2024

Citation:  
Hasan, Mahmud Al.  
"Exploring Decolonization and Colonial Legacies: A Postcolonial Reading of Khushwant Singh's Novel *Train to Pakistan*." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2024, pp. 7-16.


DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v12i3.7702>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

**Mahmud Al Hasan**

Lecturer, Department of English, Sheikh Hasina University, Bangladesh

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9148-0615>

## Abstract

The paper examines the multifaceted nature of decolonization, encompassing socio-cultural, economic, political, psychological, and territorial aspects, which signifies the emancipation of the colonized. It focuses on the Indian subcontinent, utilizing Khushwant Singh's partition novel, *Train to Pakistan*, to scrutinize whether an ideal decolonization occurred in postcolonial India or not. Besides, it underlines the imperative of achieving ideal decolonization, emphasizing the prime necessity of reclaiming native identity, language, and cultural heritage for India's advancement following the British Empire's collapse in 1947. The research aims to depict the often-violent process of decolonization and examines how inheritances of colonialism still persist in contemporary Indian societies, political and administrative systems, manifesting in various forms, and masks. This qualitative study employs postcolonial theory to analyze the selected text, supplemented by data from credible secondary sources to accomplish its objectives.

**Keywords:** Decolonization, Colonial Legacies, Postcolonialism, Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan*

## Introduction

Khushwant Singh, an influential postcolonial figure in India, serves as a versatile writer, journalist, man of letters, and political activist. His renowned historical novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956), stands as a timeless classic in Indian literature. It unfolds a realistic narrative portraying various communities entangled in the turmoil of mass destruction, brutal horrors, and the malevolent repercussions of partition violence on both sides of the India-Pakistan border. The events in the fictional village of Mano Majra sharply contrast between pre-partition and post-partition India. Singh structures the novel into four segments - Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra, and Karma - addressing the somber facets of partition and the need for a complete decolonization. *Train to Pakistan* intricately weaves the decolonization process into the fabric of social change and turmoil. The communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims is a manifestation of the deep-rooted divisions sown during the colonial era. The legacy of British policies has left all communities fostering a sense of distrust and antagonism towards one another. The fall of the British Empire in 1947 triggered a power vacuum, sparking a struggle for authority among different factions. The lingering influence of the colonizers is clearly apparent when local authoritative figures attempt to assert power and control for their personal gains, often exploiting the religious differences of the villagers.

The current study aims to elucidate the destructive process of decolonization and the presence of colonial legacies in post-independent India, particularly as expressed in *Train to Pakistan*. It also sheds light on the prevalent features of mental and spiritual colonization of the Indians,

emphasizing why the notion of an ideal decolonization remains a myth in the Indian context. This paper is divided into two sections. The first part includes an account of postcolonialism, and decolonization, while the second one focuses on theoretical interpretation and my thematic assessment of *Train to Pakistan*. Thus, in this section, a deliberate attempt is made to underscore the imperative of decolonization, and scrutinize the persisting colonial inheritance in postcolonial India.

### Research Objectives

The article focuses on three primary objectives which are outlined as follows

1. To ascertain whether there is an ideal decolonization in postcolonial India or not, as depicted in Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan*.
2. To evaluate the challenges of decolonization in India, a former colony, and their long-term consequences.
3. To elucidate the existence and influence of colonial inheritance in *Train to Pakistan*.

### Literature Review

*Train to Pakistan* bears the testimony of the reactions of the people of Mano Majra towards the partition of 1947 and the true realities and tragic events that followed. Khushwant Singh perceives partition as a regrettable occurrence for the subcontinent, deeming it a misguided decision that only results in destruction and calamities, sparing no one from its devastating effects. Shehzad and Bhatt in their work comment that "*Train to Pakistan* addresses a number of issues related to postcolonialism such as representation and resistance, abrogation and appropriation of language, racial issues and hybridism, etc." (Shehzad and Bhatt 253). Singh reveals the mental trauma, physical assaults, and psychological outburst of people. Everyone was caught up badly in the flame of communalism and partition holocaust during 1947.

According to Sultan and Awan, "Khushwant Singh expresses his disagreement to the Indian subcontinent partition and forms the combinability of the political, social and cultural legacy between Muslims and Sikhs after many centuries of

intermixing. Being an Indian Sikh, he expresses his Indian identity and develops the Indian official philosophy" (Sultan and Awan 259). *Train to Pakistan* is a famous postcolonial novel and it represents people's interpersonal conflict, attitudes, religions, philosophies, and political ideologies.

Abir critically studies the novel and, in his research article, comments that "Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), a quintessential post-colonial novel and a lucid modern classic is based on the societal conditions and upheavals of during and post-liberation Pak-Indo subcontinent in 1947" (Abir 70). The bandit group led by Malli serves as a significant representation of the British colonizers in the novel. During the struggle for independence, the British deliberately fueled communal riots and political unrest, disrupting the harmony among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in the Indian subcontinent. Employing divisive tactics, they covertly created animosity by placing pork in front of mosques and beef in front of temples, aiming to sow hatred and discord to justify their dominance.

Ramrao in his article, remarks that "The novel, *Train to Pakistan* also makes a harsh satire on the politics of the Government officials and their corrupt attitude of the time." (Ramrao 4). The political leaders and fanatics of all religions played a fundamental role during that time in respect of inciting the fire of communalism, and nationalism for the fulfillment of personal interests and agendas.

Kumar writes that "*Train to Pakistan* is pregnant with history, romance, and bureautic voluptuousness, police atrocities, judicial express, dacoity and murder, human stampede, unusual communal violence caused by the partition of the country, harrowing human experiences and ghostly scenes beyond human imagination." (Kumar 47). Khushwant Singh illustrates how the fundamental structure of the society is absolutely demolished because of partition violence and religious clashes in India. A great number of individuals were forcibly uprooted from their original dwellings due to their nationality and religious affiliation. Consequently, they were compelled to traverse borders and relocate to unfamiliar areas in search of refuge and protection from the aggression of their adversaries and extremists. Additionally, they experienced a sense of

alienation and unhomeliness in their own countries.

Hasan in his research article, indicates that “Singh offers an Indian perspective of partition in *Train to Pakistan*.” (Hasan 10) and talks about the existence of colonial inheritance in the mentality and behaviors of the Indians and in the heart of Indian society directly or indirectly. He describes decolonization as a method of complete disaster and violence (Hasan 20). In the novel, Singh talks about the harmony among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs during the pre-partition days at the beginning of the novel. They hardly have any idea regarding India’s freedom from the British or the division of India. They remain busy in their day-to-day lives and politics is completely out of their concern. There is a sense of togetherness and brotherhood among the people in Mano Majra irrespective of their communal identity, moral, and religious values.

Many scholarly inquiries have thoroughly delved into *Train to Pakistan*, illuminating its detailed scrutiny of decolonization and the enduring aftermath of colonialism in India after independence in 1947. With its vivid portrayal of characters and historical moments, the novel challenges readers to grapple with the enduring consequences of British colonial rule while also acknowledging the resilience and resolve of those striving to redefine their national identity. This review presents a holistic viewpoint on Khushwant Singh’s pivotal creation, emphasizing its significance in the broader realm of postcolonial literature and discussions regarding decolonization and colonial legacies.

### **Methodology**

The article is completed by utilizing the qualitative research method and it adopts the postcolonial theory as its theoretical framework to meet its intended objectives. The primary data is obtained through a detailed textual interpretation of Khushwant Singh’s partition novel, *Train to Pakistan*, with the intent to assess the need for a genuine decolonization in India and the prevalent existence and influence of colonial legacies across various societal, religious, and political domains of India even after its emancipation from the British Empire. The analysis is reinforced by incorporating data sourced from secondary sources.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Postcolonialism constitutes a critical examination of the enduring ramifications of colonialism across social, political, economic, cultural, and intellectual domains. Centrally anchored in the notion of “otherness”, postcolonial scholars and writers emphasize the dire need to reclaim native culture and language, which were forcibly violated and eradicated due to the incursion of European colonizers and their imposition of their foreign cultural and linguistic influences upon the colonized. Leela in her book denotes the concept of “postcolonialism” as one kind of “theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering, and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (Gandhi 4 and qtd. in Nayar 4). Hiddleston describes that “postcolonialism refers to the wider, multifaceted effects and implications of colonial rule” (Hiddleston 1). Colonization undeniably fractures the foundational elements-indigenous identity, ancient civilizations, historical legacies, and cultural integrity of the colonized. The colonizers employ diverse methods such as violence, psychological manipulation, colonial education, and the imposition of their own culture and language to indoctrinate and control those they colonize. Memmi writes that colonization morally, physically, and materially kills the colonized (Memmi 195). The colonizers reinforce the beliefs like inferiority crisis and dependency complex in the minds of the colonized through their practice of violence or threats, and cultural hegemony; therefore, a master-slave relationship is developed between them. Colonialism leads them to madness. Upon gaining awareness of their rights and black identity, indigenous populations, when faced with the harsh realities of colonization, resort to violent actions to reclaim what rightfully belongs to them. Postcolonialism emerges as a cascading response against colonization, encompassing challenges like colonial racism, stereotypes, and the aftermath of colonialism, marked by atrocities, psychological distress, conflict, ethnic cleansing, diaspora, dual consciousness, hybridity, uncertainty, identity struggles, existential quandaries, mimicry, feelings of displacement, inferiority complexes, and the

misrepresentation of the colonized by the colonizers.

Decolonization denotes the journey through which a colonized nation and its inhabitants attain independence, liberating themselves mentally and physically from the oppressive control of European colonizers or the colonizing power. It poses a fundamental challenge to colonial racism and the injustices perpetrated against the colonized in the guise of Christianity, white supremacy, and enlightenment, seeking to revive native culture and identity. It's worth noting that the term "decolonization" is idealistic in nature, not a realistic one. Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* asserts that "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder" (Fanon 36). In Fanon's view, the violence exhibited by the colonized is morally defensible, given that the very nature of decolonization is inherently violent. This cycle of violence, however, eventually spirals into complete chaos and insanity. Fanon argues that the colonizers, who initially employ brute force to subjugate the natives, inadvertently plant the seeds for their own violent overthrow, contributing to the destruction of the natives' history, culture, and inherent identity. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin express that "It is not possible to return to or to rediscover an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity, nor is it possible to create national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise" (Ashcroft et al. 220-221). Following the demise of the colonial regime, a nation gains economic and political freedom, prompting a crucial shift towards nation-building. This process instills a sense of nationalism, patriotism, and a renewed collective purpose among the populace. Using the Indian subcontinent as an example, which was once under British rule, the transfer of power in 1947 marked a significant historical juncture. Despite the change in governance, led by figures like Lord Mountbatten, true decolonization faced challenges. The administrators of that era were often products of European education, embodying colonial ideologies and imitating the cultures and languages of the colonizers. In rural India, unawareness of independence and discontent over

the end of British rule persisted, hampering genuine decolonization. Decolonization takes various forms, including territorial decolonization, where control is transferred to local authorities, granting a form of territorial independence. This process involves acquiring lands and physical assets. Social and political movements, along with the establishment of political parties, are common during colonization. In India, the Indian National Congress and Mahatma Gandhi led a peaceful, non-violent movement, while armed resistance occurred under Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's leadership, disrupting the political and social structures of the colonizers. For a thorough decolonization, economic autonomy and a well-devised economic plan are crucial. Mental or psychological decolonization, identified as a pivotal form, addresses the profound impact of colonial culture and education on the psyche of the colonized. Without achieving mental decolonization, even with territorial, political, or economic changes, traces of colonial legacies persist in a decolonized country.

### **Textual Analysis**

Khushwant Singh characterizes India as a fledgling nation grappling with the aftermath of British colonial rule, striving to make strides in progress, economic development, and full decolonization. In his portrayal of postcolonial India in *Train to Pakistan*, he vividly illustrates the enduring impacts of colonialism, including existential crises, psychological trauma, depression, corruption, racism, class divisions, gender inequality, violence, communal tensions, fanaticism, mass migrations, uncertainty, identity crises, mimicry, displacement, madness, disorders, riots, double consciousness, and more. Singh delineates how colonial legacies, such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, bribery, hypocrisy, and the abuse of power by law enforcement and magistrates, not only afflict individuals across social classes but also sow seeds of social disorder, confusion, injustice, and anarchy in society. The novel delves into the nation-building efforts post-1947, revealing the numerous calamities and disorders that ensued. Singh expresses apprehension about the administrative system, shedding light on its internal challenges and the lack of concern for the well-being of the common people among political

leaders and government officials. Highlighting instances of violence and torture in *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh shows how administrators and government officials resort to brutal tactics to exploit citizens, subjecting them to verbal abuse and physical and mental assault through the police force. While acknowledging the philosophical appeal of decolonization, Khushwant Singh contends that it is a utopian concept or illusion. *Train to Pakistan* addresses issues linked to decolonization, providing a nuanced portrayal of colonialism's continuous influence in India. It deciphers the importance, post-decolonization, of embracing native languages, cultures, and traditions to foster a genuine break from colonial influences.

Khushwant Singh highlights the prevalence of a colonial mindset among the people, vividly portraying the Chundunnugger police station where Iqbal and Juggut Singh find themselves detained. Symbolically representing police stations across India, this particular station is marked with a conspicuous "WELCOME" at its entrance, underlining the notion that language holds significant power, often wielded to assert dominance. This mirrors the colonial strategy employed by the British in India, introducing English as the official language to establish administrative control. The narrative unfolds with Juggut Singh being captivated by Iqbal's adept command of English, recognizing its role in granting privileges across various aspects of life. Iqbal's arrest even brings him respect and better treatment from villagers. In aspiring to emulate Iqbal and his linguistic prowess, Jugga seeks to elevate his own status. His eagerness to learn English is driven by or increased power, intending to wield it to assert authority and control over others. Jugga articulates his aspiration to engage with British women and is willing to serve Iqbal in exchange for English lessons. This is exemplified by his gesture of massaging Iqbal's legs, a persuasive effort to convince him to impart English knowledge. Jugga requests Iqbal, "I am going to be the servant of your feet. I will learn something... Babuji, my kismet has woken up at last. I will serve you if you teach me some English. Just a few sentences so that I can do a little git mit." (Singh 103). For Jugga, education equates to acquiring proficiency in English, considering those

without English skills as uneducated. Thus, English becomes a prerequisite for being recognized as an educated individual. Iqbal teaches a few English expressions to Jugga. Within the police station, daily events are meticulously recorded in a register, and a framed portrait of King George VI sits on the table, accompanied by a placard in Urdu declaring "BRIBERY IS A CRIME". The irony lies in the prevalent corruption among police officers who flout laws to illicitly amass wealth. The image of King George VI symbolizes England's totalitarian authority and rule in the Indian subcontinent, persisting even post-independence. The Police Act, established by the British in 1861, continues to exert influence. Breaking free from colonialism requires a movement by the colonized against the colonizers. However, the remnants of colonialism, both consciously and unconsciously, seep into the country or society, adapting in modified forms, even after the formal end of colonial rule. Within the police station, a vibrant portrait of Mahatma Gandhi graces the wall, accompanied by the inscription "HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY". Despite Gandhi's advocacy for truth and non-violence, some Indians deviated from his ideologies, influenced by the violent teachings of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Achieving complete decolonization demands the eradication of all traces of the colonial past and legacies, an undertaking deemed nearly impossible. India falls short of complete decolonization due to its reliance on inherited structures like rules, orders, judicial systems, banking systems, educational frameworks, bureaucracy, political agendas, diplomacy, national and foreign policies, all established and implemented by the British colonizers from 1757 to 1947.

*Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh delves into the roots and repercussions of racial discrimination, caste divisions, and class structures in the Indian subcontinent. With a historical backdrop of perpetual class distinctions and a deeply embedded caste system, individuals from lower castes often face limited opportunities and unequal treatment compared to their higher-caste counterparts. Iqbal's lack of astonishment at the prejudiced attitudes of the police reflects a system where convicts are racially profiled and judged based on factors such as color, caste, class, religion, and education. In



the novel, Singh writes that “In a country which had accepted caste distinctions for many centuries, inequality had become an inborn mental concept” (Singh 71). Racial discrimination as well as the class system exists in society in different forms and under new terminologies. Racism and class division are colonial legacies. The Europeans maintain class division to exercise power over the non-Europeans. Their societal structure as well as civilization is based on racial segregation, gender disparity, and class system. The people who belong to the higher class receive better treatment and respect. The senior officers enjoy more facilities and special advantages such as exclusive entrances, decorated seats, and designated parking spaces over the juniors or lower-ranked officials.

Khushwant Singh skillfully portrays contemporary socio-political realities of India with a realistic touch. Juggut Singh suffers from an inferiority complex, feeling self-conscious about his skin color and black identity. His encounter with Iqbal triggers a psychological dilemma and identity crisis, as he becomes captivated by Iqbal’s vivid descriptions of European traditions, culture, lifestyle, and white women. Juggut perceives the English language as superior to his native tongue, and is particularly struck by the beauty and physical attributes of white women. Jugga tells Iqbal, “The memsahibs are like houris from paradise –white and soft, like silk. All we have here are black buffaloes” (Singh 105). Iqbal holds no fascination for white women; instead, he experiences the dehumanizing effects of colonial racism, class distinctions, and discrimination, affecting him mentally and psychologically. Juggut, however, rejects his native identity in pursuit of whiteness, striving to learn English from Iqbal to diminish his blackness and fulfill specific roles. Juggut’s deep infatuation with the English language reflects an underlying admiration for the West. Meet Singh is similarly enchanted by Iqbal’s European lifestyle, language proficiency, skills, and various aspects of Western culture. To cope with anxieties and psychological dilemmas, Iqbal turns to whisky, advocating self-sacrifice for a greater purpose. He contemplates India’s state, religious faiths, ethics, yoga, rich civilization, cultural heritage, philosophy, ancient art, paintings, etc. The basic distinction

between the East and the West, according to Iqbal, lies in religion. While India grapples with religious conflicts, Western countries progress and enlighten due to their lesser emphasis on religion. The East remains a mysterious entity for the West. Khushwant Singh, through the character of Iqbal Singh, conveys his perspective on religion in the context of the Indian subcontinent. He describes how people perceive and adhere to religious principles, often facing judgment based on appearance, dress, hair, beard, or even circumcision.

The theme of corruption looms large in *Train to Pakistan*, as Khushwant Singh highlights how it widens the economic divide between the affluent and the impoverished. Corruption becomes a tool for the police and magistrates to discriminate based on caste, enforcing destitution and subservient status. He exposes the dubious conduct of the police force and ostentatious officials driven by greed, seeking wealth, higher positions, and fame. They behave as parasitic entities, draining the lifeblood of India’s social and cultural foundations from within. Misusing their authority, they exploit the villagers of Mano Majra, illegally detaining individuals like Iqbal and Juggat Singh without due process, often for politically motivated reasons. Khushwant Singh vividly depicts the deplorable conditions within the Indian police department and administration during partition through characters like Hukum Chand and the sub-inspector. These figures openly express biases against Muslims, the sitting Congress government, and political leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, reflecting a deep-seated immorality and mischief. They lack proper record-keeping skills, frame innocent people, and follow colonial ideologies of power and control. The authorities desire the removal of Muslims from Mano Majra to seize their properties, breaking rules with impunity and favoring the former British colonial rule over the contemporary Indian government. Both Indian and Pakistani police exploit refugees, amassing wealth by usurping resources and homes. Despite Malli’s direct involvement in the Mano Majra robbery and the killing of Lala Ram Lal, the police release him and his associates, appointing Malli as a custodian of Muslim properties illegally. Villagers fear the police, perceiving them as absolute rulers, demonstrating

their unrestrained power and control. Singh criticizes political figures for promoting communal hatred and violence and condemns their failure to swiftly address partition riots and religious atrocities.

The existential dilemma is a significant facet of the colonial legacy in *Train to Pakistan*. Imam Baksh hesitates to relocate to Pakistan, unfamiliar with the challenges awaiting him in this new territory. Having an identity crisis and existential uncertainty as a Muslim refugee in Mano Majra, he struggles with the decision to detach himself from the place where he has spent the majority of his life. Despite his deep connection to the village and ancestral land, he reluctantly opts to go to Pakistan with his daughter, Nooran, driven by an unsettling sense of unwelcome and displacement in his own community. Women during the partition underwent considerable physical and mental torment, marked by traumatic experiences of sexual exploitation and violations of human rights. Analogous to the difficulty in achieving complete decolonization in a former colony after years of dominance, slavery, and subjugation by colonizers, the rescue of abducted and victimized women proves impractical. The patriarchal structure of Mano Majra imposes a dual form of colonization on women, which hinders endeavors to reestablish their former social standing and reconcile them with their families.

Hukum Chand emerges as a pivotal figure in *Train to Pakistan*, serving as a representative of the bureaucratic system in British India. Khushwant Singh skillfully unveils the insidious nature of the corrupt political system and bureaucracy through Hukum Chand's character. Despite his authoritative role as the magistrate and DC of Mano Majra during the tumultuous partition violence, he faces many decision-making challenges. Hailing from humble beginnings as a foot constable, Hukum Chand navigates the labyrinth of favoritism, securing numerous promotions and indulging in a lavish lifestyle facilitated by the government. His penchant for flattery, coupled with a penchant for imported luxuries like cars, cigarettes, perfumes, and European liquors, reflects his opulent existence. Notably, he resorts to superficial measures like hair dye to maintain a youthful facade. However, this veneer crumbles when observing his disdainful behavior

towards servants, marked by verbal and racial abuse. Despite the stark contrast in treatment, Hukum Chand commands significant respect in Mano Majra, positioning himself as an authoritative figure while treating villagers as his subjects. Regarding Hukum Chand's power in Mano Majra, Meet Singh tells Iqbal that "He is the government and we are his subjects" (Singh 45). Hukum Chand is mentally and morally colonized as he attempts to mimic the attitudes, lifestyles, thought processes, ideologies, and mentality of the colonizers consciously and unconsciously. His thought process as well as his infatuation with European lifestyle shows that there is a great resemblance between his attitudes and the attitudes of the European colonizers at many levels. His conversation with the sub-inspector of Mano Majra reveals the problems within the administrative system and the police department. It also reveals their views against the contemporary government in India and political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi who fail to avoid the partition of India on sectarian lines. He harbors prejudiced notions and stereotypes against Muslims, influenced by his upbringing and religious background. His strong attachment to his caste and Hindu faith shapes his perspective. As a devout Hindu, he attributes the partition of India and the widespread violence, particularly in places like Amritsar, to the Muslim community.

Khushwant Singh, through the character of the sub-inspector in *Train to Pakistan*, sheds light on the challenges within the police department. This character, driven by personal gain, employs flattery as a tool to manipulate situations while dutifully following Hukum Chand's orders. Rather than upholding the principles of safeguarding people and their human rights, he engages in distortion of facts and the unjust persecution of innocent individuals, violating the law. Positioned as one of the primary antagonists in the novel, his conduct and traits trace back to the legacies of colonialism in India. Well-informed about the communal strife across the country, he aligns himself with the RSS as a Hindu, lauding their actions against Muslim groups in various cities. His beliefs perpetuate negative stereotypes about the Muslim community, portraying them as inherently violent, bloodthirsty, and responsible for the partition. Justifying violence

against Muslim citizens as a form of retaliation, he advocates for forceful evacuation of Muslim refugees from India, reflecting his actions and thoughts being driven by his communal identity.

Khushwant Singh depicts the challenging nature of true decolonization, highlighting its association with significant political unrest, communal discord, refugee crises, systemic corruption, police brutality, intolerance, ethnic cleansing, gender bias, sexual violence, and the enduring psychological impact on people following years of subjugation and foreign rule. The religious tensions and intolerance witnessed in various Indian states are rooted in the nation's colonial past. In *Train to Pakistan*, the villagers of Mano Majra remain totally unaware of the formation of India and Pakistan, showcasing their innocence. When Banta Singh questions why the British left India, Iqbal acknowledges the villagers' limited understanding of Indian political affairs. Singh reveals the villagers' innocence, prompting Iqbal to advocate for fighting for freedom and basic rights rather than accepting bondage and slavery. He characterizes the British as the epitome of hypocrisy, citing a stark contrast between their proclaimed moral values and their actual actions. In the novel, Khushwant Singh writes, "Independence meant little or nothing to these people. They did not even realize that it was a step forward and that all they needed to do was to take the next step and turn the make-believe political freedom into a real economic one" (Singh 49). Many villagers harbor a stronger affinity for British officers than their Indian counterparts, appreciating the economic support they provided. Complete decolonization necessitates economic independence and growth for an ex-colony. Many British officers and their wives cultivate positive relationships with the villagers, often sending special gifts and money from London during events like weddings and religious festivals. Meet Singh commends their generosity and advocates for their continued presence in India. Aware of the corruption among Indian officials who neglect citizens' fundamental rights, Singh believes that freedom holds little value if it means continued subjugation to new masters. He expresses concern that educated Indians will assume British roles, leaving villagers with limited opportunities,

land, and resources, condemning them to endure manual labor, suffering, and hardships under a different ruling class. One of the villagers remarks, "Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians—or the Pakistanis". (Singh 50). The villagers are very conscious of their fortune after the achievement of India's freedom from the British colonizers. Banta Singh indicates that violence spreads in different parts of India in a wild fashion and the thieves, robbers, murderers, politicians, educated people like Iqbal and the thugs are the selected ones who enjoy freedom. Life is hardly secure in the wake of the British withdrawal from India and devolution of power to the country's local authorities. In a state of frustration and despair he asserts that "We were better off under the British. At least there was security" (Singh 52). Iqbal finds himself in a traumatic situation regarding his current status as he does not know whether he can stop communal violence and hate crimes in Mano Majra or not when everyone is involved in killings and violent activities. It is not his cup of tea to change the attitudes of the villagers and make them adopt his ideas.

Khushwant Singh illustrates the differential treatment of convicts based on their caste, race, and religion within the police station. The characters of Jugga and Iqbal serve as foils throughout the novel, with Iqbal experiencing more favorable treatment from the police compared to Juggut Singh. Iqbal's vocal criticism of the police force leads to his own inconvenience. The police officers, uncomfortable with his assertive demeanor and accent, display visible hesitancy and unease in their interactions, caught off guard by his protests. He goes on with his verbal tirade against the police, magistrate, and the rules and regulations exercised by them in Mano Majra stating that "The days of police rule are over. If you dare put your hands on me, the world will hear about it. I will see that the papers tell the people how you chaps do your duty" (Singh 53). For his proficiency in English and confrontational attitude, Iqbal receives considerate treatment from the police, who address him respectfully as "Babu Sahib" and "Babu Ji", refraining from using handcuffs. In jail, Iqbal benefits from additional



amenities, including a chair, table, charpai, small pitcher, and glass in his cell, along with access to daily newspapers and magazines in Urdu and English. Detained as a political prisoner, suspicions arise about his involvement in inciting religious sentiments and spreading anti-national ideologies among the people of Mano Majra. The sub-inspector mentally torments him, labeling him a secret agent of the Muslim League and demanding his return to Pakistan, associating him with Pakistani identity due to his circumcision. Conversely, the constables treat Jugga with contempt, akin to how one might treat a dog. Khushwant Singh describes the treatment of Jugga and Iqbal by stating that “Iqbal was A-class. Jugga was the rock-bottom C” (Singh 72). Jugga has to sleep on the hard cement floor. His food is thrown at him and water is poured into his hands through the iron bars. He is dragged, punched, slapped, and whipped. The police put red chilies up his butt. They cross-verify his account of the story and do not accept it. The police station turns into a concentration camp. The police apply third-degree methods of physical torture to get his confession and find out the names of those involved in the murder of Ram Lal and the robbery in his house. Jugga is aware of the political atmosphere of India to some extent and the existence of Gandhi’s government in Delhi after the fall of the British Empire. Iqbal proposes Jugga get on the same page and fight for their rights by saying “Yes, the Englishmen have gone out but the rich Indians have taken their place. What have you or your fellow villagers got out of Independence? More bread or more clothes? You are in the same handcuffs and fetters which the English put on you” (Singh 61-62). Iqbal reproaches Jugga for resigning to his fate, a sentiment shared by many villagers who attribute their suffering to destiny, consistently oppressed by those in power. Iqbal contends that foreigners exhibit greater progressiveness, citing their honesty, lack of corruption, and minimal religious conflicts compared to the subcontinent’s inhabitants. Rooted in his moral compass, Iqbal envisions the villagers’ development through a reformatory process, advocating for the realization of fundamental rights for the impoverished. Drawing parallels between the exploitation of the poor by the rich and the historical colonization, he aligns himself with the cause of

the oppressed. Iqbal foresees India grappling with overpopulation due to the influx of refugees from Pakistan, posing a severe threat to the economy and straining the government’s ability to provide shelters and support for the additional populace. He staunchly believes that the only path to uplifting the poor and bridging the wealth gap is the downfall of the existing government. Eager to instill political consciousness, Iqbal aims to enlighten the people of Mano Majra about the imperative need for unity and brotherhood. He discourages involvement in violence amid rumors and chaos, urging active participation in India’s nation-building, and a resolute stand against corruption, bribery, and materialistic pursuits of government officials and the police.

Khushwant Singh skillfully captures the profound tragedies surrounding the partition of India, offering readers a poignant Indian perspective on the violence and communal unrest during that tumultuous period. His critique extends to the Police force, bureaucracy, and the contemporary government and political leaders, serving as a political testament. Singh delves into postcolonial issues such as corruption, police brutality, abuse of power, class distinctions, racism, bigotry, existential crises, loss of identity, displacement trauma, psychological distress, women’s suffering, irrationality prevailing over reason, refugee crises, and various forms of communal madness with a stark realism. Emphasizing the need for harmony over communal venom, he highlights the lingering colonial legacies in the Indian subcontinent, asserting that ideal decolonization remains elusive since the British Empire’s fall in 1947. Khushwant Singh advocates for eradicating class divisions, slavery, gender disparities, corruption, racism, colonial mentalities, and the caste system at the root of Indian societies to achieve a thorough decolonization in *Train to Pakistan*.

### **Conclusion**

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh transcends mere historical narrative, delivering a potent critique of postcolonial realities. The novel serves as a compelling call for authentic transformation, surpassing India’s political independence to advocate for comprehensive societal restructuring. It stands

as a seminal contribution to postcolonial literature, intricately exploring the complexities and challenges inherent in the process of decolonization. Khushwant Singh's astute observations and unwavering critique compel readers to confront the harsh realities of a nation undergoing significant transition. The vivid depiction of corruption, police brutality, abuse of power, and class divisions vividly portrays the formidable hurdles confronting the recently liberated nation. His discerning insights mirror a collective disillusionment with the postcolonial administration's inability to fulfill the pledged ideals of equality and justice. He reveals the challenges of eliminating colonial traces, acknowledging their strong presence in various forms and appellations in contemporary societies and cultures.

### Works Cited

- Abir, Md Shazed Ul Hoq Khan. "Controlled by and Controlling with Sex: Comparing Portrayal of 'Nooran' and 'Haseena Begum' - Two Female Characters of Khushwant Singh's Modern Classic: Train to Pakistan." *International Journal of Literature Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 70-77.
- Hasan, Mahmud Al. "Riots, Refugees, and Communal Madness: A Comparative Study of Saadat Hasan Manto's Selected Partition Stories and Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan." *Language in India*, vol. 23, no. 9, 2023, pp. 7-28.
- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2004.
- Banerjee, Saikat. "The Anguish of Partition in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan." *Glimpses: A Bi-Annual International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, pp. 73-77.
- Banerjee, Saikat. "The Four Phases in Khushwant Singh's Novel Train to Pakistan." *Writers, Editors and Critics*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2012, pp. 141-48.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. Grove Press, 1963.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Hiddleston, Jane. *Understanding Postcolonialism*. Routledge, 2014.
- Kumar, Vinod. *Victimization of Women during Partition in Pinjar and Train to Pakistan*. University of Bikaner, 2008.
- Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizers and the Colonized*. Translated by Howard Greenfield. Plunkett Lake Press, 2003.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.
- Ramrao, Totawad Magnath. "Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan: A Critique of Partition." *Pune Research: An International Journal in English*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2017, pp. 1-5.
- Shehzad, Aamir, and Shaheena Ayub Bhatti. "A Post-colonial Perspective of Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan." *Journal of Education & Humanities Research*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2018, pp. 247-58.
- Singh, Khushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. Penguin Books, 2016.
- Sultan, Hafiza Mavra, and Abdul Ghafoor Awan. "Comparative Analysis of "Ice Candy-Man", "Train to Pakistan" and "Alakh Nagri" in Perspective of Creation of Pakistan." *Global Journal of Management, Social Sciences, and Humanities*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2017, pp. 248-85.

### Author Details

**Mahmud Al Hasan**, Lecturer, Department of English, Sheikh Hasina University, Bangladesh.  
**Email ID:** mahmudalhasaneng@gmail.com