

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

Khushwant Singh

(1956)

Story

This novel tells a horrifying story, based on historical events, that occurred during the separation of British India into the two nations of India and Pakistan in 1947. It is set in a village in the Punjab, not far from where the line of Partition has been drawn. In the years before Partition, in the fevered atmosphere of the nationalist and anti-colonial movements, relations between Hindus (and Sikhs) and Muslims became fraught. Riots, violence and killings were common. Now, with the creation of a 'Muslim' Pakistan and a 'Hindu' India (despite the fact that India declared itself to be a secular nation, it was perceived as Hindu), millions of people feared for their lives and began to cross over the border to the territory where they would be in majority and therefore safe. The trains running in both directions were crammed with refugees, which made the trains easy targets for roving mobs. Some of the trains became 'ghost trains' or 'funeral trains' because when they pulled into a station all the passengers had been slaughtered.

Khushwant Singh sets his story in Mano Majra, an isolated settlement that was dependent on the railways for food, other supplies and transportation. The arrival and departure of the trains was the town's clockwork, the pattern by which people ordered their lives. The village has a population almost equally divided between Sikhs and Muslims, with a few Hindus and Christians, who have co-existed for hundreds of years without communal violence. They are isolated in the countryside and need each other's cooperation to survive.

The story begins when the home of the Hindu money-lender Lala Ram Lal is raided, and he is murdered by a gang of Sikh hoodlums ('dacoits'). As they escape they ride by the home of Juggut Singh, their old gang leader, who is with his lover, Nooran, the daughter of the local Mullah (Muslim religious leader). The thieves throw some of the stolen jewels in his courtyard in order to implicate him in the crime. Meanwhile, Hukum Chand, a magistrate, arrives in the village and asks if there have been any incidents of religious violence.

Another visitor to the village at this time is Iqbal Singh, a 'secular' Sikh, who has come to organise support for the Peasants Party. Chand now arrests Juggut (based on the jewels found in his courtyard) and Iqbal (based on his false identification as a terrorist). The situation seems calm, but that illusion is blown away when the first 'ghost train' arrives in the village on its way to Pakistan. As the train slowly slides along the tracks and into the station, people are shocked by the dead bodies they see. This tense situation is then brought to a boiling point when a second ghost train arrives and the villagers are ordered by (mostly Sikh) soldiers to bury the bodies. Then the Muslim inhabitants (including Nooran, who is now pregnant with Juggut's child) are rounded up by soldiers and evacuated by trucks to an unknown location. The evacuees are reassured that they can leave all their possessions behind and that they can return to collect them later. But as soon as the trucks leave the village, thieves ransack the empty Muslim houses.

After this evacuation, a band of Sikh terrorists plan to attack the next train carrying Muslim refugees to Pakistan. The plan is that the (again, mostly Sikh) soldiers will use their rifles to fire on the carriages and then the villagers will finish the job with clubs and spears. They will also tie a strong rope across a span of a railway bridge, which will sweep away everyone sitting on top of the carriages (as was common) and cause their death. At first, the villagers are ready to act but then they realise with horror that the next train to Pakistan will be carrying the Muslims evacuated from their village, that is, their neighbours and friends. And Juggut realises that his lover, Nooran, will be on the train. When magistrate Chand learns of this plan, he is also caught in a dilemma because his 'mistress' will also

be on the doomed train. He decides to release Juggut and Iqbal from prison, hoping that their release will stop the planned killing of the Muslims refugees on the train. Iqbal, however, gets too drunk to take any effective action. In the final scene, Juggut saves the day by cutting the rope on the bridge, but a Sikh soldier shoots him dead.

Themes

Partition The partition of British India, in which a million people were killed, was one of the bloodiest events in human history. Understanding what happened during the summer of 1947 and why it happened has exercised the minds of historians and politicians, and been the subject of public debate ever since. Khushwant Singh, writing less than a decade after the events, has not attempted to provide a detailed explanation of the underlying historical causes. Instead, he has shown how the horror affected a village by focusing on a few characters. Those portraits are so convincing, however, that we feel they can be extrapolated to produce a 'scaled up' picture of the larger event. More important, the author (who would probably call himself a 'secular' Sikh) does not apportion blame to any one or any group. Rather, his story suggests that everyone shares responsibility for the widespread and senseless killing. And, furthermore, his novel suggests that violence is not necessarily a conscious act but is the result of ignorance, poor judgement, moral corruption or the failure to act. The general population of the village are largely ignorant of the wider political context that has sent the ghost trains to their railway station. Very few of them have even heard of Gandhi or of Jinnah (Gandhi's Muslim counterpart). They are concerned only with providing food for their families and are thus easily manipulated by leaders who say, 'Attack X and you will protect your homes.' Groups of Muslims and Sikhs kill each other without really knowing what they are doing.

Poor leadership One of the reasons for the violence of Partition, the novel suggests, is a lack of good leadership on all sides. Muslim, Sikh and Hindu, British and Indian officials, all are culpable for different reasons. Iqbal Singh, the self-professed reformer and saviour of the village, is British-educated and completely out of touch with those whom he hopes to 'improve.' When another leader, Iqbal Singh, is released from prison and has a chance to prevent the killing on the final ghost train to Pakistan, he is paralysed with doubt about the value of violence for any political end and drinks himself into a stupor. Iqbal talks a good game of anti-colonialism but is self-deluded about his ability to affect change on the ground. On the other side of the divide, magistrate Hukum Chand, is hopelessly corrupt, both politically and morally. He arrests men without good cause, colludes with illegal beatings of prisoners and frequents prostitutes (who he believes are his 'mistresses'). He, too, has the opportunity to halt the massacre by using his powers to cancel the scheduled train. But he takes the coward's path and does nothing.

Corruption Although the novelist spreads blame for the killing among all the parties involved, he does reserve special attention for corruption in the police. And that moral failure appears to be embodied in the character of the local Inspector of Police and in Hukum Chand, the Deputy Collector and magistrate who comes to the village to help control a volatile situation. Chand is a Hindu, from outside the village, who is described as 'corpulent' and 'often dirty.' It is strongly suggested that he has reached his status of high authority by a series of corrupt actions. In a much-quoted passage, with parallels to the biblical character of Pontius Pilate who condemned Christ, Chand looks on helplessly as two geckos [lizards] fight each other. 'Hukum Chand felt as if he had touched the lizards and they had made his hands dirty. He rubbed his hands on the hem of his shirt. It was not the sort of dirt which could be wiped off or washed clean.' When he is considering how to avoid a massacre on the train, he simply tells the Inspector of Police, 'Let them kill. Let everyone kill. Just keep a record of messages sent to other stations for help. That way we can prove that we did our best to stop it.' When asked what to do with the bodies, he says, 'Just throw them in the river. What's a few hundred out of hundreds of thousands. Epidemics kill more every year.' Chand's second-in-command, the Inspector of Police is equally cynical. He orders the beating of both Iqbal and Juggut while they are held in jail awaiting trial. To force Juggut to talk, the Inspector threatens to whip his buttocks, put chillies into his rectum and twist his testicles. Later, he mocks Iqbal's request for habeas corpus, and when it is shown that he has imprisoned Iqbal on the basis of a wilful misidentification, he simply shrugs and says, 'Everyone makes mistakes.' These corrupt officials are both Indian, and the novel appears to suggest that India's problem will not be solved by removing the foreigners after Independence.

Colonialism Given that the novel is set in the year of Indian Independence, 1947, it is not surprising that it devotes a lot of space to a debate about the effects of colonialism. At the time of Partition and for years afterward, it was common for people in India to say, 'We don't have to blame the Sikhs and the Hindus, or the Muslims for Partition. It's all the fault of the British.' This is the context in which Singh wrote his novel, giving voice to various points of view. One of his characters, Banta Singh, claims that India has benefitted from British rule. He explains that when he fought alongside British soldiers on the Western Front in the First World War, he gained respect for the 'English officers.' Another ex-soldier agrees with him, citing the generosity of his old officer's wife who sends him gifts every Christmas from London. The direct opposite attitude is articulated by Iqbal Singh, who argues that the British are devious in pretending to like India when they wish to change it to their advantage, 'just like missionaries.' They have, Iqbal says, established a 'police state' that makes any legitimate criticism of the government a criminal offense. Iqbal also explains that the British have not 'left India.' They were driven out, in part by the Indian nationalists led by Bose (a historical figure) who supported the Japanese against the British in the Second World War. Finally, there is the Shakespearean 'a pox on both your houses' point of view which sees no merit in either the British or Indian elite class. Imam Baksh expresses this scepticism by arguing that the departure of the foreigners will not change the plight of the poor. 'Once slaves of the British,' he says, 'they'll simply become slaves of the educated Indians—or the Pakistanis.' In the end, the novel offers no political solution to the problems of Independence and Partition. Instead, it seems that the answers must come social awareness and personal responsibility.

Characters

Juggut Singh Juggut Singh (or Jugga) is a criminal-turned-farmer who is implicated in a murder and is arrested. He has a Muslim lover, Nooran, who is the daughter of the local Imam. When Juggut learns that she will be on the next train to Pakistan, which will be attacked, he single-handedly stops the attack and dies in the process.

Iqbal Singh Iqbal Singh is an urban-based and UK-educated political agitator, who comes to the village to gain support for his party (which appears to be Communist). An 'armchair intellectual,' he makes little contact with the local people but presents a useful comparison with Juggut. Both men are arrested for the same murder and put in prison.

Hukum Chand Hukum Chand is the local magistrate and Deputy Collector of the district, and thus a powerful man. While he appears to be a stereotyped 'corrupt' official, he turns out to be more complex and interesting.

Nooran Nooran is the daughter of a local, wealthy Muslim landlord. She becomes Juggut's lover and, as such, is the reason he risks his life to stop the 'ghost train' at the end of the story.

Juggut Singh (Brave)

Character Juggut Singh (or Juggut for short) is portrayed as a *budmash*—a 'bad-un', a man who is innately immoral. That is how he identifies himself to others and how everyone in the village regards him. They have little choice since he has inherited a life of crime from his father and his grandfather. Just to confirm our stereotypes, he is also described as a towering, muscular figure, a 'big man' and a 'powerful man.' He is also uneducated. When the story begins, however, we learn that Juggut has abandoned his criminal activity (which included murder as well as stealing) and has become a farmer. But when one of his old gang members drops stolen jewels in his courtyard, he is arrested for the murder of a man who was killed in the burglary of those jewels. He is then put in prison, where he meets Iqbal Singh, who has been imprisoned on the same murder charge. The author has deliberately set these two men in the same place and for the same reason in order to highlight their different characters by juxtaposition. Whereas Iqbal, the urban, UK-educated intellectual, who says 'thank-you' all the time, proves to be a moral coward, Juggut, the rural reprobate, turns out to be something of a hero. Another contrast is that while Iqbal is an atheist, Juggut (although not a religious man) goes to the *gurdwara* (Sikh temple) to seek moral guidance at

the critical point when something must be done to stop the killing on the trains to Pakistan. Another contrast is that while Iqbal claims to be a 'reformer', it is Juggut who actually promotes inter-communal harmony by having a Muslim lover (Nooran).

Activities When the novel begins, Juggut Singh is a farmer, living with his mother but enjoying a love affair with Nooran, daughter of the local Muslim religious leader. In the past, however, he was a violent criminal, who killed and stole. After he is falsely arrested for murder, he spends a lot of time languishing in jail, where he sleeps and has confusing conversations with Iqbal Singh (the intellectual also falsely arrested for the same crime). His decisive act comes on the final page of the novel when he prevents a massacre of Muslim refugees (including Nooran) on a train and dies in the process.

Illustrative moments

Brave We might think of Juggut as showing moral courage at two points in the novel—by turning away from crime and becoming a farmer, and by taking Nooran, a Muslim woman, as his partner. However, the clearest illustration of his bravery comes in the concluding scene of the novel. He and many others know that a train will arrive in the local station carrying the Muslim refugees from their town, and he also knows that Nooran, his lover and pregnant with his child, will be among them, on their way across the recently-drawn border to safety in Pakistan. He further knows that the local Sikhs, with the collusion of the army and police, plan to attack and kill all those on the train. They will tie a rope in such a way that when the train passes under a bridge it will kill those many refugees who are sitting on top of the carriages, 'slicing through them like a cucumber.' Juggut goes to seek advice from a religious leader, who reads verses from the Sikh scriptures. Juggut, however, does not understand them, and the leader says 'God will help you if you do good; he will stand in your way if you do bad.' And in the last scene of the novel, he does good by cutting through the rope to prevent the killing. Soldiers shoot him, he falls onto the tracks and dies. The final sentence reads: 'The train went over him, and on to Pakistan.' Juggut, the *budmash*, the inherently bad man, has saved the lives of hundreds and died himself in the act.

Brutal Despite his heroics at the end, Juggut can be a brutal and domineering man. This side of his character—which fits his image as a 'bad man'—is revealed quite early in the story. Juggut and Nooran, the local Muslim Iman's daughter, are together in his house. He forces himself upon her, although she is not altogether unwilling. As they make love, they hear gunshots outside, and Nooran is frightened. If they find her with him, a Sikh man having sexual relations with a Muslim woman, she would surely be killed. When she says 'if Allah will forgive me this time, I will never come again,' he hits her and tells her to shut up. Then they see five gunmen approach the house, and she is scared even more, but Juggut assures her, with a little laugh, that he 'is not a *budmash* for nothing' and that he will protect her. 'No one can touch you, while I'm here.' The near-rape and boastfulness are a sign that this man can be dangerous.

Loyal Another aspect of Juggut's character, and one that is said to be widespread among Punjabi peasants (and is the inspiration for the people of Mano Majra, the local town), is blind loyalty. No matter what, one does not 'rat' on a friend or a relative. For Juggut and his erstwhile criminal colleagues, this is a literal example of 'thieves' honour.' A good demonstration of Juggut's loyalty occurs when he is arrested for the murder of a money-lender and the theft of the man's jewels. Six armed policemen burst into Juggut's house while he is asleep and put him in chains. His mother cries out that she has the evidence to prove that he did not commit the murder or the theft. 'He knows who did it,' she says in a desperate attempt to get her son freed. And, we know that, in truth, he did not commit those crimes. His mother then gets the jewels that have been thrown into her courtyard, to implicate Juggut in the crimes, and she explains that they cannot be her jewels and must have been 'planted' there by the real criminals. Juggut gets angry at his mother and screams, 'You've said enough. Shut up!' When he refuses to name the criminals, the policeman set about him, kicking him with their heavy boots and beating him with their thick sticks. Juggut endures this savage treatment rather than reveal the names of his old gang members, who he knows committed the crimes. He withholds their names because of that old bond, even though they have treacherously implicated him in the crimes. This tribal loyalty, which infuriates the pretentious reformer Iqbal, is a deep streak in Juggut's character. He would rather die from the beating than squeal on his friends.

Iqbal Singh

(Coward)

Character Iqbal Singh is a political activist, who has been educated in England and comes to Mano Majra from Delhi to raise the consciousness of the peasants about the need for land and broader economic reforms. Although he does not identify himself as a Sikh, we assume that he is from his name. He says he works for the Peasant Party and refers to himself as a 'comrade,' which suggests that his cause is backed by the Communist Party of India. For this reason, the Inspector of Police labels him as an 'outsider agitator.' We are also told that he is a small man, with some 'effeminate' traits. While he appears to be sincere in his attempts to improve the lot of the common man, he is somewhat supercilious and not at all complimentary about that common man's ability to understand his message. In fact, as the action unfolds, he seems more concerned with building a reputation for himself. The magistrate Hukum Chand's description of him as 'an armchair intellectual' is not far off the mark. In the end, we probably share the author's opinion that the revolutionaries are no less hypocritical than the established men ('lackeys' in Iqbal's mind) who serve the British government as police Inspectors and Deputy Collectors. Iqbal is also a fantasist who likes to imagine the headlines to be generated by his activism and self-sacrifices to stop the bloodshed of Partition.

Activities Iqbal Singh, the outsider to the village, spends most of the early part of the novel meeting people and trying to find potential recruits to his cause. He asks a lot of questions, which help orientate the reader to the village, and yet he still spends time looking at the night sky and wondering who these people really are. When he is arrested and put in prison, he reads but also talks with Juggut Singh, a fellow prisoner, from whom he learns about the ordinary man in the village. In common with most of the male characters in the novel, he likes his glass of whisky.

Illustrative moments

Contemptuous Iqbal's greatest flaw, as a revolutionary reformer, is the contempt with which he views the people he intends to help. There is no better illustration of this attitude than the very first scene in which he appears in the novel. He arrives in Mano Marja, a place which he has never visited, where he has no friends and which he knows nothing about, and, yet, he expects to inspire the local people to follow his lead in making fundamental economic reforms. After eating and resting for a little while, he takes a pill to prevent diarrhoea (the local food is 'dirty', in his view). Then he starts a conversation with a man who talks about how Juggut Singh has disgraced his family not by the murders he has committed but by stealing from his own relatives. Iqbal keeps quiet but he thinks that this 'rural code of honour' is backward and simple-minded. 'The peasants,' he reflects, 'think that truth, honour and financial integrity are lower down the scale than being true to one's salt [roots], to one's friends and family.' The peasants, he thinks, would lie in court to defend their family because everyone is related to everyone else in a village. It was a code of honour that he detested. This then stimulates Iqbal to have wider reflections on the people of India as a whole: '...the whole place was littered with men, women, children, cattle, and dogs....Where in India could one find a place that did not teem with life? The whole country was like an overcrowded room. What could you expect when the population went up by six births every minute—or five million every year! It made all planning in industry or agriculture a mockery. Why not spend the same amount of effort in checking the increase in population? But how could you, in the land of the Kama Sutra, the home of phallic worship and the cult of the sun?' It is no surprise that, in the end, the great reformer turns out to be a moral coward.

Frightened Iqbal Singh is soon turned into a man of fear. When he is arrested for the murder of a Hindu money-lender and taken to prison in the nearest big town, his sense of his power evaporates. He now realises that he is in the hands of corrupt police and that outside the prison are only frenzied mobs ready to kill. After he is released from prison, those fears grow stronger and stronger. In this scene, he is being driven back to Mano Majra and looks out at the countryside, afraid that a gang will stop the horse-drawn carriage. He realises that the carriage has not been attacked only because there is a police constable with him. If he were alone...but he doesn't want to think about that. He is particularly afraid because, although he says he is a Sikh, he has been circumcised, which means that anyone would think he is a Muslim. He plans to gather up his things and leave by the first train (a somewhat ironic choice, given the 'ghost' trains that soon arrive in town). His fear then turns to anger when he thinks that his life 'depends on whether or not his foreskin has been removed. It would be laughable, he says to himself, if it were not tragic. This scene is key to the unfolding of Iqbal's character, whose glossy and pompous surface is slowly peeled away to reveal the frightened, tiny human being beneath.

Coward The final stage of Iqbal's moral decline arrives at the most dramatic point in the novel. He (and several others, including Hukum Chand and Juggut) know that the next train due into the station at Mano Majra will contain Muslim refugees from the village and that they will be attacked and probably killed. Iqbal argues with some of the Sikh leaders about the morality of their planned action but fails to persuade them to halt it. Then a religious leader of the Sikhs tells Iqbal that it is his duty to speak to the mob and stop them. 'Me? Why me?' he asks. 'Because you came to deliver a message,' the man says, 'and now is the time to do it.' Iqbal goes back to his room and imagines himself facing the crowd and telling them that their plan is wrong and immoral. 'He would walk right up to them, with his eyes fixing the armed men—without flinching, just like the heroes on the screen who become bigger and bigger as they walk right up to the camera. Then he would fall under a volley of blows, or preferably rifle shots.' But then he rejects this scenario because 'there would be no one to witness this supreme act of sacrifice.' There would be no reports in the national newspapers. He would just die, as thousands had died, without notice. 'If there were people to see his act of self-immolation, as on a cinema screen, the sacrifice might be worth it.' With these thoughts, Iqbal takes glass after glass of whisky until he is too drunk to move and falls asleep, just hours before the massacre is planned. The whole scene is a scathing satire of the superficial motives of the urban-educated, would-be revolutionary.

Hukum Chand (Fatalist)

Character Hukum Chand is the magistrate and Deputy Commissioner in Mano Majra. As such he holds almost unlimited power, or at least the potential to exercise unlimited power. He is a Hindu of 'lower-middle-class origin,' who is in his fifties, 'corpulent' and married to an 'unattractive and unfeeling' wife. He once had children, including a daughter of whom he was fond, but they died. He develops a love for Haseena, a teenage Muslim prostitute in the village. It is suggested that this obviously doomed love affair, which began in a night of drunken stupor, is based on the fact that she is around the same age that his daughter would have been had she lived. Hukum Chand is perhaps the most unlikable character in this novel. Insincere in his duties, he lies, he condones beatings, he fails to act when he should to prevent crimes and, most important, he doesn't care. But this is precisely why he is such an interesting character. As the author explains, Hukum Chand's view of life is summed up in question: 'What does it matter in the end?' In other words, he is a cynic and a fatalist. This point of view was generated by his early experience with death—of his aunt, of siblings and then of his own children. Again, the author explains: 'Death was the only reality for him. Everything else—love, ambition, pride, values of all sorts—he took with a pinch of salt.' As we see in the novel, he helps friends in need and he receives gifts from them in return. He likes sex, he visits prostitutes and he is negligent in his official duties, but the author's portrayal of his fatalism prevents us from condemning him altogether. As readers, we are apt to judge Hukum Chand more harshly than the author. We would likely say he is, if not immoral, then at least amoral. Certainly, he is not a conscientious man or a public-spirited official. But perhaps Hukum Chand represents a moral vacuum, an inability to think in terms of 'good' and 'bad' in the aftermath of the Partition. As many writers said of the Holocaust, after such killing, there was a moral emptiness, a numbness, a suspension of normal judgement. Perhaps it is this barren moral landscape that the author has chosen to represent through his character portrayal of Hukum Chand.

Activities As magistrate and Deputy Collector, Hukum Chand spends a lot of time in his official duties, which he does not perform with much sincerity. He likes to drink whisky and beer, to eat rich food and to smoke cigarettes, and to avoid taking responsibility for anything—that is the safest way, in his opinion. He takes great care grooming and dressing himself in the mornings. He sometimes spends the evenings with a teenage prostitute, for whom he develops a ridiculous love (only because she reminds him of his dead daughter).

Illustrative moments

Corrupt Throughout most of the novel, Hukum Chand appears to be a corrupt official. He certainly does not act according to any code of conduct for public office-holders. A good illustration of this quality occurs when he instructs the Police Inspector to fill in the arrest warrant for Iqbal Singh, who has been (wrongly) arrested for murder and theft. Instead of investigating the crimes to ascertain if Iqbal bears any responsibility for them, he blandly tells his subordinate to fill in the form with whatever seems appropriate. 'Name: Just write "Mohammed Iqbal". Then add "son of Mohammed something-or-other." Or just "father". It doesn't matter. Caste: "Mussalman." Occupation: "Muslim League

worker”.’ Every single one of these details is not only inaccurate but prejudicial to the case. His name is not Mohammed Iqbal (who was a known terrorist at the time), but Iqbal Singh. He is not a Muslim and he is not a member of the Muslim League, which was a banned ‘terrorist’ organisation at the time. At best, this kind of behaviour on the part of the magistrate could be described as nonchalant and, at worst, as corrupt. However, as the two other illustrative moments (described below) show, Hukum Chand is a more complex character.

Cynical Hukum Chand is a cynic, who professes no set of principles and holds no moral code. We witness this quality throughout the novel, but in particular it is illustrated when he has a long conversation with the local Inspector of Police. The Inspector is trying to prevent the killing on the train that everyone knows will happen soon. After listening with growing irritation to his colleague’s anxiety, Hukum Chand gives him some advice: ‘You talk rashly like a child. It will get you nowhere, and maybe get you into trouble one day. Your principle should be to see everything and say nothing. The world changes so rapidly that if you want to get on with your career, you cannot afford to align yourself with any person or group or point of view. Even if you feel strongly about something, learn to keep quiet.’ This is not the attitude we would like to see in our public officials, but it makes some sense when we know about the tragedies Hukum Chand has faced in his family (the deaths of his children) and all around him (the massacres of Partition).

Moved by violence Despite Hukum Chand’s cynical and fatalistic view of life, even he is moved by the horror of the ‘ghost’ trains that pull into the railway station in Mano Majra. Toward the end of the story, he even breaks his own amoral code and actually agonises over what he can do to stop an attack on the next train. But the first indication that Hukum Chand has these normal human reactions, that there is a chink somewhere in his armour, is given somewhat earlier. After he and the soldiers have spent almost a whole day pulling dead bodies from a train, Hukum Chand is exhausted at home. In the author’s words: ‘His fatigue was not physical. The sight of so many dead had at first produced a cold numbness. Within a couple of hours, all his emotions were dead, and he watched the corpses...being dragged out with as little interest as if they had been trunks.’ He tries to drive away the scenes burned onto his mind, but in vain. ‘He lay down again with his hands over his eyes. Within the dark chambers of his closed eyes, scenes of the day started coming back in panoramic succession. He tried to squash them by pressing his fingers into his eyes. The images only went blacker and redder and then came back. There was a man holding his intestines...there were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just then become voiceless... And all the nauseating smell of putrefying flesh, faeces and urine.’ Even the hardened cynic Hukum Chand could not witness the horrors of the ‘ghost’ train to Pakistan and remain unaffected. That is the powerful message conveyed by his character and this novel.