



SILENCED BY THE STATE: A STUDY OF IDEOLOGY AND REPRESSION IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN*

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Abstract

This paper explores the portrayal of power and control of the state and higher authorities in Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan*, using Althusser's theory as theoretical framework. By using a textual analysis method, the researcher analyzes how the dwellers of Mano Majra are manipulated both physically and psychologically by the police and magistrate. This study examines the crucial scenes where physical punishment, vulgar threats, exploitation and ideological manipulation of public are used to break the bond between communities and force Muslim community to leave Mano Majra. It also focuses on the way Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* acts as a critique of how the state suppresses ordinary people through both direct force (RSA) and changing people's mindsets, beliefs and spreading false information (ISA). The findings of the paper suggest that the failure of the police tactics to manipulate people softly turn them towards vulgar threats and physical punishment.

Keywords:

Exploitation; ISA; Power; Physical punishment; RSA; Train to Pakistan; Vulgar threats.

Introduction

Khushwant Singh is an influential author, journalist, politician, and diplomat of postcolonial era. His literary works reflect his deep connection with Sikh history. He combines historical facts with fictional elements in his novels. His first and most famous novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is considered as a timeless classic and important work in Indian literature. In 1947, British India was divided into two separate countries India and Pakistan. On the one hand, this separation was painful and tragic. On the other hand, it was an event of happiness and pride for those who embraced the creation of Pakistan as a new nation. It also led to the killing of many innocent people who belonged to different religious groups like Hindu, Sikh and Muslim. Thousands of people were forced to leave their own homes and villages and to move from one nation to another for their own safety. It affected their lives deeply, causing emotional and physical pain. It also caused unforgettable suffering and traumatic feelings in their lives. In his novel, *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh depicts a fictional village Mano Majra which is located on the border of India and Pakistan. Before partition, people of Mano Majra were living peacefully and with unity, but their unity was destroyed by the partition of British India.

Singh, in *Train to Pakistan*, depicts how chaos and violence caused by political manipulation affect the relationships of characters from different religious communities



and professions such as Lala Ram Lal, a Hindu moneylender, Iqbal, a political activist, Meet Singh, a Sikh priest, and Hukum Chand, a Hindu magistrate. He also includes Haseena, a Muslim girl, Imam Baksh, a Muslim weaver, and Juggut Singh, a Sikh peasant. The lives and bonds of these characters are deeply affected by the riots caused by political leaders and higher authorities. The novel does not only focus on the communities which are torn apart due to the chaos of partition, but it also focuses on something more troubling: how the police and higher authorities misuse their power to control the ordinary people. Instead of protecting and serving the common people, they deceive them through their political tactics (Dutta & Gupta, 2024).

By looking at how the police and people in power work in *Train to Pakistan*, this paper illustrates that Singh strongly criticizes their misuse of power and control of ordinary people during difficult time. It explores how powerful people use dishonesty, lies, and injustice to suppress ordinary people and protect their own interests. It also shows that during the time of violence and brutality; ordinary people suffer the most not only because of the hatred between different communities and religious groups but also because the leaders who are supposed to protect them often fail to do so. Khushwant Singh criticizes the savage and cruel behavior of humans that emerge because of their religious ideologies. In an interview, he states that human beings sometimes act more terribly than animals. He has observed cock and dog fights but these animals do not cross certain limits. Humans, however, are extremely violent and brutal (Kumar, 2018).

Research Questions

1. How powerful institutions and dominant groups manipulate ordinary people in ways that prevent them from challenging unjust system and social norms?
2. How do RSA and ISA work together to control common individuals and to normalize obedience and to suppress resistance?

Research Objectives

1. To examine how powerful institutions manipulate the beliefs, thoughts and actions of common people.
2. To investigate how ISA and RSA work together to maintain authority.

Literature Review

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* represents a realistic and honest image of the violence and suffering that happened during the partition of India in 1947. Chelliah (2017) argues that Singh himself has experienced the brutal situation of partition, so he writes with sincerity and honesty, showing that both Hindus and Muslims took part in the raping, killing, molesting, and destruction of innocent people. The novel focuses on the sufferings of people and explores the themes of hatred, sadness, pain, and the conflict between morality and malevolence within people. Chelliah further argues that train not only symbolizes the movement of the people of Mano Majra who were forced to leave their homes but also the destructive and impersonal forces of modern time that cause dehumanization. He further says that Singh was a Punjabi, lawyer, journalist and diplomat due to which his writing is rich of cultural details with sharp criticism on society. Singh's use of realistic dialogues and Indian English represent a realistic image of the Punjabi people. Though he writes historical facts and do not focus on the work of literary brilliance, his novel holds an important book in Indian English literature. Singh also believes that the power of love and morality can overcome violence and brutality.



Phukon and Roy (2020) state that the community honor often tied with women and attacking them means to destroy an entire community's sense of pride. Women were seen as the protectors of community's dignity and honor, that is why both Hindus and Muslims targeted them easily. They suggest that *Train to Pakistan* not directly argues about female voices, but their sufferings are presented through male centered narration. They are limited to only house chores and are not allowed to take active part in political or social activities. They are represented as victims of violence, abduction, and sexual exploitation. In the novel, Bhola and Juggut Singh talk about the objectification of women and that they are being taken and treated like property. Their sufferings are portrayed through the characters of Nooran, Haseena and Sundari. Nooran got pregnant and was forced to leave the village, hoping that Juggut Singh would join her. Sundari was raped several times in front of her husband. Haseena was forced to become prostitution just for her survival. Overall, the novel shows how women suffered the most due to violence and chaos of partition around them.

Partition, trauma, displacement and violence are closely connected with each other. Magar (2024) argues that Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* not only portrays the deep pain caused by people moving from one place to another, but it also represents the psychological trauma inflicted by the partition of India. The setting of the novel is a fictional village Mano Majra, a harmonious village located on the border of India and Pakistan, where people of different religious groups like Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim live together like a family. The arrival of a train full of dead bodies from Pakistan is a turning point from harmony and peace to despair and fear. The emotional numbing and traumatic flashbacks of Magistrate Hukum Chand symbolize the lasting impact of trauma. The Muslims of Mano Majra are forced to leave their ancestral lands. The pain of leaving their lands, village and friends causes deep sadness and heartbreak. During the evacuation of Muslims, even the Sikh villagers cry and hug them which shows the unity and closeness of the villagers but partition force them apart. After the evacuation, some villagers even agree to attack the train which shows how partition breaks the social unity and relationships of the villagers. He argues that the novel not only represents individual trauma but also national trauma, shattering communal ties and identity.

Shafique, Ahmad, and Khan (2025) analyze how the judgment of society affects and shapes a person's behavior and identity. They focus on Juggut Singh, a notorious badmash, who leaves the village in his probation period on the night of dacoity to meet his lover Nooran. This is his first act of breaking the law in the novel which is called primary deviance. Secondary deviance is when he is already seen as a criminal due to which he does not care to prove his innocence or to hide his actions. His lover Nooran is also looked down upon and immoral by the police and criminals, not because of her own actions but because of her relationship with Juggut Singh. This is called courtesy stigma. She is only judged because of her association with Juggut Singh. When the police find bangles in his house, the villagers consider him a criminal without any proof and proper investigation. This shows that his past criminal actions have become his master status due to which no one considers him innocent. They further focus on Erving Goffman's concept of spoiled identity (Goffman, 1961) where Juggut Singh is treated inhumanly, badly and his dignity is denied because of the label associated to him while Iqbal is treated with respect and care although they both are arrested by the police for the same dacoity and murder.

There are several other works done on the novel *Train to Pakistan*. Previous studies illustrate that Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* has been analyzed by many critics several times. The researcher has mentioned some of the important works of various critics which provide a base to the novel and give an insight into Singh's work.



Since the purpose of the research is to fill the gap present in the existing body of knowledge, the researcher finds out that the novel carries an important element which is the manipulation of common people through force and ideology by higher authorities, but the approach based on this manipulation has very little available in the works of various critics. It is the most important aspect of the novel, and it needs to be addressed. The purpose of this research is to fill this gap by finding out how magistrates and police use rhetorical strategies to change the mindset of ordinary people so that they may not be able to question or challenge higher authorities. As the novel has not been studied from this dimension, the findings of this term paper will be quite different from the rest.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The current research study analyzed Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* by employing the method of textual analysis through close reading of the text. Data is collected through qualitative method, where the text of the novel *Train to Pakistan* is the primary data source itself. Various passages and quotes are taken from the novel for the purpose of analysis that are relevant to the research thesis. Althusser's RSA and ISA and relevant information from various sources, such as books, essays, research papers, articles, and websites are served as the secondary data source.

This study is based on the theory of Althusser (1971), a French Marxist philosopher. In his theory, he explains how societies maintain their existing class structure not just by force but through the set of ideas, values and beliefs. He says that there are two important state apparatuses that help to preserve the power of the dominant class: the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). The main tool of RSA is repression. It controls people through punishment and physical force. The government, the police, the prison system, the court etc. are included in the Repressive State Apparatus. On the other hand, ISAs are the institutions that work through ideology, not physical force. Ideology means the set of beliefs, values and ideas that shape the minds of ordinary people in such a way that they accept them as natural and normal. These institutions do not use punishment and force to control people, but they appeal to how people think, how they behave, and what they believe in a way that supports the dominance of the ruling class. Educational, political, cultural, legal etc. institutions are included in Ideological State Apparatuses.

According to Althusser (1971), RSA relies on direct and visible force, while ISAs operate in a quiet and impactful way to influence how people perceive the world and what they believe. It presents its ideas in such a way that they become normal and natural for ordinary people. With time people start believing these ideas without questioning them. Within this framework, everyday conversations become an effective force for spreading the ideologies of the dominant class. Things like making persuasive arguments and offering moral judgements may appear simply personal opinions but in reality, they are shaped by the capitalists and authoritarian people. It also discourages individuals from questioning social injustice and unfair systems.

From Althusser's perspective, manipulation of common individuals is not just random or personal act, but rather part of a broader act of control. Common people are the informal agents of the beliefs and values of higher authorities. They spread their beliefs through language and advice to keep others unaware of inequalities. RSA is still there to punish those people who challenge the authority openly, but most of the time control is carried out through ISA which works through daily language, habits and social norms passed from person to person.

Discussion and Analysis

In 1947, the partition of India was not only about changing borders, but it created a lot of pain and suffering for millions of people over there. It was a huge



tragedy for them and affected their lives in different ways. It forced them to leave their families and homes. History often highlights the decision made by their leaders, while Khushwant Singh, in *Train to Pakistan*, draws the attention of the people towards those common people who were unaware of politics but suffered a lot. He highlights the pain and suffering of the ordinary people they have experienced during that time. Through the fictional village of Manjo Majra, Singh portrays how those common villagers are manipulated by powerful groups, such as political activists and colonial leaders by spreading false information, fear and lies to provoke violence.

People are manipulated in two different ways, through power and hidden ideas. On the one hand, the sub inspector and police arrest people by using their power, without any genuine reason, stopping people from expressing their ideas. They do not pay any attention to the growing tension between the communities. It becomes the reason for hatred between them. On the other hand, powerful groups start manipulating and influencing common people by spreading false information which becomes the reason for conflict between communities. As a result of misinformation and false rumors between Muslim and Hindu, communities produce hatred, fear and distrust.

State Violence as a Tool of Control (RSA)

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh illustrates that the government can be very powerful and sometimes uses that power in a wrong way. There is a big idea called the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), which means things like the police, army, and courts that the government uses to control people. During the time of Partition, when India and Pakistan were being made into two countries, the government and the police did not always treat people fairly. They arrested people like Juggut Singh and Iqbal even though they did not do anything wrong—just to make it look like they were doing a good job. The police and magistrates cared more about keeping control than about doing the right thing. In one village, Mano Majra, the soldiers came, but they did not help everyone. Instead, they helped send Muslims away quietly. The author shows us that during this hard time, the government used fear and power to stop people from speaking up and to hide what was really going on.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh skillfully represents Repressive State Apparatus through the unlawful arrest of Iqbal. He shows that power is not used to provide justice to the public, but it is used as a tool of suppression. The constables openly misuse the state power in the arrest of Iqbal. They do not arrest him through legal procedure, like Iqbal says “you have no right to arrest me like this, he shouted. You made up the warrant in front of me. This is not going to end here” (Singh, 1956, p.48). They made the warrant immediately in front of Iqbal which shows the forceful and the unreasoned nature of police actions. According to Althusser, RSA maintains social order through force, punishment and fear of force. The constable does not arrest Iqbal because he is guilty, but they arrest him because his presence may threaten their status quo. The making of illegal documents represents how the higher authorities use law as an instrument of repression rather than providing justice to the public. They use their power to suppress those people who are considered a threat to their system.

Singh shows that violence is the normal part of the daily routine of the officials. It is treated as something ordinary and routine and is not seen as an act of abuse and cruelty. In the novel, the magistrate Hukum Chand orders “whip him on his buttocks till he talks” (Singh, 1956, p.58) which shows that violence is regarded as normal rather than extreme and an unusual practice. Althusser argues that state uses direct force to control its public and Singh takes this idea further by showing that violence is not questioned and that the officials show no concern for fairness or basic human rights. Violence and physical punishment are routinely used for obtaining confessions. Any sense of legal protection meant to safeguard individuals is wiped away within this



system. Powerful people and institutions no longer provide justice rather than they use intimidation and coercion as their main tool for enforcing orders.

Singh also argues that violence and torture is not only used to hurt the body, but it is used to humiliate the person's dignity and identity. The sub inspector orders Iqbal to "take off your pyjamas! The sub inspector slapped his khaki trouser with his swagger stick to emphasize the order" (Singh, 1956, p.59). This is not only physical violence to hurt his body, but he also tries to degrade him and to break his spirit. He treated him as if he was an object to be controlled and ashamed of, not a human being with feelings, thoughts and rights. It reveals that the government uses power not only to try to control the voices of ordinary people or prevent them from expressing themselves, but it is also used to shatter their confidence and to break people's inner resolve. It is used to destroy their sense of personal dignity.

Moreover, Singh highlights that the police are not concerned with actual criminals or innocents. If they see anyone as a threat, they can easily arrest him and call him criminal, using their power as an instrument of suppression. Iqbal says, "for anyone they do not like, they have a rule which makes him a bad character and a criminal" (Singh, 1956, p.56). This illustrates that the power is used as a tool to silence targeted individuals rather than uphold justice. It also highlights the RSA's role in maintaining the existing situation by instilling fear and mistrust among the public. Singh further states that India got independence, but common people still face justice and fear from higher authorities. This injustice shifts from British colonial rule to the magistrates and powerful people of India. They have lost the trust of people, like Iqbal says to Meet Singh "I would rather trust you than the police in this free country of ours" (Singh, 1956, p.490). By putting trust in Meet Singh over powerful authorities, Iqbal exposes the corruption of state machinery.

The state violence is also evident in the arrest of Juggut Singh in *Train to Pakistan*. This arrest represents another way through which the police use violence not to treat people with justice but to control them and instill fear in them. The police are aware that the robbery and murdering of Lala Ram Lal are not done by Juggut Singh but still they used force and brutality to arrest him as the text describes "the constables closed round Juggut Singh and started slapping him and kicking him with their thick boots" (Singh, 1956, p.53). They arrest him because he was a notorious *badmash* and it is easy for them to make him guilty. Their goal is not to find the real dacoits or to seek justice but to reinforce the state's authority and remind the ordinary people, especially those who belong to the lower class, that they can be targeted and punished at any moment. Jugga belongs to a poor robber's family which makes him an easy victim. So, the police use such violence to create fear in public, ensuring that they remain obedient and submissive.

Furthermore, authoritative people use language as a tool of state violence. Singh argues that they use vulgar threats and violent imagery even before physical punishment. It begins with words meant to belittle, intimidate, degrade and dehumanize. Language is wielded as a weapon of coercion. Powerful people exploit language to psychologically overpowered suspects, ignoring reasonable investigation. One of the prominent examples from the novel is when the magistrate orders the sub inspector by saying "well, get the names out of him quickly. Beat him if necessary" (Singh, 1956, p.60) and the sub inspector vulgarly threatens him by saying "you want to be whipped on your buttocks or have red chilies put up your rectum before you talk?" (Singh, 1956, p.68). These instances show how RSA uses sexualized violence and degradation to control ordinary people.

Ideological Manipulation and False Narratives (ISA)

Khushwant Singh, in *Train to Pakistan*, shows that how voices changed the



thoughts and action of people around them. There are several reasons why loathing begins among people belonging to different social groups. The sole reason isn't to fight with each other rather a slow and steady change in norms, religious discussions, a change in politics ideologies and blaming one another in front of the public. Initially, village life used to be a peaceful life having harmony and cohesion but with a passage of time, the feeling of terror and distrust approached it. The route behind this scenario was that people started following beliefs without judging their authenticity. Resultantly, this led them to the point where they would call an inaccurate thought an accurate one. Singh believes that this is an unending miserable change. Keeping this situation to us, he informs the readers that rulers as well as cultural factors like norms and religion can divert their followers' attention when they find them in hard times.

Singh shows that police and higher authorities also use ideological manipulation along with violation and physical punishment to influence the minds of ordinary villagers which is clearly reflected in Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses. In the novel, the magistrate and the sub inspector want to evacuate Muslims from Manu Majra but they are aware of the unity and brotherhood between Muslims and Sikhs. If they ask Muslims for the evacuation, Sikhs will clearly resist it. So, they start manipulating the minds of people through their political tactics and rhetorical strategies by spreading doubt and suspicion. The murder of Ram Lal was done by Mali's Sikh gang, but they blame Sultana's Muslim gang to break unity between Muslims and Sikhs. The sub inspector orders the constable to "first take Mali and his men to Mano Majra. Release them here the villagers can see them being released.....Then inquire casually from the villagers if anyone has seen Sultana or any of his gang about" (Singh, 1956, p.103). It was part of their strategy. They do not use direct force and violence but use rhetorical techniques and manipulative questions to show that evil lies in Muslims and that they should be evacuated from the village to protect Sikhs from their evilness. This is how powerful and authoritative people shape the beliefs and minds of people by telling false stories that will help the villagers to allow the evacuation of Muslims. In this way, Singh shows how the ISA works by shaping attitudes and beliefs of ordinary people.

Furthermore, Singh argues that higher authorities and the police are not concerned with truth and facts, but they intentionally try to create lies and spread false information. They create doubts, spread fears among people and make them act in the way the state wants. They represent Iqbal as a member of Muslim League to spread fear among the Sikhs so that they can accept the planned evacuation of Muslims from Mano Majra. The sub inspector orders the head constable: "also inquire from the villagers if they know anything about the mischief the Muslim Leaguer Iqbal had been up to when he was in Mano Majra.", and the head constable replies: "sir, the Babu's name is Iqbal Singh. He is a Sikh" (Singh, 1956, p.103). This clearly supports the concept of ISA that how these apparatuses work by shaping public thinking and spreading false beliefs.

The Interplay of ISA and RSA

Moreover, if their efforts fail, they quickly start giving vulgar threats to control the voices of the public. When the police represent Iqbal as a Muslim, Meet Singh openly protests by saying "Sentry Sahib, the young man you arrested the other day is not a Mussulman. He is a Sikh-Iqbal Singh" (Singh, 1956, p.109). The head constable should respond him with reason, but he stops him angrily "Sentry Sahib, Sentry Sahib, Sentry Sahib...you have been eating my ears with your "Sentry Sahibs".... Did you open the fly-buttons of his pants to see whether he was a Sikh or a Mussulman?" (Singh, 1956, p.110). This clearly shows how ISA and RSA work together and how the police quickly turn from shaping the minds of people through spreading false beliefs to humiliation and vulgar threats.



Conclusion

Khushwant Singh, in his novel *Train to Pakistan*, explores how state power operates through both Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). It shows that government uses different tactics like power and hidden ideas to control the population and use them for their own interests. Powerful groups of the people started manipulating the population by spreading false rumors and fear to control the people's mind and to create tension between communities. For Instance, falsely blamed Sultana's gang and misrepresentation of people like Iqbal. People were not just tortured physically but also mentally. It shows that the government and its system, which should protect justice, are corrupt, unfair and cruel.

Singh's novel illustrates how police can be abusive, vulgar and offensive. Police always try to control people's mindsets by fear and lies but when these don't work, they use force and power. In such circumstances, the train traveling to Pakistan not only revealed the brutality of the state authority during the partition of the subcontinent but also alerted about the misuse of power in any social setup when institutions fail to safeguard the rights of the citizens. The message of the novel is even relevant to today's time that it is the responsibility of everyone to challenge the power when they try to divide, harm and manipulate people.

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