

**UNIT  
12**

**TRAIN TO PAKISTAN BY KHUSHWANT SINGH-  
FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN LITERATURE AND HISTORY**

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: STRUCTURE :  
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**12.0 OBJECTIVES**

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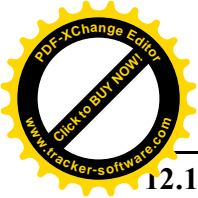
In this Unit we shall;

- discuss the definitions of literature and literary studies,
- discuss the classification of literature,
- understand Indian English Literature,
- discuss the social environment in which the novel is set up,
- try to analyse and understand the degradation of Human values.

**Outcomes :**

At the end of this unit, you will be;

- prepared to understand the relationship between Literature and History from the point of view of Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*,
- well equipped to understand the classification of Literature,
- to comprehend Indian English Literature,
- able to analyse the cause and effects of the aftermath of Partition.



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## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

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### 12.1.1 A brief description on the relation between History and Literature :

The word literature has traditionally been applied to those original works of poetry and prose distinguished by the purposes of their authors and the seeming artistic excellence.

Literature may be classified according to a variety of systems, including language, national origin, historical period, genre, subject matter and geographical regions.

Indian English Literature is the body of work by writers in India who write in English language and whose native language is one of the numerous languages of India. It is frequently referred to as Indo–Anglian literature.

History is the study of past events, particularly in human affairs. It is the whole series of past events connected with a particular person, society or time.

The stories of History are stretched to entertain or preach the audience and make them reflect further. The main difference between history and literature is the purpose of each : History intends to record events as accurately as possible while literature interprets historical events in an imaginative way.

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS–1

<b>ANSWER THE QUESTION GIVEN BELOW.</b>
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1. Write a short note on the Relation between History and Literature.

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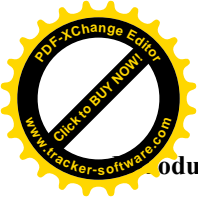
## 12.2 LITERATURE AND HISTORY IN RETROSPECT WITH RESPECT TO KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN*

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History and literature have been intertwined since the very beginning. Real events were narrated as stories to teach the younger generation wisdom or lessons about their origins. Literary text is one of the tools to learn the history as well. It is the indirect way to learn what happened at a certain point of time. All the tales cannot be validated, still they throw light on the then political, social, cultural or religious circumstances. Indian freedom movement and the partition are such historical movements of our history which have left deep scars. The literature of 50s and 60s reflects the then period.

*Train to Pakistan* is an unauthorized social document on the physical and emotional upheavals which were faced by the people living in the frontier during partition. The compassion that one finds in *Train to Pakistan* is that it exceeds the horror and brutality of Partition by giving a glimpse into human destiny.

Khushwant Singh's novel is all about the holocaust that took place in 1947 when India was divided into two countries – Indian and Pakistan.



Partition has left many scars in the hearts of several Indians. The memories and wounds of the tragic period still make people shiver. The book was first published in 1956 when in the backdrop the terrible memories of the holocaust were still afresh. The novel begins with a reference to the Hindu Muslim riots that had torn the nation and set the fire of communalism and terrorism.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-2**

**ANSWER THE QUESTIONS GIVEN BELOW.**

1. What kind of document is the novel *Train to Pakistan*?  
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2. What can one find in the novel?  
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3. What does the novel refer to?  
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4. When was the novel *Train to Pakistan* published?  
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**12.3 AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE THEMES PRESENTED IN THE NOVEL**

Indian literature covers every single aspect, both symbolically and realistically. The writers have tried to mirror the Indian society, their times at large. The events and happenings in India have been successfully projected. Thus, themes in Indian literature have always depicted the ongoing Indian society and the people associated with it.

The story of the *Train to Pakistan* may be fictitious but it is not far from the truth. It represents a true picture of social, economic and political conditions prevailing at the time. It is a story of a region, divided into totally opposite feelings of compassion and revenge, showing typically Indian Society.

The tragic experience of partition, depicting pain, trauma and sufferings of those who had to part from their kith and kins, friends and neighbours; the deepening nostalgia for places of those who had lived in for generations, the traumatic experiences of those countless people who boarded trains thinking they would be transported to the realization of their dreams but of



Whom not a man, woman or child survived the journey. The scale and depth of the tragedy was such that many writers approached the subject of partition with great uneasiness.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS –3**

**ANSWER THE QUESTION GIVEN BELOW.**

1. What picture does the novel *Train to Pakistan* presents?

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2. What kind of story do you think is *Train to Pakistan*?

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3. What are the themes presented in the novel?

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**12.4 OUTLINING THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN***

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In the history of India, the partition of 1947 has been documented as the most deadly incident the entire humanity has ever witnessed.

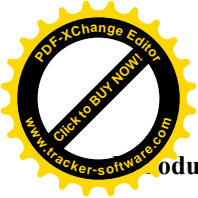
Politically, it has been an event with lasting impact of horror and emotional threat which touched the lives of millions of common people throughout the country who were suddenly forced to choose a country on the basis of religious ideologies. It was a geographical dislocation of the lives of those who had to rebuild their lives after a total destruction of their identities.

The Partition, in the mind of Khushwant Singh is not just a catastrophic event that needed to be recorded but more a phenomenon to be explored and theorized that informed and defined the social, political, cultural and religious realities on the Indian subcontinent

**12.4.1 The Social Milieu :**

In *Train to Pakistan* the social environment reveals that Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims made the traditional structures of the Punjabi society in the pre-partition India. Culture, language and customs contributed to the larger Punjabi identity, though at a certain level, religion divided those into communal groupings almost separate identities. Another identity is a tense emotional belongingness to the village. It operated at the immediate level which gave shape to the separate religious identities. Mano Majra, the focal point of *Train to Pakistan* is by and large a typical of the rural Punjabi life. In view of economic and cultural backwardness Mano Majra is like any other village in the sub- continent.

*Train to Pakistan* by  
 Khushwant Singh – from  
 the point of view of  
 Relationship between  
 Literature and History



The Punjab rural people are not at all prepared for the big holocaust which the partition proved to be. It came as a big blow to the Indian rural life. The people are caught in a disaster beyond their understanding.

Khuswant Singh sketches some very divergent characters some weak and some very strong which are types and individuals. He hints at their complexity and does not intend to develop them fully. The novel portrays sincere belief in traditional, moral and social stands of Indian society.

Though there is a feeling that his characters are hemmed in by their environment and traditions. Khushwant Singh puts the microscope on the then Indian society through his spokesman, Iqbal to criticise different evil customs that were running rampant.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-4**

**ANSWER THE QUESTION GIVEN BELOW.**

- 1. What contributed to the pre-partition Punjabi Sikh society ?

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**12.4.2 Horror and Violence :**

Dacoity in the first part of the novel is a significant beginning. It is a prelude to actions on other levels too. It introduces a character Juggut Singh as a confirmed criminal who had been released for his good behaviour.

The morning after the dacoity the Mano Majra railway station is more crowded than usual.

The trains also present scene of horror “they were crowded with Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan or Muslims from India. People perched on the roofs with their legs dangling or on bedsteads wedged in between the bogies. Some of them rode precariously on the buffers.” (p-32).

Again a horrifying scene is presented in the second part of the novel,” The arrival of the Ghost train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Majra. People stood on their roofs to see what was happening at the station.”(p-78).

After the cremation of the massacred corpses the village was stilled in a deathly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odour was. The sight of so many dead had at first produced cold numbness.”(p-84).

In the last part of the novel train loads of people coming over to Mano Majra is the centre of horror. The river Sutlej is flooded with corpses. The people are inside doors and are left to pray and wait.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – 5**

**ANSWER THE QUESTIONS GIVEN BELOW.**

- 1. What does the arrival of the train present?

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Describe the Ghost train's arrival at Mano Majra station?

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3. Write a note on the silence of the village after the cremation of the corpses?

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**12.4.3 Symbolism in the Novel :**

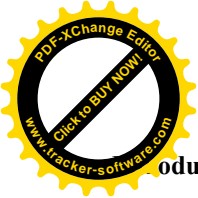
The novel *Train to Pakistan* is divided into four parts : Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra, & Karma, all parts having a symbolical significance.

**12.4.3.1 Dacoity :** The first part constitutes a true to life description of an actually committed Dacoity but it echoes far beyond the inhuman and cruel actions of Malli and his gang. It symbolizes that the humanity has been deprived of its values. The dacoity is a material expression of our inner and spiritual deprivation.

**12.4.3.2 Kalyug :** The second part Kalyug is named after the Hindu's religious and theological concept. It represents the last phase in the four cycles of existence. At the time of partition in both India and Pakistan there was darkness everywhere. Millions were uprooted from their homes and hearts. This part of the novel is symbolical of inner blackness of human heart and the darkness all around the whole of India and Pakistan.

**12.4.3.3 Mano Majra :** The third part is Mano Majra. Every region has a population which can be easily recognized by its structure, language, gait and the dress code. Mano Majrans reflect the pristine culture of India. It is the focal point in the sequence of events in the novel. It is deeply rooted in the very structure of the novel. The small world of this village is invaded by the larger world of India Pakistan division. The symbol of this intrusion is the train loads of corpses from Pakistan & India. The engine of the train has taken hold of man and the engine and the bulldozer have succeeded in dehumanizing us. The realities of human relationships break here and the Muslims decide to leave Mano Majra for safety at the Chandannagar refugee camp. The Sikhs feel that after all the bulbul does not sing always and the spring does not leave for ever.

**12.4.3.4 Karma :** The fourth part is Karma which is significant enough. It has double bearing in the narrative strategy. Karma denotes the totality of a person's action in one of the successive cycles of his existence. It determines man's fate in his next phase of life. It may also be used to denote the unpredictable ways of fate or wheels of fortune. It also indicates the Indian way of life in relation to man's experience with the unknown cosmic design stored for him.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – 6**

**ANSWER THE QUESTIONS GIVEN BELOW.**

1. What are the four parts of the novel?  
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2. What does the first chapter constitute of?  
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3. How does the writer justify the name 'Kalyug' for chapter two?  
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4. What does Mano Majra symbolize in the novel?  
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5. Bring out the significance of the fourth chapter 'Karma'.  
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**12.5 SYMBOLISM IN CHARACTERS**

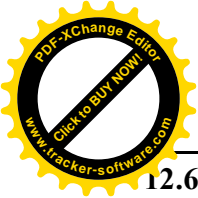
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The major characters of Mano Majra are also symbolical to some extent. Meet Singh an affectionate man, Imam a religious man, Iqbal Singh is a fortune or a compromise, Hukum Chand is a ruler who rules Mano Majra, Nooran is peerless, Haseena is lovely, Ramlal a custodian of gems, Malli is mean, Juggut is a jewel for humanity, Banta Singh is the maker of the village . Thus the characters are the symbols of good or bad, health or wealth, and virtues and vices.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS–7**

**ANSWER THE QUESTION GIVEN BELOW.**

1. Write the symbolism of the major characters of the novel ?  
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## 12.6 SYMBOLISM AND NATURE

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The symbolism of rain is also an important aspect of atmosphere in the novel. The first rain after the summer is very joyful but the thunder and lightning follows as the season advances, the towns and villages are swallowed by the rising rivers. The rain is the source of life on the earth but it also creates death and destruction. “With the monsoon, the tempo of life and death increases.” (p-92)

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS– 8

**ANSWER THE QUESTION BELOW.**

1. Bring out the symbolism of rain in the novel.

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## 12.7 KEY WORDS

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- History** : the study of past events, particularly human history
- Literature** : a written work considered to be of lasting merit
- Social Milieu** : the immediate physical and social setting in which people live
- Horror** : an intense feeling of fear
- Violence** : behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt
- Symbolism** : indirect suggestions used to express emotions, ideas or state of mind

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## 2.8 LET US SUM UP

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The human values in *Train to Pakistan* are profound, moving and erudite on different facets of 20th century cultural changes. It is an explanation of one of the most moving and tragic events of contemporary Indian history. It is in the background of the great human catastrophe of the partition of India and the ghastly events that followed. It is perhaps one of the most telling contradiction of certain types of pacifism, lure of violence and the paradox of heroism. Thus a great novel of partition and its tone reflects much of the suspicion and fear generated as the result of the communal massacres of 1947.

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## 12.9 BOOKS SUGGESTED

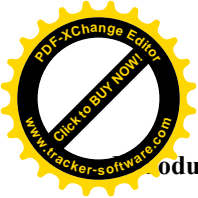
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