



Communism and Complexity: A dichotomous study of Iqbal Singh in Khushwant Singh's Novel, *Train to Pakistan*

Imran Ahmad Sheikh, Khushi

Post-graduate Scholar, Department of English, Central University of Jammu, India.

Received: 25 Jan 2024; Received in revised form: 01 Mar 2024; Accepted: 08 Mar 2024; Available online: 16 Mar 2024

©2024 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— This research paper delves into the complex character of Iqbal Singh in “Train to Pakistan.” As a representative of the People’s Party of India and a communist, he is dispatched to Mano Majra to address socio-economic issues. The narrative explores his interactions, distinct urban traits, and the challenges he faces in a rural setting. Iqbal’s commitment to communism is evident as he discusses poverty, corruption, and societal disparities. His perspective on crime emphasizes its societal roots, challenging conventional views on criminality. The paper also highlights Iqbal’s views on population control, hygiene, and his disillusionment with societal norms. The character’s disdain for Indian cultural aspects, including religion, Yoga, art, and music, reflects his staunch communist ideology. His skepticism towards metaphysical beliefs and indifference to values underscore a profound internal conflict. The narrative delves into Iqbal’s encounters with the police, his detention, and the societal issues he grapples with in Mano Majra. The research elucidates Iqbal’s role as a missionary striving to avert violence during the partition, emphasizing his dedication to communism. However, it notes his limited understanding of India’s diverse religious traditions, exposing a certain immaturity in his perspective. Overall, the paper navigates Iqbal’s multifaceted character, exploring the intersections of ideology, social dynamics, and personal growth within the context of “Train to Pakistan.”



Keywords— Iqbal Singh, Train to Pakistan, Communism, Socio-economic issues, Mano Majra, Poverty, Corruption, Crime, Partition, Religious traditions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan" weaves a compelling narrative set against the backdrop of the harrowing partition of India in 1947. Within this tumultuous landscape, the character of Iqbal Singh emerges as a key figure representing both the political and ideological forces shaping the destiny of Mano Majra, a village on the banks of the Sutlej River. Iqbal, an ardent follower of communist ideals, becomes a harbinger of change, dispatched to address the socio-economic challenges gripping the rural community.

As the People’s Party of India's emissary, Iqbal Singh serves as a lens through which the narrative explores the intricacies of societal upheaval and individual transformation. His mission in Mano Majra transcends mere political advocacy;

it encapsulates the broader struggle for justice, equality, and the mitigation of inevitable bloodshed accompanying the partition. The introduction of Iqbal Singh marks a juncture where political ideologies intersect with the lived experiences of a community on the brink of irrevocable change.

This research endeavours to delve into the layers of Iqbal Singh's character, unravelling the intricacies of his persona as shaped by his communist beliefs, interactions with the local populace, and the challenges posed by the complex socio-political landscape. Through a meticulous examination of Iqbal's actions, dialogues, and interactions, this study seeks to illuminate not only the character's individual evolution but also the broader thematic undercurrents that define "Train to Pakistan" as a poignant

exploration of human resilience amidst the turbulence of history.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research employs a qualitative approach, analysing Iqbal's character traits, actions, and dialogues to understand his role in the novel. Primary focus is placed on textual analysis, extracting nuanced details from the narrative to unravel the complexities of Iqbal's character. The study incorporates relevant passages and dialogues to support key findings.

Additionally, the research contextualizes Iqbal's character within the broader historical and socio-political landscape depicted in the novel. The methodology involves examining critical perspectives and literary critiques to enrich the understanding of Iqbal Singh's significance in "Train to Pakistan." This comprehensive approach aims to provide a nuanced and insightful exploration of Iqbal's character and its implications within the larger framework of the novel.

III. DISCUSSION

Iqbal Singh, an adherent of communist ideology, represents the People's Party of India, as he is dispatched to the rural environs of Mano Majra with the mission of arousing the local peasantry to their socio-economic predicament, galvanizing them to champion the cause of justice. Upon arriving in Mano Majra, Singh, possessing scant knowledge about the village, confronts the immediate concern of securing lodging. Inquiring of the Station Master regarding available accommodations, Singh, despite potential exasperation stemming from the official's preoccupations or protocol limitations, receives valuable guidance. The Station Master, albeit begrudgingly, discloses the option of seeking refuge in the Sikh temple, identifiable by a conspicuous yellow flag adorning its apex. The unfamiliar traveller successfully locates the temple without incident.

Iqbal exhibits distinctive characteristics that set him apart from the inhabitants of Mano Majra, as meticulously delineated by the novelist. His urban accent, attire, and demeanour serve as distinctive markers, drawing attention from the local populace upon his emergence from the station. Manifesting an upright gait reminiscent of a soldier, he experiences a palpable awareness of the scrutiny directed towards him. Despite initial hesitation upon entering the temple, Bhai Meet Singh's candid hospitality quickly alleviates Iqbal's reservations, prompting him to decline a food offer with polite gratitude, citing provisions he brought. Subsequently, Iqbal finds accommodation in a spare room facilitated by Bhai Meet Singh.

In due course, Iqbal initiates formal introductions with Meet Singh and elucidates the purpose behind his presence in the village. Despite the potential diversity of Iqbal's religious affiliation—be it Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh—Bhai Meet Singh, discerning from Iqbal's direct approach to the Sikh temple, unswervingly concludes that Iqbal is indeed a Sikh. Iqbal Singh, whose religious observances include shorn hair and a shaven beard due to purportedly limited religious sentiments, apprises Bhai Meet Singh of his role as a "social worker" dispatched by his political party. The primary objective of his mission is to forestall the imminent bloodshed anticipated in the border village consequent to the partition of the country.

Expressing concern over the ongoing violence accompanying the partition, Iqbal underscores the necessity for intervention. He conveys the imperative assigned to him by his party, emphasizing the criticality of Mano Majra as a pivotal locus for refugees and the potentially catastrophic consequences of turmoil in this strategic locale. Iqbal unequivocally characterizes his mission as altruistic, clarifying that he receives no remuneration beyond covering his expenses. The narrative underscores his status as a missionary rather than a mere employee, a distinction further underscored by his unmarried status, aligning with the conventional expectations of a missionary. At the age of twenty-seven, Iqbal's youthfulness is emphasized, reinforcing the notion of a dedicated young man dispatched on a mission to avert violence in Mano Majra, particularly in light of the expected influx of refugees seeking retribution for perceived injustices perpetrated by Muslims in Pakistan.

In a discourse with Bhai Meet Singh, Iqbal discerns his ethical convictions. Meet Singh asserts that Christians are morally deficient due to the alleged promiscuity of Sahibs and their wives. Individuals like Meet Singh, lacking intimate knowledge of the Christian lifestyle abroad, erroneously perceive them as engaging in spousal exchange, a misconception not applicable to the Christian populace at large. Iqbal, in response, asserts, "But they do not tell lies like we do, and they are not corrupt and dishonest as so many of us are."

Iqbal, entrenched in a communistic ideology, promptly asserts, "Morality is a matter of affluence. Impoverished individuals cannot afford moral standards, hence resort to religion." He distinguishes between morality and religion, asserting that the former is a malleable code of conduct subject to climatic and economic variations, while the latter remains immutable across circumstances and societal strata. Consequently, he contends that religion is prone to obsolescence and harm, thereby abstaining from any religious faith. The nomenclature "Iqbal," shared by

Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, deliberately obscures his religious proclivities.

However, he promptly transitions to the broader issue of widespread poverty, expressing to Meet Singh, "Our primary concern lies in ameliorating the conditions of the populace by addressing their fundamental needs in food, clothing, and comfort. Such rectification necessitates the cessation of exploitation by the affluent class and the abolition of landlordism. The requisite transformation can only be achieved through governmental restructuring." It is evident that Iqbal's perspectives on the eradication of poverty find widespread acknowledgment, as socioeconomic disparities intensify with the affluent accruing more wealth, exacerbating the plight of the impoverished. Iqbal, a devoted proponent of communism, articulates his socialist ideologies emphatically. Subsequently, Iqbal directs attention to the prevalent corruption within the police department, lamenting, "The police system, rather than safeguarding citizens, engages in maltreatment while thriving on corruption and bribery." Iqbal articulates these sentiments promptly after his encounter with Bhai Meet Singh, underscoring his profound discontent with the prevailing societal framework.

Upon receiving information from Meet Singh regarding the dacoity and homicide within Ram Lal's residence, allegedly orchestrated by Jugga Badmash, Iqbal expounds, "There is no inherent criminality in an individual's lineage, just as there is no innate virtue in the ancestry of others." Seizing the moment, he articulates his core hypothesis, asserting that the imposition of gallows or prison cells alone does not deter homicide or theft. Iqbal contends, "They execute a man daily in the province, yet ten succumb to murder every twenty-four hours. Criminals, Bhaiji, are not inherently predisposed; they evolve through the crucibles of hunger, deprivation, and societal injustice." It remains an acknowledged truth that an individual veers toward criminality only when financial constraints prevent the fulfilment of basic needs. Widespread consensus acknowledges that societal inequities contribute to hunger and poverty. Communists, in response, vehemently oppose the capitalistic inclination to deprive labourers of their rightful share in profits.

Upon disembarking from the train at the Bombay station, Iqbal is confronted with throngs of individuals on the quayside, in the streets, and on railway platforms. Even during nocturnal hours, the pavements remain densely populated. Contemplating this situation, he contemplates the implications of a burgeoning population, surmising that the incessant rise, averaging six individuals per minute and five million annually, renders any strategic planning in industry and agriculture futile. Iqbal advocates for

redirecting efforts towards population control, questioning the feasibility of meaningful initiatives in a nation culturally rooted in the Kama Sutra, characterized by phallic worship, and venerating the son cult. His musings on the predicament underscore a scientific approach to the issue of population explosion.

Iqbal harbours a pronounced aversion toward the deficiency of hygienic practices among the Indian populace. With discerning vigilance, he conscientiously introduces a tablet of chlorine into the potable water presented to him by Bhai Meet Singh, having observed the latter's immersion of unclean nails into the water. Furthermore, Iqbal notes the absence of chlorination in the well from which the water is drawn. Subsequently, when the Lambardar proffers a glass of milk concealed beneath a soiled handkerchief, he compounds the hygiene transgression by stirring the milk with his forefinger. Adding to the egregious display, the Lambardar employs his forefinger to extract a portion of clotted cream, ostentatiously returning it to the milk as a purported demonstration of its quality. Iqbal, cognizant of the imperatives of hygiene, discreetly disposes of the contaminated milk in the drain subsequent to the Lambardar's departure. Iqbal, possessing an erudite disposition, comprehends the indispensability of hygiene in the fabric of daily life.

Iqbal seizes the opportunity to articulate his views on liberty and the struggle for freedom. The Lambardar inquires into the imperative for the British withdrawal from India. Iqbal conspicuously neglects to acknowledge Mahatma Gandhi's role in the independence movement, attributing all accolades to the Indian National Army, established by the Japanese. Iqbal specifically underscores the belief held by the Japanese that Indian forces would refrain from harming their compatriots. However, he omits any mention of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, the progenitor of the Indian National Army. Iqbal posits that the English evacuation was compelled by apprehension, asserting that Indian soldiers refrained from firing upon fellow Indians enlisted in the Indian National Army.

The Lambardar Inquires about the potential benefits of attaining freedom, contemplating whether it would result in an increase in land and livestock. A dissenting Muslim voice asserts that freedom may not yield tangible gains for the masses, positing that it is intended for the educated Indians who actively fought for it. The speaker laments that transitioning from English rule merely shifts the subjugation to either educated Indians or Pakistanis. Iqbal aligns himself with this viewpoint, emphasizing the communist perspective that foresees the disenfranchisement of peasants and laborers from their rightful share in profits. In a distinctly communistic address, Iqbal rallies the

peasants and workers, urging them to unite and confront the dominance of the Bania Congress. He advocates for the elimination of the aristocracy, asserting that genuine freedom encompasses expanded land holdings, increased livestock, and liberation from debt. Iqbal's discourse reveals his commitment to communism, as he endeavours to galvanize the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, utilizing this occasion to disseminate his ideological message.

Iqbal is afforded periodicals within the detention facility alongside some furnishings, inclusive of a charpai. Conversely, Jugga is relegated to repose upon the unyielding cement floor. This juxtaposition evokes a broader cognizance in him, resonating with the pervasive societal differentiations extant throughout India. This hierarchical demarcation extends beyond the confines of detainment, as evidenced by the allocation of distinct parking spaces for civil servants predicated upon their seniority. Furthermore, facilities such as lavatories are stratified in a hierarchical manner, delineated as Senior Officers, Junior Officers, Clerks, Stenographers, and other ranks. Subsequently, his disenchantment becomes manifest in his aversion to the stereotypical content prevalent in the periodicals.

In a state of disdain, he peruses the matrimonial supplement, only to encounter a disheartening revelation that the criteria sought by young men for a prospective partner mirror the ubiquity found in mainstream news outlets. Preferences for virginal status, proficiency in domestic affairs, and an apparent indifference to physical beauty suggest a conformity to societal norms, echoing the novelist's insight that beauty is merely superficial. Certain individuals, exhibiting a more progressive mindset, may consider widows as potential spouses, albeit with the condition of their unspoiled status. Photographic evidence is not a priority, yet there is a prevalent inclination towards the scrutiny of horoscopes, as a prevailing belief holds that 'astronomical harmony' supersedes mutual understanding in securing matrimonial bliss. The periodicals he surveys feature repetitive content, such as articles on well-explored subjects like Ajanta Cave frescoes, Tagore, and Prem Chand's stories. Iqbal, being of youthful and contemporary disposition, finds himself disinterested in these trite themes, expressing a preference for articles exploring subjects like Marx, Gorky, and other intellectually stimulating topics.

Iqbal is profoundly dismayed by his arbitrary arrest, noting with concern the apparent absence of a justifiable cause. He observes that the constables, in a flagrant transgression of legal norms, spontaneously drafted his arrest warrant on-site, an occurrence emblematic of the reputed unlawful practices within the Indian police force. Faced with this unjust situation, Iqbal expresses his intent to initiate a

Habeas Corpus petition, seeking legal recourse to compel the police to present him before the judiciary. However, his admonition is met with dismissive incredulity from the constables, who cavalierly assert that he remains oblivious to the prevailing methods of law enforcement.

Iqbal expresses strong disapproval of the prevalent fixation on sexuality within the Indian context. When Jugga learns of Iqbal's prolonged residence in European countries, he speculates that Iqbal may have engaged in intimate relations with multiple European women. Iqbal finds such observations vexatious, questioning the propriety of delving into an individual's private life. Furthermore, he laments the narrow focus of individuals like Jugga, emphasizing that the Indian society at large exhibits an overarching preoccupation with matters of a sexual nature beyond Jugga's individual preoccupations.

Iqbal discerns the presence of public displays, commonly in urban locales, endorsing aphrodisiacs and remedies for the perceived adverse effects of masturbation. Additionally, vendors peddle oils derived from sand lizards, purportedly possessing the capability to augment the dimensions of the male organ. Iqbal expounds, "No community exhibits casual recourse to incestuous abuse to the extent witnessed among the Indian populace." Jugga unabashedly boasts of instances where women, having experienced his phallic prowess, implore him to withdraw, exclaiming 'Toba, Toba.' Iqbal expresses his disdain for such vulgar trivialities, contending that the Indian society displays an undue preoccupation with matters of a sexual nature.

Iqbal, informed by Bhai Meet Singh, discerns an imminent threat to Muslim evacuees destined for Pakistan via the morning train, facing the prospect of a massacre. Recognizing the need for preventive measures, Iqbal solicits Bhai Meet Singh's intervention, who, cognizant of the vengeful nature of the perpetrators, deems his influence ineffective. Confronted with the responsibility of thwarting the atrocity, Iqbal contemplates his course of action. Bhai Meet Singh, having discharged his duty in delineating moral imperatives, acknowledges his inability to restrain those intent on wrongdoing. Acutely aware of his status as a stranger, Iqbal anticipates the futility of his attempts to dissuade the assailants, apprehensive that intervening may lead to his own demise, rendering his sacrifice devoid of societal impact.

Contemplating the irreparable nature of the situation, Iqbal entertains the notion of dismantling existing structures and initiating reconstruction. Consequently, he arrives at the decision to forgo intervention in the unfolding events.

As a committed communist, Iqbal disparages all religions, reducing Hinduism to 'caste and cow protection,' constraining Islam to 'circumcision and Kosher meat,'

characterizing Sikhism as mere 'long hair and animosity towards Muslims,' denoting Christianity as, at best, 'Hinduism with a sola topee,' and limiting Parsi faith to 'fire worship and vulture feeding.' Rooted in his communist disdain for religious beliefs, Iqbal selectively perceives the negative facets of various faiths.

The individual in question exhibits an evident lack of comprehension regarding the considerable benefits attributed to the universally acclaimed discipline of Yoga. In response, he resorts to derisive commentary, characterizing it as a mere pursuit of financial gain and dismissively caricaturing its physical postures. Furthermore, he disparages the concept of rebirth or reincarnation, contending that its authenticity lacks substantiation. Subsequently, he extends his critique to the Eastern cultural ethos, dismissively attributing it to blind faith devoid of rational thought, thereby eschewing the essential role of contemplation within a philosophical framework. Ultimately, he unequivocally condemns Yoga as a deceitful endeavor, asserting its sustained existence is contingent upon the gullibility of the populace.

The subject's aversion extends beyond Yoga to encompass a broad rejection of elements intrinsic to Indian culture, including art and music, which he dismisses with scorn. His antipathy is expressed through rhetorical questioning of the success of contemporary Indian artistic pursuits on a global scale. This animosity towards Indian cultural expressions is further compounded by his disdain for adhering to societal norms, characterizing such compliance as an act of cowardice when disavowing belief in both society and its standards.

In matters of metaphysical belief, the subject displays a pronounced skepticism, rejecting faith in both God and humanity. The pervasive disorder and confusion in the world preclude any reliance on divine or human assistance. The perpetual conflict between good and evil, with uncertain outcomes, leaves the subject in a state of indecision regarding the guiding principles for his own life. In response, he adopts a stance of apathy, cultivating a profound indifference to all values, proclaiming the insignificance of everything.

Iqbal, identified as a dedicated adherent of communism, embarks on a mission to prevent potential mass atrocities in Mano Majra, a village on the Sutlej River. His exposure to European countries and the influence of communism have contributed to a disdain for Indian cultural attributes, particularly its perspectives on sex, religion, and morality. The narrative unfolds with Iqbal's adversarial relationship with the Indian police, who alter his identity and faith, leading to unwarranted arrest and detention. Despite his fervour for life and missionary zeal, Iqbal's perspective

remains insufficiently mature to appreciate the profound philosophical underpinnings of India's diverse religious traditions, exemplified by luminaries such as Buddha, Nanak, and Chaitanya.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the character analysis of Iqbal Singh in "Train to Pakistan" reveals a nuanced portrayal of an individual navigating the tumultuous historical landscape of India's partition. Iqbal's commitment to communism, his mission in Mano Majra, and his interactions with the local community provide a lens through which the complexities of ideology, societal dynamics, and individual growth are explored.

While Iqbal emerges as a catalyst for change, the narrative does not shy away from depicting the limitations in his understanding of India's diverse religious traditions. This aspect introduces a layer of realism to his character, highlighting the challenges of reconciling political ideology with the rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity.

The research, conducted through qualitative analysis and contextualization within the historical and socio-political framework, contributes to a deeper understanding of Iqbal Singh's character. As a literary figure, Iqbal embodies the struggle for justice and socio-economic equity, but his journey also underscores the inherent complexities and limitations within individuals when confronted with the multifaceted realities of a changing society. The unbiased examination of Iqbal Singh's character allows readers to appreciate the intricacies of human nature and ideology in the face of historical upheaval.

REFERENCES

- [1] Sengupta, Somini, "Bearing Steady Witness To Partition's Wounds," an article in the Arts section, *The New York Times*, September 21, 2006, pages E1, E7
- [2] Lance Truong, "Character Development" An excerpt from A writing assignment, St. Paul College, September 16, 2006
- [3] Book Review: Khuswants Singh's 'Train to Pakistan'. *India Today*. Retrieved 1 October 2014.
- [4] Singh, Khushwant (1956). *Train to Pakistan*. Penguin Books. Pp. 4–5.
- [5] "Train To Pakistan, Hindi Play". *Delhi Events*. Retrieved 2021-09-10.
- [6] Reshma Singh. "Partition and Train to Pakistan." *Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature*, vol. 6, no. 4, Research Walkers, Apr. 2023, pp. 74–79, doi:10.51879/pijssl/060410.
- [7] Dipak A. Joshi. "Politics of Affect in Train to Pakistan and Tamas." *Contemporary Research*, vol. 4, no. 1, Nepal Journals Online, Nov. 2020, pp. 59–75, doi:10.3126/craiaj.v4i1.32730.

- [8] Alka Bansal. "Train to Pakistan: A Saga of Unsalvaged Suffering." *Smart Moves Journal Ijellh*, vol. 9, no. 7, Smart Moves, July 2021, pp. 41–55, doi:10.24113/ijellh.v9i7.11118.
- [9] "Communal Frenzy in Khushwant Singh's Novel Train to Pakistan." *Journal of arts, literature, humanities and social sciences*, vol. 37, Apr. 2019, pp. 517–24, doi:10.33193/jalhss.37.25.
- [10] Milind Kantilal Solanki, and Pratap B. Ratad. "Hostility and Violence as Consequences of Turbulent Partition in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan." *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, vol. 4, no. 5, AI Publications, Jan. 2019, pp. 1274–77, doi:10.22161/ijels.45.5.
- [11] P.R.V.N.Kesava Kumar. "ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND MASS MIGRATION: A STUDY ON 'TRAIN TO PAKISTAN' BY KUSHWANT SINGH." Zenodo (Cern European Organization for Nuclear Research), CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research, Sept. 2021, doi:10.5281/zenodo.5508678.
- [12] Ashfaque Ahmad Shovon. "Depiction of Post-Partition Violence in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan." *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, vol. 7, no. 6, AI Publications, Jan. 2022, pp. 144–47, doi:10.22161/ijels.76.20.
- [13] Smt. Sudha Kumari. "Exploring the Elements Dichotomy of Human Relations in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan." *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 7, no. 5, Perception Publishing, Oct. 2022, pp. 151–56, doi:10.53032/tcl.2022.7.5.15.
- [14] Ira Sarma. "Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan and Margaret Bourke-White's Partition Photographs: Clash of Narratives or Postmemory Project?" *Cracow Indological Studies*, vol. 17, no. 17, Księgarnia Akademicka, Jan. 2015, pp. 269–92, doi:10.12797/cis.17.2015.17.14.
- [15] Syrrina Ahsan Ali Haque. "Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan: The Heteroglot World of Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus in a Sikh Village." *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics*, vol. 1, EJournal Publishing, Jan. 2015, pp. 280–83, doi:10.18178/ijll.2015.1.4.53.
- [16] Zarina Qasim. "Portrayal of Female Characters in Train to Pakistan: An Anti-Feminist and Reader-Response Perspective." *Vol. 6, Mar. 2022*, pp. 26–43, doi:10.33195/jll.v6ii.316.