



## Portrayal of Female Characters in *Train to Pakistan*: An Anti-Feminist, Reader-Response Exploration

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### Abstract

The study explores the portrayal of women in *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh. The study examines the ideological assumptions of patriarchy through the representation of women as being seductive and angelic characters by a male author through the lens of Reader-Response Theory along with the Anti-Feminist Theory. The study analyzes the novel from the prospective of a female reader to investigate the tone of the writer to assess how unrealistically female characters are presented in the novel. Khushwant Singh has presented the women traditionally in negative roles, negating all kinds of freedom and liberation to them. He has presented the women as alluring and charming whose purpose is to get the attention of the men for the sake of getting money, by completely negating the lustful and manipulative nature of the men who are exploiting women by taking benefit of their weakness. Nooran has been presented as unfaithful and disloyal to her father because of having an illicit relationship with a dacoit. Haseena is presented as a sixteen-year-old prostitute, serving a man as old as her father just to get money. Juggut's mother is an angelic woman who is serving her child, enduring his all kinds of disrespect, insults, and humiliations. The study proves to be significant to understand the general and typical view of the men towards the women as the ones whose primary role is to serve their male counterparts socially, physically, emotionally, and sexually and to be faithful and committed to them.

**Keywords:** Femme Fatale, Objectification, Woman as Reader Approach, Patriarchy, Feminist Perspective

### Introduction

Contemporary feminism is a historically specific movement. It may be viewed as a rapidly developing major critical ideology. Its developmental stages have historically been dependent on and in tension with male-centered political and intellectual discourse; however, its more recent manifestations transcend the former. As a philosophy of life, it opposes women's subordination to men in the family and society, along with men's claim to define what is best for women without consulting them; thereby offering a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization, and control mechanism. Feminist critics gave forth an effective feminist theory for analyzing the literary text and unveiling the way women were being portrayed in literature. Feminist critics emerged as an offshoot of the Women's Liberation Movement. As Purohit (2012) attributes women's liberation movement as a motivation to draw connections between women's own work and their own lives.

The objectives of the Feminist theory were to develop and uncover a female



tradition of writing, to interpret symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view, to rediscover old texts, to analyze women writers and their writings from a female perspective, to resist sexism in literature, and to increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style. Feminist critics also openly challenged and disrupted the logo centric tradition. This started with a number of notable books in 1970's. These include Patricia Meyer's *The Female Imagination* (1975) which dealt with English and American novels of the past three hundred years. Another important work in this regard is Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) that describes the female tradition in the English novel from the Brontes onward as a development of subculture; and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2020) studies the major female writers of the 19th century.

Feminist movement not only objected to the maltreatment of women in real life but in literature as well. The present study is an attempt to explore the representation of women at the time of partition by a male author. The novel under study is *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh. The story moves around a village, Mano Majra half a mile away from Suttlej, where Sikhs and Muslims have lived together in peace for hundreds of years. Then one day, at the end of the summer, the "Train" arrives, a silent, incredible funeral train loaded with the bodies of thousands of refugees, bringing the village its first taste of the horrors of the civil war. *Train to Pakistan*, is a story of this isolated village that is plunged into the abyss of religious hate. There is also a love story of a Sikh boy and a Muslim girl. However, the most important aspect of the novel is the portrayal of women. Khushwant Singh presents the female characters in a stereotypical way that reflects the mindset of a patriarchic society. This study tries to uncover all the hidden ideologies behind the text through investigating the portrayal of women in the novel. The research has focused on the study of female characters in the novel and analyzes the way in which they are treated as compared to male characters.

The study investigates the selected text to find the answers to the following questions:

1. How are the female characters portrayed?
2. What is the underlying tone of the writer as revealed by the conceptualization and evaluation of the female characters in the text?

This particular research is going to be significant in letting the readers unfold how women are shown as seductress by the male writer in making the readers perceive women as alluring for the men to get their interests fulfilled. Moreover, the study



contributes to the research focused on the application of anti-feminist theory on South Asian literature. Finally, the study challenges the general attitude towards the women as being beautiful angels whose duty is just to serve the men. The study attempts to help the readers develop their understanding about the negative attitudes of the male writers towards the women by portraying them in negative roles which reflect their stereotypical perceptions about women.

### **Literature Review**

The partition of India is generally considered to be the partition of the whole sub-continent along with the sectarian lines because India had gained its freedom and independence from the British Empire. Khushwant Singh has mainly focused on the physical torture of the people belonging to different communities as well as the emotional and psychological outburst of them during the partition and division of the regions of Pakistan and India. He has presented a clear picture of the separation of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. He explored some of the major issues that were emerging at that time by portraying the devastating picture of independence followed by the partition (Dar, 2013).

The novel is describing the story of political disillusionment as well as the violence and hatred throughout the horrible days of partition of British India. Everything seems to be fake and disillusioned and nobody was trustworthy. The partition and its devastation had touched the whole country. Everyone was under the effects of the partition which has been depicted by Singh in detail (Kanimozhi & Literature, n.d.). Khushwant Singh was one of the respected leading figures in India for being a diplomat, journalist, historian, and editor as well. It is really a valuable social and political work of literature in which the characters are clearly described with respect to their passions and emotions of love and revenge (Dhanju, 2019).

People can easily get a glimpse of the everyday and ordinary lived experiences of the people during partition and independence. As it has been written almost ten years after the partition of sub-continent so it can be considered as an account of the way it was witnessed at that time and the way its horrible and fearful events are still remembered after partition. A shifted view is presented through the train because previously it has been considered as a train carrying the people and the goods across the borders but now it has become a train carrying the dead bodies (Virdee & Safdar, 2017).

Different multi-religious and multi-cultural groups had been existing in the sub-continent for centuries. This novel is the representation of different ethnic groups where



there were huge dialogic possibilities. Muslims and Hindus had lived like brothers and they had very close relationships. In the end, Juggut struggled hard to save hundreds of Muslims just for the purpose of saving Nooran, his Muslim lover. Similarly, Hukum chand tried his best to save a Muslim prostitute, Haseena. Through the distinctness of voices and actions of all the characters, Singh has tried to show the possibilities of integration and interaction among the different groups (Ahsan & Haque, 2015).

As usual during the time of partition the weaker segments of the society and the innocent people have suffered a lot as compared to those who were the reason for partition. Singh has painted the picture of violence and bloodshed very realistically to show the condition of violence and horror. The feelings of love and passion have won in a chaotic situation of war and terror even among the people of different religious groups. Common people have to leave their homes and their properties for the sake of saving their lives in the country. He has indirectly shown the power of the people in status and the situation of love and pleasure among the people (Sharma, 2019).

At the time of partition when everyone was in rage and anger and engaged in killing the people of the other religions, the women and the girls significantly suffered. They were raped and killed by the brutals and the people who were thirsty of blood of humanity. At the same time, there were some of the people like Juggut Singh who went against their own communities just to save his love and commitment for his lover who now belonged to the nation of enemy. He went against his own people when he found out that his love was suffering in the name of religious and cultural clashes. Just because of the power of love and compassion, he sacrificed his own life for the survival and the well-being of the people belonging to the culture and religion of his lover (Sehrawat, 2013).

Singh has given a patriarchal representation of the victimization of the women because of partition violence but he has failed to give any particular reason of this victimization of the women. There is a proper patriarchal portrayal of them being victimized, submissive, silent, weak, less important yet beautiful, all the time busy in doing their domestic work but active women characters are missing in his *Train to Pakistan* (Purohit, 2012).

The reader-response theory is based on the effort to show and illuminate the close relationship between the text and the reader. It is based on an underlying concept that any literary text contains the social and political conflicts and dilemmas but these texts demand to have an extensive reading by the reader where he can add his own personal



responses to any concept (Yang, 2002). Reader response theory completely rejects the notion of new criticism which emphasize that the meaning is only generated by the the text. The text and its structures are given importance and are considered as enough for the creation of the meaning but according to reader response the the reader is responsible for the creation of the meaning (Mart, 2019).

Louise Tyson has highlighted the fatures of the reader response theory. Firstly, the role of the reader in the understanding of a literary text cannot be ignored and taken forgranted. Secondly, the readers actively contribute in making the meaning about whatever they find in literature rather than just passively accepting and consuming all the possible meanings presented to them (Tyson, 2006).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Elaine Showalter (1977) gave the two distinct approaches in feminism.

1. Women as Reader Approach
2. Women as Writer Approach

According to women as a reader approach, when a female reader comes across a piece of literature written by a male author, she focuses on the stereotypes of women in literature, omission, and misconception by male writers. As a writer approach when a female reader analyzes a text written by a woman, she focuses on the woman as the producer of textual meaning. The focus is also on female creativity and female language (Showalter, 1999).

The woman as a reader approach along with the reader response theory has been adopted for this particular study in order to get a clear insight of the writer' purpose of portraying women as a seductress and as the one who is alluring the men. The mutual relationship between the text and the reader is the base of a reader response theory. Transaction between the reader and the text is considered significant for the creation of the meaning of any text within a specific context in which the text is place by the author. This theory and its implications become really significant for facilitating the readers with the clear understanding and better awareness about the text.

This particular theory has gained prominence in the late 1960s where the reactions and the responses of the reader and the audience are given more importance than the text itself. It has been said that the meanings of any literary piece are dependent upon interpretation of the reader in a particular context. The text itself is having no meaning. It is the reader who gives it its real essence. He is considered to be an active agent who is responsible for completing the real meaning of the text.





Louise Rosenblatt's theory of Transactional Reader-Response has been employed for the interpretation of the text of Train to Pakistan. It is all about the transaction between the reader and the text and the reader is supposed to give his own interpretation based on his or her own personal experiences, emotions, and knowledge. The text is considered to be a stimulus that is responded by the reader with his or her own personal experiences in his own ways. On the basis of the feelings, emotions, associations, and the memories and experiences of the past, a person makes sense of the text. Moreover, the present circumstances and the moods can also influence the interpretation of the text (Mart, 2019).

The transactional view of the responses by the reader is based on the assumptions and the beliefs that the reader is not seen as a separate entity, acting upon the environment, nor the environment acting on the organism, but both parts acting as a total event (Rosenblatt, 1978). In order to develop a complete understanding and to complete the interpretation, the reader can again go back to the text and can get the guidance from the text. Both the reader and the text have equal importance in the process of interpretation and understanding development. *Aesthetic mode* of interpretation should be adopted in which the focus is on the aesthetic stance towards the text rather than just adopting the *Efferent mode* where the focus is on the information containing all the facts and ideas elaborated by Wolfgang Iser's (1972) *Determinate* and *Indeterminate* meanings. *Determinate* meanings refer to the facts and the events that are embedded in the text. On the contrary, *indeterminate* meanings refer to the gaps within the text that are fulfilled by the reader. Some of the facts are not clearly explained by the author and the reader is expected to explain the hidden and unexplained facts with his own understanding (Iser, 1972).

The researchers have attempted to reveal the indeterminate meanings of the text that are made hidden by the author in order to reach to the depth of the concepts. Because the concepts, like women as seductress and angels who are alluring the men and who negatively astray the men, that the researchers have attempted to explore are not explicitly written and explained by the author as he has indirectly targeted the women and shown them as the source of promoting vulgarity in the society and they have been depicted as the ones who have drifted the people from their right path.

### **Analysis**

#### Women as Reader Approach in Train to Pakistan



In this study, woman as a reader approach is employed to *Train to Pakistan*. This novel has been written by a male writer Khushwant Singh who has presented the females in a very different way. However, when seen from a female perspective, the whole content of the novel rests upon the male dominated mindset. In his *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Jonathan Culler (1982) addresses this issue and forms several interesting conclusions such as, "To read as a woman is to avoid reading as a man, to identify the specific defenses and distortions of male readings and provide correctives" (p. 54).

When a woman reads a text written by a male writer, she also analyzes the male ideological assumptions that were there in the novel. For example, in this novel, whenever a woman was shown, she was either cooking or busy with children. The typical male assumption represented by Khushwant Singh, is that a woman's basic duty is to look after her house. In *Manu Majra* whenever an important issue was discussed, it was only discussed by the male members. This shows another ideological assumption that women are not intelligent and capable enough to make decisions. It is the male who is capable of taking decisions. Culler (1982) states: "Women's experience, many feminist critics claim, will lead them to value works differently from their male counterparts, who may regard the problems women characteristically encounter as of limited interest" (p. 53).

There are only four female characters in the whole novel and the story revolves around three major female characters. One is Nooran who is a Muslim and the lover of Sikh Juggut, a Sikh and a dacoit. Haseena, a sixteen years old girl, is having no sense of right and wrong and she has been given to a Hindu Hukum Chand as a prostitute by her own grandmother. The third female character is Juggut's mother who has spent a horrible life full of anxiety and worries. The fourth character is Haseena's grandmother whose role is to leave her granddaughter to serve a man who is equal to her father's age just for the purpose of getting money and to be financially stable. Their stories are presented with the men. None of them is given individual voice or her own life story.

When a woman analyzes a text as a reader, there are many issues that are dealt with. First of all, the female reader observes the stereotyped images of females in the novel. In this novel, women are stereotyped. They are shown as of bad moral characters. Nooran loves a Sikh boy Juggut; hence, portrayed as Juggut's beloved. She is shown as an unfaithful daughter to her father who is ready to deceive her father by secretly having an affair with a person who is not of their religion and their culture. She is being



represented as a woman who is ready to sacrifice her norms and values just for her selfish love. Singh has presented her even in a more negative way as the one who is using Juggut, her lover, for her own purposes to save her community. She uses him for Muslim protection as he is a badmash of village. As Hukum Chand talks about her: “she is dark, but her eyes are darker. She certainly keeps Jugga in the village. And no one dares say a word against Muslims. Her blind father is the mullah of the mosque” (p. 24).

Woman as a reader also analyzes the manipulation and mistreatment of women by the male writers. In *Train to Pakistan*, women are not shown as individuals. Everywhere in the novel, they are represented in doors and as the ones who are only having any importance in the society because of their services for the male characters. They are presented as mere objects that are meant to please their men. Women are given no respect and there is no regard for their feelings.

When Nooran goes on to meet Juggut, he forces her to sleep with him. Even in that love making scene, she does not want to give him sexual favor, but he does not care for her feelings. Even there, Khuswant Singh does not sympathize with Nooran. In fact, in the beginning of the scene, she is shown to be involved in tempting Juggut. Khushwant Singh is indirectly putting the blame on Nooran without realizing that she herself is not having any voice and power to do anything and he is not paying attention to what she is saying as her words show: “Every time she started to speak, he tightened his arms round her and her words got stuck in her throat” (p.13).

She was unable to free herself from his body of massive weight. She protested him to free herself, but he always tightened her forcefully without her wishes. The writer, however, has presented it as a love scene without portraying the man as an abuser who has sexually tortured a girl. She was making him conscious of the voices of the guns, but he was busy in fulfilling his lust and was not paying any attention to her. Finally, when he became conscious, he was fearful and anxious to save himself from the police. He was not concerned about the girl and her character rather he was thinking that she would not visit him again to serve him lest the police find out about her.

He rebuked her when she warned that she would not come again. The man who was earlier showering his so-called love for her, was now rebuking, and scolding her to be silent at this time of distress when the policemen were searching for him in the village: ‘Will you shut up or do I have to smack your face?’ (p.16) which clearly shows that it was not the women who were using men rather the men were manipulating them for their own purposes. She was herself much surprised to look at the double standards of his





personality. He was merely the man who was trying to fulfill his own lust: "The girl began to sob. She found it hard to believe this was the same man who had been making love to her a moment ago" (p.16).

For making her to be present for tomorrow, he was making her relaxed by ensuring her that she would be completely safe in the village: 'No one can harm you while I live. I am not a badmash for nothing,' he said haughtily.' (p.17) this is how the men were using their power and based on his power, he said that she would be safe altogether. They are the men, and they have the power to save the women. Being a badmash and dacoit, everyone is fearful of him; no one can harm her because she is his lover.

She is the one who has done nothing wrong in the village that can become the cause of disturbance of law and order unlike Juggut. Being a dacoit, he has become the cause of trouble for his own mother because she must be answerable to the policemen for his absence. She must save him from the police. Moreover, he was the cause of the trouble for the village people and for the police as well. Still, she was frightened to lose her life, but he was very much relaxed and even making plans. As she said, "You think of tomorrow and I am bothered about my life. You have your good time even if I am murdered" (p. 17).

The women are used frequently in abuses and insults. Juggut Singh's mother has also been abused not only by her own son but also by the policeman. He used to torture his mother verbally as well as physically. 'Juggut Singh woke up from his reverie. He pushed his mother back rudely' (p. 59) and when the police came to arrest Juggut, she wanted to save her son, on which a policeman says in insulting manner: "You keep the evidence of your son, he said bitterly. We will get the story out of this son of a bitch of yours in our own way. When he gets a few lashes on his buttocks, he will talk." (p.61)

Therefore, although a male critic may deem these events as minor instances, the feminist reader must note a great sense of irony and regret in these passages. We can easily take the example of Hassena. Khushwant Singh only presented her as a prostitute who was just there to entertain Hukum Chand. A feminist critic, on the contrary, will try to analyze the problems regarding this profession. She will analyze the circumstances that led her to adopt the profession. She will also throw light on the problems that are faced by the girls of that profession and also their feelings and emotions regarding their profession.



Hokum Chand has asked the sub inspector that he has made the arrangements for his entertainment. He tries to fulfill his lustful desires by the prostitutes, 'have you made any arrangements for the evening?' (p. 25). In a very fawning manner, sub inspector responded that he had made very good arrangements and the magistrate would not be disappointed by him. 'Is it possible for me to have overlooked that? If she does not, please you, you can have me dismissed from service. I will tell the driver where to go and collect the party' (p. 25). His use of the word 'party' shows that they considered those women as a source of pleasure and entertainment. They took the women as objects and playful things that were the source of relaxation, relief, and tranquility.

If anyone looks at the character of Haseena in the light of above discussion, she was only a sixteen-year-old girl not clearly aware of right or wrong. Moreover, she was dragged on to this profession by her grandmother. As in the beginning, when she did not want to talk with Hukum Chand her grandmother scolded her by saying that "The government is talking to you. Why don't you answer him?" (p.31). Her choice of words like 'government' for Hukum Chand who is the magistrate, shows the significance of power. He is a government official and secondly, he is a man, so he has power over the women in general. It also depicts that the women are willingly presenting themselves to these men and they are ready to be subordinated, used, manipulated, and ruled by them.

The writer himself has described Haseena as innocent sixteen years old girls, having no sense of sexual relationship as, 'just young and unexploited" (p. 30) Immediately, he has justified Chand's act of having sexual relationship with Haseena by saying that she is there because she needs money. The women sell their body and respect just for the purpose of getting money and financial security. Instead of considering it as the fault of the system, he has accused the women of such practices. Hukum Chand who is in government can easily help these women financially and in fact it is his duty to serve his people and to take care of their comfort and to fulfill all their basic needs of life. On the contrary, ironically, he is providing them money in return of their physical and sexual services.

It was not her will to sleep with Hukum Chand as she visited his place for singing. It was her grandmother who left her at the place for the night. She is continuously dictating her to serve the magistrate. Hukum Chand, like all the other men, is exploiting her in the name of money. He throws money when she was singing and this time, he has not thrown it and asked to get a five rupee note from his hands. He touched her body and waist lustfully. He offered her to drink and have fun with him and her grandmother



tries to say that the girl would soon learn to respect and serve the government. As she said: 'Government, the girl is young and very shy. She will learn' she exclaimed' (p.31).

He gets the girl inside as his own property to do anything with her and everyone else had left. He was not concerned with her feelings and emotions rather he was just concerned with the fulfillment of his own desires: 'The magistrate was not particularly concerned with her reactions. He had paid for all that' (p. 33). The writer himself has justified his act of being physical with her because he had paid for having fun with her. She had now legally become magistrate's property. Haseena had made her mind that she cannot get freedom from here; she cannot free herself from this lustful man.

In the light of all the above stated facts, we can easily conclude that a woman reads a novel in a different way than a male reader. If anyone reads the text from a feminist point of view, he can reach at his own conclusion which is worlds apart from the impression created by Khushwant Singh.

When a male writer portrays female characters in an anti-feminist novel, usually a harsh tone is used towards the female characters. The writer never, at any point, sympathizes with the female characters in the novel. On the contrary, critical attitude towards women prevails throughout the novel. In *Train to Pakistan*, the tone of Khushwant Singh is not sympathetic towards women. He seems to be rather critical. Whenever misery of a woman is shown, there is no sympathetic attitude from his side. He just refers to it casually.

One of the female characters is Juggut's mother. Juggut always misbehaves with her and never listens to her. He even uses the words like "shut up" to his mother. When his mother stops him from going outside at night, he at once says, "Shut up, It is you who will wake the neighbors". He does not pay attention to his mother and at last she says: "Go! Go wherever you want to go. If you want to jump in a well jump, if you want to hang like your father, go and hang. It is my lot to weep. My kismet, slapping her forehead" (p.12).

Khushwant Singh, however, never at any place sympathizes with her through her son, as he does not care for her at all. The treatment that Juggut gives his mother is referred to just very casually. There is nothing wrong if he mistreats her because he is a male and he has the right to do anything and he can insult his own mother as well. He is having no sense of talking to her and the writer has not criticized this act of mistreatment and rudeness.



The women in this novel are shown to be evil creatures who are transgressing the moral boundaries. They sleep with other men out of love or for the sake of money. The attitude of Khushwant Singh towards the women is not sympathetic. He never objects at the discrimination or mistreatment of women in the novel. All the matters are enumerated very casually. The men talk about women in a lustful manner during events, as in the beginning of the novel; the dacoits are talking about Nooran and her dress and make the following comment: "During the day she looks so innocent you would think she had not shed her milk teeth" (p. 7).

Indirectly they are targeting her by pointing fingers on her character. The male characters are portrayed discussing the opposite gender in a very demeaning manner. Whenever they are threatening others, they are using the sentences that they would rape their sisters and mothers: "Come! they yelled. Come out if you have the courage! Come out if you want your mothers and sisters raped! Come out, brave men!" (p. 11). Women are shown as the objects that can be used as a source of pleasure or revenge and can be used to let others down.

In *Train to Pakistan*, there are stereotypical images of women. There is no modest woman shown in the novel. Women are only presented in extremes. A female is either a seductress or an angel in the novel.

### **Women as Seductress**

In *Train to Pakistan*, most of the women are shown in the novel as seductress. They are shown to be craving for the attention of men. They are blamed to have this alluring nature. They are alleged to attract the men with their beauty and magical charm and they are always considered to be alluring the men with their treacherous nature. Khushwant Singh has tried to show that they are using their feminine beauty and magical charm for the purpose of getting the attention of the men. He has very easily put all the blame on the women and made the men as innocent creatures who are just trapped by the evil nature of the women. He has ignored their lustful nature, the way they are talking about the women and their dressing, the way they buy them and manipulate, exploit, abuse, and take the advantage of their helplessness and powerlessness.

Imam Baksh was the mullah of the masjid, a very devoted and religious fellow who was partially blind. His daughter Nooran ironically, a Muslim girl, is physically involved with a Sikh, Juggut Singh. She sneaks out in the dark of night to meet Juggut outside. Khushwant Singh, thus in the guise of Nooran, shows an evil girl who cheated his blind father and used to secretly meet a "dakou." Even when the scene of their meeting is described, she is shown tempting Juggut: "He tried to play with her lips to induce them to kiss his fingers. The girl opened her mouth and bit him fiercely" (p.13).



When Malli and his friends were talking about Nooran, they talked about “tight shirt” showing off her body. Here again Nooran is shown to be a seductress who wore tight clothes to attract the attention of men.

At one point in the novel, Khushwant Singh talks about weavers’ reputation. The people of the village did not think positively about weavers because their women always had illegal relationships with other men. Khushwant Singh, once again, hints at the evil nature of the female characters who were thus committing a great sin by sleeping with other men behind their husband’s back. He has proved them to be unfaithful and disloyal of their male counterparts and they have brought the bad name to the community. They have become the cause of bringing shame and dishonor to the whole community because of their lustful nature of having illicit relationship while being in legal relationships with their husbands. As Khushwant Singh Writes: “they are considered effeminate and cowardly – a race of cuckolds whose women are always having liaisons with others” (p. 83).

Then there was Haseena in the novel; a prostitute who was brought to Hukum Chand to please him. In one scene, Hukum Chand asks about her family, and she says, “My mother was a singer, and her mother was a singer till as long back as we know” (p.107). She has also adopted this profession to get the money and financial security. They describe her ways of talking to the men in an alluring way as one of them said: ‘May your government go on forever. May your pen inscribe figures of thousands – nay, hundreds of thousands’ (p. 94). They used to praise men and flirt with them just for getting attraction and to make them feel better and honored so that they could spend more money on them.

Haseena was not the only one who did prostitution; rather every female in her family did this. Prostitution was something normal to Haseena and her family as it was their profession which provided them with money, and they were happy about it. Khushwant Singh is indirectly hinting at the evil nature of these women. Ironically, he has not paid a little attention to the reasons behind their adopting this horrible and disrespectful profession. He has just generalized his viewpoint without commenting at the evil nature and the root cause of the evil that is the men and their lustful nature to be fed by the women.

In another scene, when Hukum Chand asks Haseena to eat the breakfast flirtatiously, she replies: “If you do not eat, I won’t eat either, she said coquettishly. The girl wriggled in his arms. If you eat, I will eat. If you do not, I will not either’ (p.120) with





the passage of time she has also learned the ways of arguing and talking to the men. She tried her best to make him feel relaxed and to make him realized that he is her only protector at this time of difficulty and danger.

Haseena was only sixteen but the way she was trying to seduce Hukum Chand is symbolic. She sat in his lap and ate her breakfast. When Hukum Chand asked her to go, she objected to it and said that she did not want to go to Pakistan. 'I am not frightened. We know so many people so well and then I have a big powerful Magistrate to protect me. As long as he is there no one can harm a single hair of my head.' (p. 110). She is talking to Hukum Chand in such a romantic way that shows that the magistrate has all the powers over her body and life.

By describing this scene in detail, Khushwant Singh tries to show the evil in a sixteen year old girl who was trying to tempt a man older enough to be his father. She has been shown as a girl who is thirsty of money and the one who can do each thing for the magistrate in want of money and financial security. 'If you make me sing or spend another night here you will have to give me a big bundle of notes' (p.110). Singh has devalued the women in the name of money having no self-respect and having no sense of purity. They think of nothing except money. They can understand and talk about the money as the central topic of any scene they appear in the story.

### **Women as Angels**

Another image of women that is shown in this novel is the image of an angel. At one extreme, Khushwant Singh portrays evil women and at the other extreme, an angelic woman is portrayed by him. Juggut's mother is shown to be an angel. She is the one who is very much devoted to her duties as a devoted and protective mother. Juggut is always misbehaving with her, but she never says a word. Whenever Juggut goes out to meet Nooran, she always stops him from going out of the village because of the fear of police but he never listens. His mother, none the less, still cares for him and shows her concern every now and then. She says at one point: "Have you forgotten already that you are on probation – that it is forbidden for you to leave the village after sunset?" (p.12).

After the murder of Ram All, police come to arrest Juggut. His mother tries to convince the police of Juggut's innocence. Juggut misbehaves and the policemen attacked him. At this point, she throws herself on her son and says, "Don't hit him. The Guru's curse on you. He is innocent. It is my entire fault. You can beat me" (p.31). Thus in Juggut's mother, the image of a perfect angel has been presented. She is a caring, loving woman, who always looks after her son and is even ready to lay down her life for her



son. She represents the ideal image of a woman whose role is to love and to be in service of the men as mother, sister, daughter, and wife.

Keeping all these above arguments in mind, it can rightly be said that male writer has portrayed female characters in a negative way. Male writers use women as objects. The problems of women folk are referred to just casually. They are assigned nominal roles and they are only discussed in relation with the male characters. Most importantly, females are shown in extremes. The women in the novel are either shown as completely evil or completely pious. Their evil view is presented as the one that is extremely hated in the society and the angelic one is the more traditional view about the good women according to patriarchal ideology.

### **Conclusion**

The point under research was the exploration of anti-feminist theory in the novel *Train to Pakistan*. Feminism was a movement in which the point of emphasis was that women should be side by side with men in every field of life. Some people however, were not in the favor of this theory and they believed that women should not be given freedom to work outside their houses, they were called anti-feminist. Soon feminist movement spread to literature and the female characters in the novel were analyzed from the feminist point of view. Khushwant Singh is one of anti-feminist writers whose novel *Train to Pakistan* was analyzed in the light of feminist theory along with the reader-response theory for the treatment of women in the novel.

In this novel, woman as a reader approach was employed as the novel was written by a male author. The representation of women was also given attention and the researchers analyzed the way women were shown as seductress, femme fatal and as angels. Women are predominantly shown as evil through the characters of Nooran and Haseena. Only Juggut Singh's mother is shown as a righteous woman in the novel. Throughout the novel, she keeps on weeping and suffering due to her son Juggut Singh, but Khushwant Singh has not written even a single word of sympathy for her. The tone of the writer is harsh and indifferent towards women in this novel. For example, Nooran does exactly what her lover asks her to do because she loves him, but Khushwant Singh has placed all blame on Nooran.

Moreover, she has also been represented as a femme fatale because she has become the cause of the death of Juggut. He lost his life for the purpose of saving the train in which she was travelling. Hukum Chand has also manipulated him to save the train because it was expected that Haseena was also travelling in the same train. He has



suffered because of his love for Nooran. In this way the writer has place all the blame on these women to inflict Juggut with death.

Another important character is Haseena. She is a teen-age girl and cannot decide anything about right and wrong. She spends her time with Hukam chand who is of her father's age. The writer has portrayed Haseena in a negative way, but Hukam Chand is portrayed in a neutral manner. It is notable that Hukam Chand uses a girl who is half his age just for pleasure. Khushwant Singh, however, doesn't use any negative evaluation of him.

Even though there are very few female characters, but the roles assigned to these female characters are also secondary and nominal. It is notable that many writers of that time such as Bapsi Sidhwa and many others wrote novels based on the theme of partition, but they have maintained a balanced attitude towards male and female characters. This clearly indicates that the female characters in *Train to Pakistan* are the creation of writer's own ideology. Keeping in mind all the above-mentioned facts it can be concluded that Khushwant Singh is an anti-feminist writer in his novel *Train to Pakistan*. He presented the women in such a way in such in his novel that is completely based on the hatred and disgust for women in the brutal scenario and incidents of partition.

Future studies on reader response theory and anti feminist reading can focus on a variety of literary texts to cultivate the interest for critical reading and enrich the literary research. These approaches to the analysis of literary texts can be introduced in the literary criticism curriculum to provide opportunities for intellectual and social growth of the learners and researchers through exploration of the underlying ideologies of the authors and the uniqueness of different authors.



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