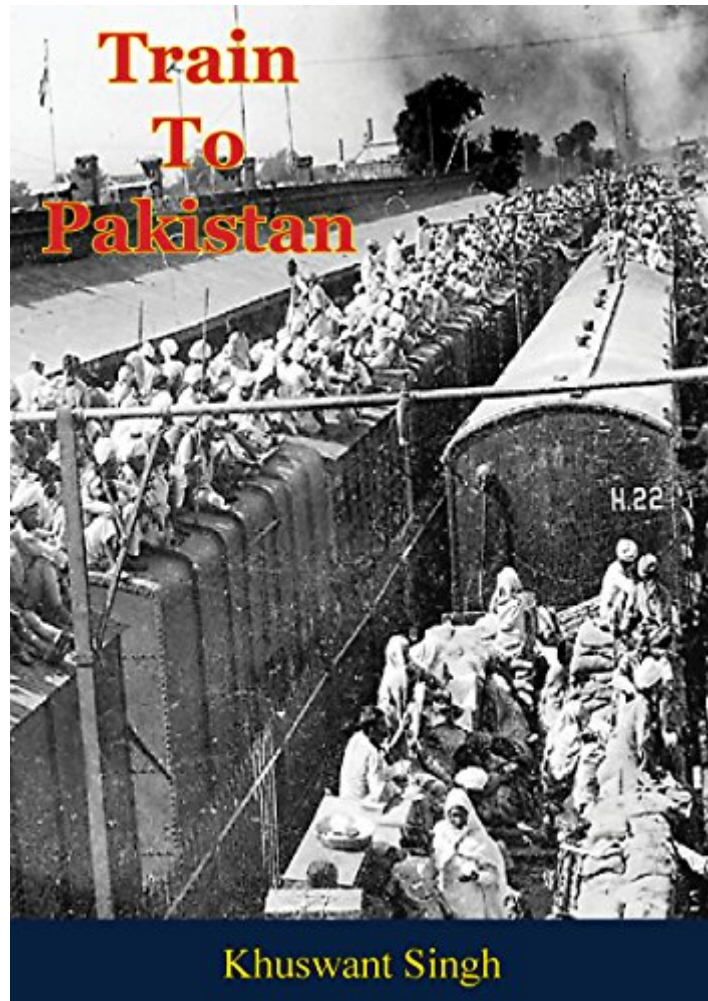




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Train To Pakistan



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Synopsis

“In the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people—Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs—were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding. The only remaining oases of peace were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villages was Mano Majra. It is a place, Khushwant Singh goes on to tell us at the beginning of this classic novel, where Sikhs and Muslims have lived together in peace for hundreds of years. Then one day, at the end of the summer, the “ghost 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 the story of this isolated village that is plunged into the abyss of religious hate. It is also the story of a Sikh boy and a Muslim girl whose love endures and transcends the ravages of war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Just finished reading Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh. It was hard to put down and kept me hooked from the first page. Since I was reading another book parallel to this one, took me longer to finish. I loved every bit about this one. Singh's narrative style is so honest and original that it

engrosses you into the weave of the story from the word go. The story-telling has this earthiness that somehow helped me relate to every nook and cranny of Mano Majra. The characters were so real and alive that I could actually see them walking and talking before my eyes. Since I am a Punjabi myself, reading this book somehow meant going /being home. I loved the ending message; it is the individuals who make all the difference. Just do your bit when it's the right time and place.

This book is set against the background of the greatest tragedy of the modern Indian sub- continent – the partition into India and Pakistan and the Hindu-Moslem riots that caused over a million gruesome murders, countless millions who were physically maimed and two nations that seem scared forever by anger and hatred against each other. The story is set in a small obscure Indian village, Mano Majra, which is noteworthy only because of its small station on the Indo-Pakistan railway link. The good people of this mixed village of Hindus and Muslims have lived in peace for centuries with cordial relations among both religious communities that respected each others religions and customs. They have isolated themselves from the brutality that prevails elsewhere, even despite the arrival of trainloads of dead bodies of Hindus that arrive from Pakistan and are buried here in secrecy on the orders of higher government authorities that seek to contain the violence. But lower level public officials and military officers conspire to instigate violence against the local Muslim community with elaborate plans to create discord. Hukum Chand, the magistrate and the deputy commissioner for the district, is the quintessential Indian government lower-level babu that the author loves to hate. A corrupt, lecherous fellow who has risen in the ranks by toadying to his superiors, he puts together an elaborate plan to create dissension and violence in the village which he could later use to gain commendation by pretending to avert the tragedy. The protagonists are Iqbal Singh, a young foreign educated communist social worker who comes to the village to awaken the poor, and Juggut Singh, a notorious illiterate bandit descended from a family of dacoits. Both of them have been prepared as the fall guys for the violence against the Muslim community that the officialdom has prepared by being arrested and detained by the police on false charges and then freed before the planned mass murder of Muslims which can later be blamed on them. But when the train to Pakistan is loaded with Muslim villagers who are set to be massacred shortly after leaving the train station, the mettle of the two heroes is tested. Iqbal Singh, the communist social worker and idealist who came to save the village is unwilling to intervene in this planned tragedy and finds rational intellectual reasons for his behaviour. It is the fearsome illiterate dacoit, Juggut Singh, outraged by the actions of outsiders creating this violence in his own village, together with his love for a Muslim girl in the train, who bravely executes a desperate plan that foils

the murderers and in the process willingly submits to an act of self-sacrifice and a horrible death. It is a novel of suspense and riveting tension. It is a story of the contrived corruption of innocence and the final triumph of simple rural values over urban sophistication.

This is a very interesting book about the partition of India and Pakistan. It is written very well, but the content is very graphic and very sad considering the things that happened during this time. It is one thing to read about the experiences of that time, but this book is about how one small village went from Muslims and Hindus living together peacefully and harmoniously even after the partition started, but get torn apart neighbor against neighbor as the Muslims were forced to relocate and then be finally sent on a train to Pakistan, and facing that trip when they know about the horrible and cruel massacre as trains are used to shuttle Hindus from Pakistan, and Muslims to India. Muslims decide to massacre Hindus coming across the border to India, and the Hindus decided to reciprocate with their own massacres of the Muslims. The story is about how one village managed to derail the massacre of their village members of Muslims who would have normally been facing the same fate as all previous trains. This book shows how people of two different religions can live together harmoniously until interfered with by the tides of time and government policies. A really good book, and I would suggest anyone interested in Indian history of this time to read it to understand how it actually played out in some people's lives.

A thin little book and a truly great piece of writing. Rarely has there been a book which better exposes the idiocy of war and armed conflict, the petty interests fueling hatred and crimes that ensue. Written through the eyes and lives of small people in a village on the border between India and emerging Pakistan, on the eve of its war of independence, this book takes no side but that of humanity and kindness. With its genuine warmth and the subdued elegance of its writing, it makes one weep over the repeated foolishness of humankind. A classic by one of India's greatest writers.

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