
“MORAL CHOICE AND PRINCIPLED COLLAPSE IN *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN*: AN EXISTENTIALIST UNDERSTANDING”

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Abstract:

This paper examines Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* through the lens of existentialist philosophy, uniquely the hypotheses of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. While the novel is set during the Partition of India—a period marked by political upheaval and cooperative violence—its deeper goal lies in the individual moral choices developed in the face of chaos. The paper explores how Singh portrays moral paralysis and philosophical failure through the characters of Iqbal, Hukum Chand, and Jugga. Iqbal, the cultured reformer, embodies Sartre's inspiration of “very bad faith,” hiding behind intellectual detachment to keep away action. Hukum Chand, the magistrate, symbolizes the moral decay of institutional control, collapsing under guilt and cowardice. In contrast, Jugga's ultimate sacrifice reflects Camus' opinion of the silly hero—one who finds moral distinctness through original, self-explained action. By foregrounding moral uncertainty and personal responsibility, Singh transforms the Partition from a historical affair into an existence-related hardship, drawing attention to that in moments of profound disorder, it is our choices—not our ideologies—that define who we incredibly are.

Introduction

The literature of Partition has long been dominated by stories of violence, displacement, and collective trauma. Novels, short stories, and testimonies from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have recounted in impressive detail the horrors that joined the drawing of new national borders in 1947. While much of this writing focuses on historical documentation or cultural mourning, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) introduces a profound and less always explored scale of Partition literature: the moral and principled dilemmas faced by individuals caught in moments of perfect historical chaos.

Unlike separate Partition novels that make clear political ideology, religious debate, or sweeping shared divides, *Train to Pakistan* zooms in on the inner moral terrain of its characters. In the fictional village of Mano Majra—an isolated community thrown into trouble by the appearance of a ghost train carrying murdered refugees—Singh locates the Partition not just in history, still in the hearts and minds of people forced to make a choice in relation to

action and inaction, justice and safety, love and ideology. These choices, and the inability of many to make them, are what promote Singh's work from historical fiction to a deeply philosophical inquiry into moral being.

This paper argues that *Train to Pakistan* is prime understood through the lens of Philosophy of existence, specially the moral philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Existentialist thought, which established in post-World War II Europe, grapples with human freedom, virtuous responsibility, and the illogicality of reality in a world stripped of divine or ideological certainty. In such a world, individuals are "reproached to be free" (Sartre)-stressed with the responsibility of choice in the shortage of exterior moral guarantees.

Partition, in this scenario, becomes more than a political hardship. It changes into a stage for essential confrontation, where individuals must decide who they are not through rely on, even so through action. As Sartre claims, "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself." This highlight on freedom, responsibility, and realness runs through *Train to Pakistan*, where characters are judged not by their ideologies or plans, regardlessly by whether they act-or fail to perform-when it matters most.

This paper will survey how Singh dramatizes these fundamental tensions through three central characters:

- Iqbal, the intellectual outsider who is paralyzed by self-doubt and philosophical detachment, depicting Sartre's conception of "frightful faith"
- Hukum Chand, the magistrate who sees and understands the horror unfolding regardlessly remains morally impotent, representing the failure of methodical conscience;
- Jugga, the dacoit-turned-hero, whose final perform of self-sacrifice aligns with Camus' vision of the silly hero-someone who chooses meaning in a world without it.

Through these character studies, this paper examines how *Train to Pakistan* interrogates the moral failures of the trained select, the psychological collapse of institutional force, and the competence for redemption through casual moral action. It argues that Singh offers no ideological resolution to Partition. Instead, he uses the existence-related crises of his characters to reflect the good rupture at the heart of historical trauma.

The paper is structured into five pivotal sections. The first explores Iqbal's paralysis through Sartre's belief of dreadful faith, showing how intellectual overanalysis transforms a tool for avoiding honest responsibility. The second examines Hukum Chand as a figure of affectionate disintegration and organizational inaction, revealing how talent without moral clarity turns into complicit in atrocity. The third analyzes Jugga's final choice in the framework of Camus' absurdism and the ethics of action. The fourth considers Partition itself as an being problem-a historical occurrence that damaged collective meaning and left individuals alone with the responsibility of choice. The paper concludes with a reflection on

Singh's role not just as a novelist, yet as an right witness, delivering Partition as a test of moral character in its most rudimentary form.

Ultimately, this paper positions *Train to Pakistan* not as a political novel, still as a moral one-a work that asks how people define themselves when stripped of social certainty and confronted with radical freedom. In doing so, Singh joins a global conversation about standards in times of disaster, echoing the existentialist feel that our actions, not our beliefs, determine who we are.

Among the many philosophical tensions running through *Train to Pakistan*, one of the most gripping lies in the character of Iqbal, the social worker dispatched to Mano Majra to stimulate political awareness and ban joint violence. On paper, Iqbal is an ideal figure: cultured, well-intentioned, and ideologically equipped to resist injustice. But, when the calamity finally arrives, Iqbal fails to behave. He changes into paralyzed by internal monologue, upstanding indecision, and an obsessive fear of futility. This paralysis-what Jean-Paul Sartre famously called "very bad faith"-is not simply a character flaw. It is a profound essential condition that reflects the inability to make a choice when entire moral structures collapse.

In Sartre life philosophy, "horrible faith" is the state in which a person denies their own freedom and responsibility by charging extraneous pressures-become they God, society, or ideology-for their failure to behave accurately. Sartre argued that we are disgraced to become free: there is no predetermined moral order, and hence we are totally responsible for the meaning we build through our actions. Iqbal, except, refuses this responsibility. Instead of creating tough choices, he retreats into symbolic philosophical reasoning, hoping that thought will exonerate him from the burden of action. We see this most reliably during his internal debate about whether or not to sacrifice himself to stop the train carrying Muslim refugees to their deaths. He contemplates the morality of martyrdom, the futility of dying without recognition, and whether such an react would uniform matter in the grand scheme of political chaos. This obsessive need for sharpness, recognition, and philosophical certainty is the core of his inauthentic life. Sartre would argue that Iqbal is hiding behind intellectualism to skip developing a choice that might require accurate risk and passionate investment. In refusing to leap into action, Iqbal transforms what Sartre calls a "coward"-not in the timeless sense, on the other hand in the being sense: one who chooses inaction over freedom, safety over meaning.

Moreover, Iqbal's approach reflects the failure of ideology as a moral compass. While he claims to be a social worker and a revolutionary, his factual commitment to these causes dissolves under pressure. He spends more time debating whether he is Hindu or Muslim-grounded on the logical benefit of either identity-than addressing the suffering around him. This reveals separate layer of really awful faith: the disconnection within assume and action. Iqbal believes in progress, transform, and revolution, even so he is unable to translate these ideas into lived final outcome. His doctrines turn a warm of shield opposing responsibility-

a way of appearing righteous without constantly risking himself. Singh's portrayal of Iqbal is not entire unsympathetic. He does not mock the character or reduce him to a stereotype. Instead, he uses Iqbal to uncover a greater failure of the postcolonial intellectual class-those who, despite their education and political consciousness, fail to behave when history demands it. Iqbal is the manifestation of India's best paralysis during Partition: full of investigation, devoid of courage. His arc contrasts intensely with that of Jugga, whose lack of formal education does not restrict him from building a morally fearless resolution. Singh seems to suggest that morality is not the asset of intellect; it is the product of choice. Iqbal's inaction turns into more damning not because he lacks path, although because he has too much self-mindfulness-and however does nothing with it.

There is especially an existence-related loneliness to Iqbal's character. He does not belong to the village, nor does he have meaningful human relationships. He exists in a vacuum of remoteness, which only deepens his detachment. Sartre notes that "living precedes crux"-that individuals must define themselves not by what they are born into, but by what they do. Iqbal, though, cannot decide who he is. He waits for peripheral confirmation-proof that his sacrifice would matter, that it would be seen and remembered. This desperate craving for certainty makes him incapable of choice. Ultimately, Iqbal's tragedy is not that he is cruel or indifferent. It is that he knows what must become done-and regardlessly does nothing. He is the man who sees the train, hears the rumors, understands the consequences-and remains still. Sartre would argue that this is the deepest moral failure: the denial of one's own office in the face of foolishness. And in the chaos of Partition, irrationality is everywhere. There is no logical ideology left, no rely on institutions, no understandability of accurate and wrong. What remains is the freedom to select, and Iqbal chooses silence.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Singh uses Iqbal not only to delve into the pertinent dilemma of freedom on the other hand to critique a class of passive intellectuals who, despite having the language of standards, lack the will to perform ethically. Iqbal is not a villain-however he is a warning. In times of moral contingency, it is not enough to understand what is right. One must do it, level if no one is watching.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh paints a devastating picture of Partition-stage India not just through scenes of communal violence, on the other hand through the quiet failures of those tasked with preventing it. Chief among these figures is Hukum Chand, the district magistrate of the region-a man with official control, insider expertise, and the moral responsibility to perform. Nevertheless, despite his position, Hukum Chand does nothing. His inaction, rolled up in guilt, self-pity, and methodical language, forms one of the novel's most chilling portrayals of just collapse. He is not a villain in the customary sense. Instead, he is the unfilled man of Partition-symbolizing the paralysis of institutional talent when confronted with accurate human suffering. From the incredibly commencement, Hukum Chand is depicted as a man on the verge of failure. He drinks too much, engages in oppressive relationships with young women like Haseena, and spends most of his moment avoiding responsibility. His mental and passionate fragility is recognizable in his inner monologues,

filled with self-disgust and dread. He is painfully observant of the horrors unfolding around him-the incoming ghost trains, the arranged massacres, the political duplicities-regardlessly he remains detached, nervous to intervene resolutely. This moral failure reflects a key idea in life perspective: that potentiality without authentic moral participation is ethically in debt. Sartre and Camus both accentuate that in a world without complete worth, meaning must become made through individual responsibility and choice. Hukum Chand, regardlessly, represents the clash of this philosophy. He chooses dodging over action, excuses over culpability.

In philosophical terms, Hukum Chand is not wicked-he is cowardly, in the most human way. He sees too much, feels too much, and does too little. He is overwhelmed by the unreasonableness of Partition, by the contradictions of duty and care, by his own expressive helplessness. His guilt is not fictional-it is being. He represents what happens when moral responsibility transforms into really bad, and so it is buried under layers of protocol, liquor, and silence. Importantly, Singh does not portray Hukum Chand as a one-dimensional official. He gives him depth, pain, and complexity. The magistrate is haunted by the exceptionally violence he fails to stop. He watches the ghost train get to, listens to his officers report atrocities, and becomes physically ill at the thought of sending new train of refugees into likely slaughter. However instead of acting, he spirals further into self-loathing. His interactions with Haseena are expressly telling: he sees her both as a victim of Partition and as a mirror of his own drain. Through her, he relives his moral failures, but he never attempts redemption.

This self-aware of impotence can again become associated to Camus' philosophy of the outlandish-the concept that human beings seek purity and justice in a world that offers neither. Hukum Chand is a man who knows there is no moral order left, and instead of resisting the illogical, he collapses under its weight. Unlike Camus' "unreasonable hero," who continues to act in defiance of a meaningless world, Hukum Chand chooses to surrender. He changes into a passive observer of atrocity, unwilling to bear the responsibility of resistance.

If Iqbal represents the failure of intellectual interaction, Hukum Chand represents the failure of regulatory expertise. He is a symbol of how systems shaped to protect people often turn into mechanisms of complicity. The fact that he is sentimentally affected by the suffering he sees makes his inaction equal more tragic. He is not indifferent-he is crushed. Although crushing guilt is no copy for action. In many ways, Singh uses Hukum Chand to critique the postcolonial Indian state-a approach that inherits the tools of colonial control but lacks the moral will to use them humanely. The magistrate has police, intelligence, and political domination at his disposal. Although, he behaves like a powerless onlooker. Singh suggests that institutions, no matter how well-equipped, are only as moral as the people who operate them. Without courage, care, and principle, they turn soulless engines of documentation and denial. Hukum Chand's arc does not end with redemption. He remains trapped in his emotive paralysis until the final pages of the novel. Uniform as Jugga leaps to save the train, Chand

watches from a distance-reduced to a spectator of the too much world he is meant to govern. This inaction isn't simply moral laziness-it is life-centered failure. He has approved himself to turn what Sartre warned disagreement: a man described not by his choices, still by his panic of them.

In the landscape of existentialist thought, few images are more surviving than that of Albert Camus' illogical hero-the individual who, in the face of a meaningless and chaotic world, chooses to perform with moral clearness flat when no recognition, recognition, or certainty is guaranteed. In *Train to Pakistan*, Singh gives us his own version of that figure: Jugga, the village wrongdoer, the most unlikely of heroes, and ultimately the most morally awake character in the complete novel. At first glance, Jugga appears to be a figure of disorder. He is a dacoit, feared by villagers, and dismissed by the police as a behavioral delinquent. His relationship with Nooran, a Muslim girl, marks him as someone who operates outside ancient norms and public dividers. He is not intellectual like Iqbal, nor institutionally powerful like Hukum Chand. Although, as the village descends into concern and public hate, it is Jugga-not the skilled, not the officials-who rises to the principled moment. His story turns into a sharp fundamental contrast to the inaction of others.

Jugga's final behave of self-sacrifice-throwing himself at the rope meant to derail the train carrying Muslim refugees, including Nooran-epitomizes this philosophy. He does not save them because he is told to. He is not part of any ideological movement. He does not figure out the consequences. He simply acts-with full knowledge that it will cost him his life. This behave is not romanticized by Singh. It is wild, desperate, and wordless. Jugga is not glorified in the time; there is no audience, no speech, no recognition. His leap is unannounced. It is private. And that is what makes it philosophically valid. Camus argues that moral action gains its value nicely when it is performed in the missing of certainty or divine command. Jugga acts not because he knows it will change the world, regardlessly because it is the only choice that feels precise to himself. This sincerity separates Jugga from both Iqbal and Hukum Chand. Iqbal spends his moment figuring about whether a sacrifice matters if no one knows about it. Jugga acts without asking. Hukum Chand tries to evade assess. Jugga takes everything the rebuke and although sacrifices himself. This is not because Jugga is morally pure-it is because he is existence-wise honest. He sees the silliness of the situation-the futility of politics, the corruption of institutions, the randomness of violence-and chooses to respond not with despair, on the other hand with a final, radical gesture of love.

That love-his relationship with Nooran-is required to knowledge Jugga's moral insight. It is not an nonliteral bond to humanity. It is a personal, bodily, heartfelt tie that anchors him to moral action. In existence theory, specifically in Camus' thought, love is not sentimental-it is a confrontation with death, with vulnerability, and with meaning. Jugga does not save a train full of people. He saves Nooran. Although in doing so, he transforms a symbol of resistance disagreeing with the machinery of death. Singh's resolution to do Jugga the savior of the novel is a radical political and philosophical choice. He upends the logic of Partition,

which glorified soldiers, bureaucrats, and ideologues, and instead places moral clarity in the hands of a man who is illiterate, rough, and criminalized. This aligns with Camus' belief that the silly hero does not need to be a philosopher or saint-he only needs to act, and to behave freely. What makes Jugga's perform aligned more ontologically gigantic is that it comes without hope. He does not rely on it will change history. He knows it will termination in death. Even so he leaps anyhow. In that moment, he embodies what Camus calls "defiance"- a refusal to surrender to nonsense, a choice to create meaning through action, flat when the world offers none.

In postcolonial terms, Jugga also represents a counter-narrative to upper-class constructions of morality. He is not interested in religion, nationalism, or ideology. His moral compass is grounded in something more visceral: love, loyalty, and the raw refusal to become complicit in villainous. Singh's portrayal of this is not idealized, even so deeply human. Jugga is no saint-however he is a man who transforms rewarding, not by dogma, on the other hand by verdict. His death does not restore Mano Majra to peace. It does not undo the massacres. Yet it interrupts the logic of Partition-the logic that says Muslims must die, that love must conclusion, that action is pointless. Singh offers no fantasy of salvation. But he gives us something enhanced: a time of moral distinctness in the midst of historical madness.

Conclusion

At its surface, *Train to Pakistan* is a novel about Partition-about trains full of corpses, the crash of have faith, and the chaos of a nation tearing itself apart. Even so at its core, it is something much more timeless and quietly devastating: a portrait of moral collapse, and a intricacy to the individual sense. In using existentialist notion to interpret the novel, what develops into clear is that Partition is not just a historical affair for Singh-it is a moral crucible, testing the limits of trust, care, and human responsibility in the face of absolute disorder. This paper has examined the three primary right arcs in the novel through the existence-related lens of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. These are not theoretical philosophical overlays-they illuminate the psychological and moving texture of Singh's characters with painful authenticity.

Iqbal, the reformer, embodies the failure of intellect in the face of moral urgency. He knows what's happening. He understands Partition, communalism, injustice, and flat revolution. Yet when confronted with a choice that requires sacrifice, he chooses paralysis. Sartre's "most awful faith" is not a dramatic villainy-it's Iqbal's internal evasion, his obsessive reflection that substitutes for responsibility. He wants guarantees back then he acts, and in the chaos of Partition, there are none. So he does nothing.

Hukum Chand, the magistrate, is opposite figure of reality-based failure. He represents institutional force-an arm of the state-still he is warmly tired, morally damaged, and panicked. He drowns in guilt although uses protocol and performance to turn aside exact engagement. His story reminds us that control, if not grounded in beliefs, changes into complicit in violence. Singh does not develop Chand a monster-he makes him heartbreakingly human, and in turn uniform more terrifying.

And but, in contrast to these portraits of inaction, Singh gives us Jugga-a man with no ideology, no institutional role, and no illusions. Jugga is a dacoit, a man who loves a Muslim woman, and a man who sees through the bullshit. In the closure, when it matters, he acts. He develops into Singh's answer to the being question: What should one do when all falls apart? The answer is not to preach, not to theorize, regardlessly to pick-and to go with truthfully, knowing that no one may continually know or care.

Camus' silly hero is not someone who wins. It is someone who resists meaninglessness by living ethically in full perception of its preposterousness. Jugga's sacrifice, like Sisyphus pushing the rock, is not about results. It is about reclaiming a moral self when the world no longer offers one. Through this pertinent contrast, *Train to Pakistan* develops into more than Partition literature. It transforms a moral parable-a warning facing honest laziness, and a reminder that when institutions fail, when ideologies collapse, it is the individual who must bear the weight of meaning.

This understanding also positions Khushwant Singh not merely as a witness to Partition, although as an right novelist. He doesn't preach nationalism, he doesn't offer political answers. He offers the story of one village, one ghost train, and a handful of people creating choices that resounding across decades. In a world that often rewards ideology over compassion, Singh dares to suggest that the truest form of resistance is choosing to become rewarding when it is most exacting. What uplifts the novel further is its refusal to romanticize this moral sharpness. Jugga is not canonized. His story ends abruptly. The village does not transform. There is no redemption arc, no societal healing. And that's precisely what makes Singh's message so profound. He does not make sure that moral action will change the world. He simply insists that it nevertheless matters. In our contemporary framework-where political violence, joint polarization, and historical distortion continue to define global recitals-Singh's life-centered message has only transform into more urgent. He reminds us that moral simplicity does not require education, status, or accuracy. It requires courage, sense, and the willingness to perform when everyone else stays silent. And perhaps that's the deepest precision of *Train to Pakistan*: when history loses its way, when ideology consumes identity, and when panic silences speech, it is the quiet, defiant choices of individuals like Jugga that keep the flame of humanity animated.

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