



Analysis of Train to Pakistan, Film Adaptation from Khushwant Singh's Novel: Similarities and Differences

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Abstract

The film *Train to Pakistan* (1998), directed by Pamela Rooks, is a cinematic adaptation of Khushwant Singh's 1956 novel of the same name. The story is set against the backdrop of the Partition of India in 1947, depicting the devastation and turmoil faced by individuals during this period of mass migration, violence, and dehumanization. As V.A. Shahane opines, "It is a grim story of individuals and communities caught into the vortex of partition of undivided India into two states in 1947" (Shahane 332). While Rooks' adaptation remains largely faithful to the core themes and narrative of the novel, the film inevitably condenses, streamlines, and emphasizes certain aspects for cinematic impact. This analysis explores both the similarities and differences between the novel and its film adaptation.

Key Words: film adaptation, dehumanization, partition, religion

Introduction: As a reflection of reality, the films attract a wider range of audience than literature as they transcend barriers of religion, class and language. However, Literature serves a significant source of material for cinematic adaptations. The Visualisation of literary scenes captivates viewers through its rich portrayal of imagery, music and emotions. The study examines the film adaptation of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. The author was born in Haladi, now in Pakistsan. He was the most learned and versatile personality. *Train to Pakistan* was his debut novel. M.R. Anand, RK Narayan. Raja Rao were his inspirations. He was awarded Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, Groove Press Award and Honest Man of the year Award. He gained recognition as lawyer, journalist, ambassador, and a literary writer.

Similarities Between the Novel and the Film

1. **Central Theme and Setting:** Both the novel and the film are set in the village of Mano Majra, located on the Indo-Pakistan border. The community, initially depicted as living in harmony, is eventually torn apart by the forces of Partition. The Sikh and Muslim villagers, who had coexisted peacefully, are thrust into violence and mistrust. The arrival of the “ghost train,” which carries the bodies of massacred people, becomes a pivotal symbol of the communal violence that disrupts this idyllic life.

2. **Main Characters:** The central characters in both the book and film remain the same, with Jugga Singh, a Sikh “badmash” (outlaw), and Nooran, a Muslim girl, at the heart of the story. Their love affair, which transcends religious and communal boundaries, reflects the human cost of the Partition. Additionally, the characters of Iqbal, a progressive socialist, and Hukumchand, the District Commissioner, play essential roles in the narrative.

3. **Key Events:** Several key events from the novel are preserved in the film. These include the murder of Lala Ramlal, the dacoity committed by Mali and his gang, and the subsequent framing of Jugga and Iqbal for the crime. The film also captures the arrival of the ghost train, the escalating tension between Muslims and Sikhs, and Jugga’s tragic sacrifice to prevent the train from being blown up, saving Nooran and others in the process.

4. **Symbolism of the Train:** The train in both the novel and the film serves as a powerful symbol. Initially representing British Imperialism, it gradually transforms into a symbol of the carnage and tragedy caused by the Partition. The arrival of the ghost train, carrying massacred bodies, becomes an emblem of the bloodshed and loss that defined this period in history.

5. **Realistic Portrayal of Violence:** The depiction of violence in the film, particularly the arrival of the mutilated bodies of massacred Sikhs and Hindus, closely follows the descriptions in the novel. Rooks emphasizes the brutal realities of Partition, with scenes such as the close-up of Imam Baksh’s fearful expression as he anticipates the train, which captures the horror and helplessness of the situation.

Differences Between the Novel and the Film

1. **Condensed Timeline:** The novel is more expansive in its treatment of time and characters. It delves deeply into the backstories and motivations of the characters, particularly Jugga and Iqbal. The film, however, condenses the timeline, focusing more on the central conflict and the immediate sense of urgency and tension surrounding the Partition. This condensation inevitably leads to the loss of certain character nuances and subplots, including Iqbal’s political ideology and Jugga’s past.

2. Character Development: While the novel provides a rich exploration of character motivations, the film simplifies some of these aspects for brevity. For example, Iqbal's political stance as a socialist is more subtly introduced in the film, and his internal conflict regarding the violence of Partition is not as thoroughly explored as in the novel. He is a cynical intellectual who questions the efficacy of political solutions and grapples with the limitations of his own idealism. The film presents him as a more straightforward idealist, driven by a desire to bring about social change. Similarly, Hukumchand's character is more complex in the novel, where he grapples with his own moral dilemmas and the futility of his position. He is torn between his duty to maintain order and his growing awareness of the injustice being inflicted upon the Muslim population. whereas the film simplifies his character somewhat, focusing more on his role as a representative of authority and portrays him as more of a helpless bureaucrat. However, there are subtle differences in the portrayal of juggat Singh and Nooran. These adaptations in character portrayal reflect the constraints of the cinematic medium and the need to condense complex narratives for the screen.

3. Streamlining of Subplots: The film adapts the central love story between Jugga and Nooran with greater emphasis, while sidelining some of the secondary characters and subplots present in the novel. For instance, the role of the teenage prostitute Haseena, who has an affair with Hukumchand in the novel, is minimized in the film, as is the deeper exploration of the moral ambiguities faced by the various characters in the village.

4. Focus on Action and Tension: The film places greater emphasis on the suspense and action surrounding the climax, where Jugga attempts to stop the train and save Nooran. This shift focuses on the physical and emotional intensity of the final moments, whereas the novel builds up to this conclusion more slowly, allowing the reader to reflect on the larger political and social implications of the events. The film, due to its medium, must focus on the immediacy of the events, whereas the novel provides more space for introspection and commentary on the Partition.

5. Use of Music: The song "Sanu Aa Milya Yaar Piyaariya," composed by Sai Bulleshah, plays a significant role in the film, setting the tone for the peaceful existence of the villagers before the chaos of Partition. This song, with its evocative lyrics and imagery, serves as a subtle narrative device to underscore the harmony that once existed in Mano-Majra. The novel, however, lacks this musical element and instead focuses more on descriptive passages to capture the essence of village life.

Conclusion -The film *Train to Pakistan* is a sincere attempt to bring Khushwant Singh's powerful narrative to the screen and remains largely faithful to the novel in terms of its central themes, characters, and key events, it necessarily condenses and streamlines certain aspects for cinematic purposes. Rooks succeeds in capturing the emotional intensity of the story, emphasizing the personal sacrifices made against the backdrop of national tragedy. However, the deeper, more complex reflections on Partition present in Singh's novel are somewhat diminished in the film, as it focuses more

on the immediate emotional impact of the events. Overall, *Train to Pakistan* the film is a poignant retelling of a tragic chapter in Indian history, staying true to the novel's core message while adapting it for the visual medium.

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