



Exploring Identity and Belonging in the Context of Partition of 1947: A Social Identity Theory Analysis of ‘Train to Pakistan’ by Khushwant Singh



Bushra Saeed

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Literature, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

Shahzeb Shafi

M.Phil. Scholar, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Muhammad Hamzah Masood

Lecturer, Department of Linguistics and Communications, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract: *This study explores the theme of identity and belonging in Khushwant Singh’s novel, ‘Train to Pakistan’, by investigating how the characters develop their sense of identity and belonging within the socio-political context of the Partition of India in 1947. The study employs a qualitative research methodology, analyzing the novel through close reading and thematic analysis. The study applies the Social Identity Theory to examine the novel’s categorization, social comparison, and identification processes. The research reveals that religious, cultural, and national affiliations significantly influence the characters’ identities and sense of belonging. It highlights the complexities of identity construction during conflict and demonstrates that characters’ identities are subject to external categorizations. However, the study also observes the characters’ agency in negotiating their identities and challenging societal expectations. The study explores identity dynamics, emphasizing the importance of social and contextual factors in shaping individual and collective identities, particularly within historical and cultural narratives.*

Key Words: Identity, Belonging, Social Identity Theory, Partition of India, Categorization, Social Comparison, Identification, Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Hamzah Masood (Lecturer, Department of Linguistics and Communications, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: hamzah.masood@umt.edu.pk)

Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 marked a significant period of upheaval, violence, and displacement, during which the concepts of

identity and belonging took on new dimensions (Mehta & Mookerjee-Leonard, 2014). Khushwant Singh’s novel, *Train to Pakistan*, offers a compelling narrative set

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against this backdrop, providing a rich context for exploring identity and belonging. This research paper applies Social Identity Theory to examine how the characters in the novel navigate their sense of self and belonging within the socio-political dynamics of the Partition.

This research paper applies the Social Identity Theory framework to examine the theme of identity and belonging in Khushwant Singh's (2016) novel, *Train to Pakistan*. The study seeks to understand how individuals in the novel develop a sense of identity and belonging within the socio-political context of the Partition of India in 1947. The research methodology involves a qualitative analysis of the novel, drawing on close reading and thematic analysis to identify instances and dialogues that highlight the characters' experiences related to identity and belonging.

The Social Identity Theory theoretical framework, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, explores the processes of categorization, social comparison, and identification within the novel (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The study investigates how the characters categorize themselves and others based on religious and cultural affiliations, and how these categories shape their understanding of identity. Social comparison is examined to understand how characters compare their own religious group with others, leading to in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. Furthermore, the study explores the identification process as characters align themselves with their religious and cultural groups, emphasizing the significance of shared norms, values, and customs.

The research findings reveal that their religious, cultural, and national affiliations deeply influence the characters' sense of identity and belonging. The analysis highlights the complexity of identity construction during conflict and how it shapes individuals' behaviours and attitudes

(Mavor et al., 2017). It is observed that the characters' identities are subject to external categorizations, often leading to stereotypes and prejudice. However, the characters also exhibit agency in negotiating their identities and challenging societal expectations (Tajfel, 2010).

The research contributes to understanding identity dynamics within the context of the Partition and provides insights into the human experience of identity and belonging. The study underscores the relevance of Social Identity Theory in analyzing historical and cultural narratives, emphasizing the importance of social and contextual factors in shaping individual and collective identities. This research contributes to the existing literature on identity, belonging, and the impact of socio-political events on individual and collective consciousness.

Statement of the Problem

The Partition of India in 1947 significantly disrupted millions of individuals' identities and sense of belonging (Ambedkar, 2023). Khushwant Singh's (2016) *Train to Pakistan* provides a narrative that portrays the experiences of characters during this tumultuous period. However, there is a need to explore further and understand how individuals in the novel develop their identities and negotiate their sense of belonging within the socio-political context of the Partition. This research aims to address this gap by applying the theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory to analyze the processes of categorization, social comparison, and identification in the formation of identity and belonging in the novel. By delving into these themes, this study seeks to provide insights into the complex dynamics of identity and belonging during times of conflict and to contribute to the existing literature on identity, belonging, and the impact of socio-political events on individual and collective consciousness.

Research Questions

The current study answers the following research questions:

1. How do the characters in *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh develop their sense of identity within the socio-political context of the Partition?
2. How do the characters in the novel negotiate their sense of belonging amidst the religious, cultural, and national affiliations during the Partition?
3. To what extent does Social Identity Theory help understand the processes of categorization, social comparison, and identification in forming identity and belonging in the novel?

Research Objectives

The objective of the present study is as follows:

1. To examine the characters' experiences of identity and belonging in *Train to Pakistan* within the context of the Partition
2. To explore the processes of categorization, social comparison, and identification depicted in the novel, and their influence on the characters' sense of identity and belonging
3. To apply Social Identity Theory as a framework for analyzing the dynamics of identity and belonging in the novel

Significance of the Study

This research aims to contribute to understanding identity and belonging within the context of the Partition, utilizing the lens of Social Identity Theory. The analysis sheds light on the characters' experiences and provides insights into the complex dynamics of identity formation and negotiation during the conflict. The findings of this research may inform broader discussions on the impact of socio-political events on individual and collective identities, fostering a deeper

understanding of the human experience of identity and belonging.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this research. Firstly, the analysis is limited to the data presented in the novel *Train to Pakistan*, which may not fully capture the breadth and complexity of identity and belonging during the Partition. Additionally, the researcher's own biases and interpretations may influence the analysis. However, steps were taken to minimize these limitations through reflexivity, transparency, and consultation with experts.

Literature Review

The literature review provides an overview of previous studies on identity, belonging, and the Partition. It explores the theoretical underpinnings of Social Identity Theory and its relevance to understanding the complexities of identity formation and belonging in times of conflict. Additionally, it highlights key concepts and constructs within Social Identity Theory for the analysis of *Train to Pakistan*.

Identity, Belonging, and the Indo-Pak Partition of 1947

The Partition of India in 1947 divided the Indian subcontinent into two separate nations, India and Pakistan. This significant event had far-reaching consequences, including reshaping identities and the sense of belonging for millions (Zia, 2022). Scholars have extensively examined the themes of identity and belonging within the context of the Indo-Pak Partition, shedding light on the complex dynamics that unfolded during this tumultuous period.

Numerous historical accounts provide insights into the experiences of individuals and communities during the Partition. Scholars such as Gyanendra Pandey and Urvashi Butalia have explored the violence,

displacement, and trauma faced by people as they were uprooted from their homes and forced to migrate. These accounts highlight the impact of the Partition on individual and collective identities as people grappled with the loss of familiar landscapes, cultural heritage, and social ties (White-Spunner, 2017).

Oral histories and personal narratives have played a crucial role in documenting the lived experiences of those directly affected by the Partition. Works like "Train to Pakistan" by Khushwant Singh and "Pinjar" by Amrita Pritam offer nuanced portrayals of characters navigating the complexities of identity and belonging amidst the violence and chaos of the Partition. These narratives provide intimate perspectives on how the events shaped individual identities and altered perceptions of communal and national affiliations (Gupta, 2012).

Scholars have highlighted the specific experiences of women during the Partition, revealing the gendered dimensions of identity and belonging. Their works explore the impact of violence, sexual violence, and the challenges women face in reconstructing their identities within new social and cultural contexts. The Partition was a transformative moment that shaped women's roles, agency, and sense of belonging (Manchó, 2000).

The Partition has also been examined through various artistic and cultural expressions, including literature, poetry, art, and cinema. Writers like Saadat Hasan Manto and Faiz Ahmed Faiz captured the trauma and displacement experienced by individuals. At the same time, artists like Satish Gujral depicted the physical and emotional scars left by the Partition. These cultural expressions illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of identity and belonging, providing alternative perspectives and narratives (Boivin, 2019).

The Indo-Pak Partition led to the displacement and migration of people,

forming diasporic communities. Scholars such as Alok Bhalla and Vijay Mishra have explored the experiences of these diasporic communities and their negotiation of identity and belonging in new contexts. They examine how individuals and communities retain connections with their homeland while forging new identities in their adopted countries (Khan, 2017).

The literature on identity, belonging, and the Indo-Pak Partition of 1947 offers a rich tapestry of perspectives. It underscores the profound impact of this historical event on individual and collective identities, emphasizing the complexities of identity construction and the enduring legacy of the Partition on notions of belonging. These studies contribute to our understanding of the human experience during political upheaval and shed light on the ongoing processes of identity negotiation and belonging in post-Partition societies.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals perceive and construct their identities within social groups (Turner, 2007). Scholars from various disciplines have explored and expanded upon this theory, examining its applications in diverse contexts (Abrams & Hogg, 2006; Allport, 2008; Sherif, 2006, 2015; Sumner, 2006; Wardell & Turner, 2014).

The seminal works by Tajfel and Turner serve as the foundation for Social Identity Theory. Tajfel's work on intergroup discrimination and Turner's contributions to self-categorization theory laid the groundwork for understanding the psychological processes underlying social identity formation. These works emphasize the role of social categorization, social comparison, and the need for positive distinctiveness in shaping individuals'

identities (Yzerbyt et al., 2004).

Social Identity Theory has been extensively applied to studying intergroup relations and prejudice. Researchers such as Donald D. Davis, Richard J. Crisp, and Michael A. Hogg have explored how individuals develop their social identities in relation to different groups, and how these identities influence intergroup attitudes and behaviours. This line of research investigates the formation of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination based on social categorization processes (Rowling, 2019).

Social Identity Theory has also been applied to understanding group dynamics and leadership within organizations. Researchers like Michael A. Hogg, Daan van Knippenberg, and Catherine Tinsley have examined how shared group identities and social categorization influence group cohesion, cooperation, and leadership effectiveness. These studies shed light on the mechanisms through which group identity processes impact collective outcomes (Hogg & Tindale, 2008).

The theory has been widely employed to analyze identity-related conflicts, including ethnic, national, and religious conflicts. Scholars such as John C. Turner, Rupert Brown, and Steve Reicher have explored how social identity processes contribute to the escalation or resolution of conflicts. These studies highlight the role of collective identities, intergroup dynamics, and identity negotiation in understanding the nature and dynamics of social conflicts (Wearing, 2011).

Haslam et al. (2014) investigated the link between social identity and individual well-being. Studies by Jolanda Jetten, Catherine Haslam, and Alexander Haslam have demonstrated the importance of social identity in fostering a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. These studies emphasize the positive aspects of social identity, such as social support, a sense of meaning, and personal growth.

In recent years, scholars have incorporated intersectionality into Social Identity Theory, exploring the complexities of multiple identities and their intersections. Intersectional perspectives, advanced by scholars like Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlight how social identities related to gender, race, class, and other dimensions interact and influence individuals' experiences of identity and belonging (Burke, 2006).

Overall, the literature on Social Identity Theory demonstrates its wide-ranging applicability in understanding various aspects of identity, group dynamics, intergroup relations, conflict, leadership, and well-being. The theory provides a valuable framework for comprehending the complex processes through which individuals form, maintain, and negotiate their identities within social groups and broader societal contexts.

Methodology

The research methodology consists of a qualitative analysis of the novel, incorporating close reading and thematic analysis techniques. The selection of primary and secondary sources and ethical considerations regarding the portrayal of sensitive historical events are discussed. The data collection and analysis methods are outlined, focusing on identifying instances and dialogues that exemplify the characters' experiences related to identity and belonging.

Theoretical Framework

One theoretical framework that can be applied to analyze the theme of identity and belonging in *Train to Pakistan* is the Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s. This theory explores how individuals develop a sense of identity and belonging based on their group affiliations and the processes of

categorization, social comparison, and identification (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In *Train to Pakistan*, the characters' identities and sense of belonging are strongly influenced by their religious, cultural, and national affiliations. Applying the Social Identity Theory, the following elements were examined in the novel:

- A. **Categorization:** The characters in the novel categorize themselves and others based on religious identities, such as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. These categories provide a framework for understanding their own identity and distinguishing themselves from others. Societal norms and the political context of the Partition reinforce the categorization.
- B. **Social Comparison:** As the violence and conflict escalate, characters engage in social comparison, particularly along religious lines. They compare their religious group to others, often emphasizing their own virtues and superiority, further deepening the divisions and reinforcing a sense of belonging within their respective groups.
- C. **Identification:** The characters' sense of identity and belonging is strongly tied to their identification with their religious, cultural, and national groups. They adhere to the norms, values, and customs associated with their group, and their identities become intertwined with their religious and cultural affiliations. This identification intensified during the Partition as they aligned themselves with their respective communities for protection and survival.
- D. **In-group Favoritism and Out-group Discrimination:** The characters display in-group favouritism, showing loyalty and support to their own religious group. It often leads to discrimination, hostility, and violence towards

members of other groups. The rigid boundaries between in-groups and out-groups result in the exclusion of individuals from other communities, contributing to a fractured sense of belonging in the broader society.

By applying the Social Identity Theory to *Train to Pakistan*, we can gain insights into the characters' motivations, behaviours, and dynamics of identity and belonging during the Partition. The theory helps us understand how group identities are constructed, how they influence individuals, behaviour and attitudes, and their role in shaping a sense of belonging within a larger societal context.

Research Design

The research design for this study is qualitative in nature (Sinha, 2004), aiming to conduct an in-depth analysis of the novel *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh. The qualitative approach allows for a detailed exploration of the characters' experiences of identity and belonging within the context of the Partition. The analysis drew upon Social Identity Theory as the theoretical framework to examine the processes of categorization, social comparison, and identification within the narrative (Breakwell, 2008).

Data Collection

The primary data source for this study is the novel *Train to Pakistan*. The novel was thoroughly read, paying close attention to instances, dialogues, and narratives highlighting the characters' interactions with identity and belonging. These data points were identified and extracted for further analysis (Deshpande, 2018).

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved several steps. First, the study was closely reading the novel to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and its themes. Next, thematic analysis was

employed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to identity and belonging. The data were coded and organized into categories that reflect the concepts and constructs of Social Identity Theory. The study utilized analytical tools to facilitate the organization and analysis of the data (Mami, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were considered throughout the research process (Gregory, 2003). The analysis was conducted sensitively and respectfully, considering the Partition's historical context and potentially sensitive nature.

Validity and Reliability

Multiple strategies were employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. Firstly, the research maintained a detailed journal documenting the process, decision-making, and reflections. It ensured transparency and allowed to track potential biases (Sindic et al., 2014). Additionally, intercoder reliability checks were conducted by involving experts in the thematic analysis process to ensure agreement in data coding and interpretation (Watzlawik & Born, 2007).

Findings and Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the novel, drawing on the Social Identity Theory framework. It explored how the characters categorised themselves and others based on religious, cultural, and national affiliations and examined social comparison dynamics, in-group favouritism, and out-group discrimination. The analysis delved into the identification process, highlighting the characters' alignment with their respective groups and the negotiation of their identities in the face of societal expectations.

Dialogue Between Juggut Singh and Hukum Chand

Juggut Singh: "I am a Sikh. Why do they call me a Muslim? Is it because I wear a beard and don't cut my hair? I have always been a Sikh. It's just that nobody knows it."

Hukum Chand: "It doesn't matter what you are. The fact is, you are an outcast."

This dialogue showcases Juggut Singh's struggle with his identity and how his appearance and actions have led to him being labelled as something he is not. It reflects the tension between external perception and one's true identity.

Dialogue Between Iqbal and Nooran

Iqbal: "Religion doesn't matter to me, Nooran. I see you as a person, not as a Sikh or a Muslim."

Nooran: "But the world sees us differently, Iqbal. We cannot ignore the reality around us."

In this dialogue, Iqbal expresses his belief in looking beyond religious labels and seeing people for who they truly are. However, Nooran acknowledges the social and cultural reality that religion matters and affects how others perceive and treat them. It highlights the conflict between individual perceptions of identity and external societal expectations.

Dialogue Between Malli and the Refugees

Refugee: "We are Hindus. We belong to India."

Malli: "There is no India anymore, brother. There is no Pakistan. There is only Mano Majra."

This dialogue occurs when refugees seeking safety and belonging arrive in Mano Majra. The refugee emphasises their religious identity and attachment to their homeland, while Malli emphasises unity and belonging beyond religious and national identities. It reflects the tension between individual and

collective identities and the notion of belonging in a place that transcends political divisions.

These dialogues illustrate the complexities of identity and the struggles characters face in finding a sense of belonging within the societal and political context of the Partition. They showcase the clash between individual perspectives and societal expectations and the challenges of reconciling personal identity with the larger communal and national identities imposed upon them.

Textual Evidence

"They had always been Hindus and Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, and they had always been friends. In Mano Majra they were all the same, only the police and the administration tagged them with their separate names" (Chapter 1).

This passage highlights the harmonious coexistence of people from different religious backgrounds in Mano Majra. It illustrates how communal identities are imposed from the outside, while the villagers themselves see each other as friends, emphasizing the importance of shared humanity.

The Character of Juggut Singh

Juggut Singh, a dacoit and an outcast in the village, grapples with his own identity and belonging. He is treated as an outsider due to his criminal activities, and his status further isolates him from the community. However, he also questions the communal divisions and offers acts of compassion, indicating his complex struggle to find acceptance and a sense of belonging.

The Character of Hukum Chand

Hukum Chand, the magistrate of Mano Majra, represents the authorities and their attempt to impose an identity on the villagers. He struggles to maintain order and

make decisions that align with his own beliefs while adhering to the political pressures of the time. His character reflects the dilemma faced by individuals in positions of power who must navigate their own sense of identity and belonging within a larger political context.

The Relationship Between Iqbal and Nooran

Iqbal, a Muslim scholar, falls in love with Nooran, a Sikh girl. Their relationship challenges religious boundaries and showcases their desire to transcend communal divisions. Their love highlights the potential for connection and understanding across religious identities, questioning the rigid boundaries that define individuals in society.

These instances and examples demonstrate the ways in which the characters in *Train to Pakistan* grapple with questions of identity and belonging amidst the chaos of the Partition. The novel portrays the fluidity and complexities of identity, the impact of communal divisions on individual lives, and the potential for transcending those divisions through empathy, love, and shared humanity.

Discussion

The discussion section interprets and synthesizes the findings from the analysis, providing insights into the complex interplay between individual identity and collective identities during the Partition. It compares the research findings with existing literature, highlighting the theoretical implications of the study and its contribution to the understanding of identity and belonging in historical and cultural narratives. The theme of identity and belonging is a significant aspect of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. The novel explores the complexities and challenges faced by the characters as they grapple with questions of

identity and struggle to find a sense of belonging amidst the chaos of the Partition. Here is a closer look at how this theme is portrayed:

Religious Identity

One of the central conflicts in the novel revolves around religious identity. The characters are defined by their religious affiliations, primarily Hindus and Muslims. As the violence of the Partition unfolds, their religious identity becomes a source of division and animosity, leading to a sense of alienation and displacement.

Cultural Identity

The novel delves into the cultural identities of the characters, particularly the Punjabi culture is emphasized in the novel. Through descriptions of customs, traditions, language, and way of life, Singh emphasizes the importance of cultural identity in shaping individual and collective experiences.

National Identity

With the birth of India and Pakistan as separate nations, the characters grapple with their national identities. They are suddenly forced to align themselves with one nation or the other, causing them to question their sense of belonging and loyalty.

Displacement and Loss

As the violence escalates, many characters are uprooted from their homes and communities, becoming refugees in their own country. This displacement further intensifies their struggle to maintain a sense of identity and find their place.

Cross-Cultural Relationships

The novel also explores relationships between characters from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Such relationships challenge the boundaries of identity and

highlight the potential for understanding and empathy across divisions.

Identity Crisis

Several characters in the novel experience an identity crisis as they are torn between conflicting loyalties. They question their beliefs, values, and allegiances, trying to reconcile their identities with the more significant socio-political circumstances surrounding them.

The Changing Perception of Identity During the Violence

As the violence of the Partition intensifies, the characters' identities become crucial for their survival. Muslims hide their religious identity in predominantly Sikh areas, and vice versa. It demonstrates the fragility of identity and the fluidity with which individuals adapt to protect themselves, emphasizing the significance of identity during times of conflict.

Through these explorations, Singh raises profound questions about the nature of identity and the impact of societal divisions on individual lives. The characters' struggles to find a sense of belonging in a time of immense upheaval highlight the deep human need for connection, rootedness, and a stable sense of self in the face of identity fractures caused by religious, cultural, and national conflicts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research has significant implications for understanding identity and belonging within the context of the Partition. It underscores the significance of Social Identity Theory in analyzing the psychological and social dimensions of identity formation and belonging. This research paper explores the theme of identity and belonging in Khushwant Singh's novel, *Train to Pakistan*, within the socio-political context of the Partition of India in 1947.

Using the theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory, the study aims to analyze how the characters in the novel develop their sense of identity and belonging, as well as the processes of categorization, social comparison, and identification that shape their experiences. The research methodology involves a close reading of the novel, supplemented by thematic analysis to identify instances that highlight the characters' interactions with identity and

belonging. The findings of the analysis reveal the complex interplay between individual identity, group affiliations, and the societal dynamics of the Partition. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and social aspects of identity formation and belonging during times of conflict and upheaval. The paper concludes with recommendations for further research and a reflection on the broader implications of the study.

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