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ENG IV / A

### **Train to Pakistan**

Religious beliefs and closed/small-mindedness can halt social progress, as demonstrated in *Train to Pakistan*. The only character shown to possess any semblance of intelligence is Iqbal, who is the only atheist and a member of the extremely short list of people who are thinking about matters outside Mano Majra. The rest of the village seems mainly concerned with their own cloistered village and the people in it, showing no thought for outside affairs.

Religious beliefs, including fictional finalism and self-deception regarding the nature of the world discourage an attitude of inquiry by explaining events away to the supernatural and remove responsibility from individuals regarding their actions by ascribing their motivation to fictional spiritual forces. Such beliefs and their effect are demonstrated in *Train to Pakistan* when Iqbal talks to the men in the Sikh temple about politics and social issues in India, after which they express their views that the single most important factor in evaluating someone's ideas is whether they believe in their god or not; a disgusting ad hominem that leaves no room for proper analysis of the ideas; in the same conversation the villagers express that their second largest concern with the previous communist agent that was sent to Mano Majra was that he planned on draining a sacred well to grow food. The villagers express no real concern for what goes on outside their village that does not directly affect them until the train carrying dead people arrives; but the outrage is at the people of a different religion that killed members of their own religion, and tensions between the religions arise, rather than acknowledging that the members of the same religion in their town had nothing to do with the actual killings. The book ends with images of religiously driven rape, murder, and expulsion of one religious group at the hands of another.

The description of the village at the beginning of the book only further drives the point that the attitude of the inhabitants towards life is not productive for more than simple self-sustainment. They make no significant impact on any portion of the world, and remain ignorant of all that goes on outside. The few outside influences on the entire community are the train and the neighbouring villages, but interaction with either are small, besides the normal passage of the train as it routinely sails past, giving no indication of its ultimate intent. The townspeople seem to remain satisfying with scraping out a bare living, devoid of intellectual, social, or technological progress. Such a bare existence begs for the question of whether it is a proper existence at all to be asked.