INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES (IJELR)
A QUARTERLY, INDEXED, REFEREED AND PEER REVIEWED OPEN ACCESS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
http://www.ijelr.in (Impact Factor: 5.9745) (ICI)

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 13. Issue 4. 2026 (Oct.-Dec.)

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

Climate Anxiety, Solastalgia, and Mental Health in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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doi: 10.33329/ijelr.13.4.26



Article information
Article Received:13/09/2026
Article Accepted:20/10/2026
Published online: 25/10/2026

Abstract

Increasing evidence suggests that ecological changes and global warming affect human health, including mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Concepts such as eco-anxiety, eco-grief, eco-guilt, and solastalgia have emerged in response to the widespread and potentially irreversible effects of environmental change. One of the most traumatic events in South Asian history was the Partition of India in 1947, which resulted in mass displacement, intercommunal violence, and the disintegration of established social structures. An ecocritical reading of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) offers a framework for examining the psychological anguish of Partition through the loss of place, disrupted relationships with familiar surroundings, and the fragmentation of communal life. Although the novel predates contemporary environmental psychology, its portrayal of displacement, violence, and the destruction of established ways of life invites interpretation through the concepts of climate anxiety, solastalgia, and psychological trauma. This article examines Singh's narrative representation of loss, displacement, and damaged collective memory while exploring the possibilities of ethical re-identification within a traumatised social environment. By employing environmental mental health and solastalgia as interpretive frameworks, the study investigates how the novel represents the psychological consequences of losing home, belonging, and a familiar social landscape. It argues that these concepts offer a contemporary perspective on the fractured society and profound emotional dislocation depicted in the novel, while distinguishing historical trauma from the specific psychological effects of climate change.

Keywords: Solastalgia, Climate Anxiety, Eco-Grief, Mental Health, Partition, Displacement, Trauma, *Train to Pakistan*.

Introduction

One of the largest forced migrations in human history occurred as a result of the partition, involving the cross-border exchange of about 15 million individuals, many of whom fled within their own country out of fear for their lives. During the partition, plagues, killings and intercommunal violence may have claimed the lives of about a million people (Kaur,2009). Partition caused identities to be impacted and relationships based on trust, community ties, and cultural heritage to become severely strained due to a sense of displacement at both recent and historical events (Pandey, 2001). The phrase 'Solastalgia' means 'homesickness while at home' is often used. Instead of physically leaving one's home, it is the distress brought on by changes in that setting. A person's sense of place, identity and connection to their home are all impacted by disturbances like deforestation, bio diversity loss and rising temperatures. Negative mental health consequences such as sadness, anxiety and post-traumatic stress order (PTSD), have been connected to solastagia. Extreme weather and natural catastrophes are examples of environmental crises that can cause solastagia by upsetting people's sense of location, identity and control having a detrimental impact on their mental health. According to Clayton et al. (2017) climate anxiety is the term used to describe the persistent worry and mental discomfort related to expected consequences of climate change, such as extreme weather conditions, bio diversity loss and global instability. Solastagia can how itself as emotional tiredness, hopelessness, and a feeling of alienation from one' surroundings for college students who live in rapidly changing urban areas. Recent research highlights the connection solastagia and climate fear. People are grieving the loss of current natural areas, cultural legacy, and ecological stability in addition to worrying about the future as environmental degradation picks up speed. In areas like Pakistan where climate related problems like floods, heat waves and water scarcity are becoming more common, this dual burden might exacerbate psychological vulnerability (UNDP,2021)

The changing environment in Singh's book is mostly political, social and cultural rather than ecological. After partition. Manomajra –which was originally shown as a community where Muslims and Sikhs lived-becomes psychologically unrecognizable. Although the village's physical location doesn't change, its emotional significance is lost. Because the character feels the loss of home without necessarily leaving the actual place, solastagia is a helpful comparing notion.

Manomajra as a broken nation: Manomajra seems to be somewhat stable social environment at the start of the novel. The village's concept of time is structured by the rail road, local customs religious rituals and agricultural routines. The train is an integral part of the village's familiar surroundings, not just a mode of transit. This balance was upset due to the partition. Villager's perception of their own environment is progressively altered by news of violence elsewhere. The village is characterised by feeling of dread, rumours, distrust and monitoring. There is no longer any comfort in the houses, roads, rail road tracks or places of worship. Although the physical environment is still there, its emotional and symbolic structure has evolved. Because the residents no longer feel the 'solace' they are connected with their house, this is similar to solastagia. However, the story also goes beyond ecological change by demonstrating how political violence may result in an estrangement from the earth. The home turns into a dangerous place. According to Foucault's essay, "The Other Spaces" (1984), heterotopias are 'real sites' that exist inside every civilisation yet serve as, ""counter-sites, a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (24). Heterotopias are physical, localised locations that allow alterity as contrast to utopias, which are essentially imaginary places. They juxtapose many spaces and sites that are incompatible or contradictory inside a single genuine area. (25) Importantly, heterotopias are associated with temporal breakdowns or, "heterochronies" which occur when people or societies experience a complete breakdown with conventional, standardised time. This notion is reflected in Manomajra, which is hidden away near the river Satluj and has a tiny community of Sikhs, Muslims and one Hindu family. Although it is located inside Punjab's geographical borders, it is nonetheless socially and intellectually at odds with sectarian strife plaguing cities like Delhi, Lahore

and Amritsar. In addition to Foucault, Edward Soja spatial trialectic in "Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places" (1996) offers a framework for examining the relationship between ideological power and physical space. Soja divides space into three interconnected domains.

a) First Space (perceived space): The tangible, concrete spatial structures that may be measured and immediately recorded.

b) Second Space (conceived space): Conceptualised maps, limits and state ideology that are produced by political organisations, urban planners, and cartographers.

c) Third Space (lived space): The subaltern groups negotiate, oppose and reinvent the prevailing spatial order in Third Space, a complex overlay of actual and imagined behaviours (Soja 6-10). When Soja's paradigm is applied to partition, Radcliffe line and the newly formed countries of India and Pakistan stand in for the 'Secondspace' an abstract, politically constructed geometry that was imposed from above on the subcontinent.

On the other hand, Manomajra is an example of a third space, a lived social geography in which villagers have lived traditionally valued localised agricultural coexistence over impersonal national ties. Thus, the conflict in *Train to Pakistan* is essentially spatial; it is the violent clash between the peasants' Lived Space (Third Space) and the State's Conceived Space (Second Space).

From ecological anxiety to historical anxiety: Instead of using psychiatric diagnosis, the story depicts psychosocial anguish through conduct, silence, perplexity, violence and moral paralysis. When their environment collapses, characters react in different ways.**Juggut Singh:** Although Juggat Singh is known for his physical prowess, lawlessness and impetuous behaviour, Manomajra also plays a significant role in his personality. He, being the main character is imprisoned after authorities suspect him of murder under these unsettling circumstances. Juggut Singh loses his beloved Nooran when the partition of Muslims of Manomajra are forced to leave the village for their own safety. One Muslim expresses the pain of being separated as they leave the community that has been their home for all eternity by asking, "What relevance do we have to Pakistan?" We originated here. Our predecessors were similarly, situated, "We have coexisted with you as brethren" (133).

Iqbal: Iqbal is more intellectually displaced. He comes with abstract theories and political notions, but when faced with real misery, he finds it difficult to take decisive action. He is physically present in the community but emotionally and socially cut off from it, which highlights the psychological effects of alienation. His situation is similar to a crisis of identity. Iqbal does not have a stable relationship with the community, in contrast to Juggut who is well established in the community. The limitations of abstract political reasoning in a traumatic setting are revealed by his incapacity to convert ideology into moral behaviour.

Nooran and the Muslim families: The prospect of being expelled causes great uneasiness for Nooran and the Muslim families of Manomajra. Their ties to the community are more than just residential; they are cultural, emotional and historical. Through memory, labour, kinship and daily cohabitation, they are a part of the land. Therefore, their displacement entails more than just migration. It denotes the annihilation of a world that has been lived. In addition to physical violence, trauma study on the novel also emphasis the loss of cohabitation, betrayal and relocation as intangible traumas.

The train as a symbol of Environmental Rupture: The train is the most potent representation of a disordered location in the novel. Trains create consistency and the rhythm in the village's daily existence. They stay as a part of Manomajra's regular routine while also serving as a link to the outside world.

However, railroads become death-carrying vehicles during partition. From connection to fear, their meaning shifts. The 'ghost train's' appearance symbolises how faraway violence has invaded the

village's immediate surroundings. The train is transformed from a commonplace aspect of everyday life to proof that the entire environment has been unsafe due to the dead corpses inside.

The feeling of environmental deterioration is analogous to this symbolic transformation: a familiar river, forest, field or house may maintain its physical shape but lose the characteristics that formerly made it sustainable. The train in the novel *Train to Pakistan* becomes emotionally poisonous due to the fallout from the political disaster.

Solastagia and Communal Identity: Identity and Solastagia are closely connected since the people frequently use their homes to understand who they are. People may feel both a loss of surroundings and a loss of themselves when a place drastically changes. Solastagia's consequences on metal, emotional, spiritual and social wellbeing are highlighted in the research. The breakdown of a common cultural identity serves as an example of this process in Khushwant Singh's novel. Despite coming from different faiths, Mano Majra's residents have co-existed through common social customs. A new identity system based on separation imposed by partition. Instead of seeing themselves as neighbours, farmers, lovers, friends or villages, people are compelled to view themselves primarily as Sikhs or Muslims.

The anguish that arises when a pluralistic household is turned into a hostile and exclusive place is a type of communal solastagia.

Nature, Silence and Violence: Singh's Story pays attention to the rural space even if it isn't an ecological novel. Human brutality seems particularly strange against the background of relative consistency created by the fields, river, railway, village lanes and seasonal rhythms.

This disparity has a significant impact. Nature does not give a simple means of mending or stop violence. Rather, the landscape's tenacity draws attention to how unstable human society is. As the village's moral order collapses, the fields remain.

Thus, it is possible to think of the natural environment as a silent witness. While the people suffer from fear, sadness, and confusion, it silently absorbs the remnants of past atrocities. Even when the protagonists are unable to express that has transpired, the environment becomes a storehouse of memories.

Ecocritical Interpretation: From an Ecocritical viewpoint, Train to Pakistan illustrates that human disputes are inextricably linked to their surroundings. The village. river, railway, fields, animals and trains create a cohesive environment. When the political violence permeates his environment, it disrupts the social and psychological realms of the residents. The narrative consequently enables us to contemplate a more expansive concept:

When people lose a sure relationship with their environment, they may also experience a loss of psychological and cultural stability.

Despite Singh's focus on partition instead of climate change, this observation links the novel to the contemporary discussions about ecological bereavement, displacement, environment anxiety and solastagia.

Conclusion

Train to Pakistan can be effectively interpreted as narrative concerning location, displacement. psychological distress and ecological transformation. Climate anxiety, as understood now, is not explicitly depicted in the novel since the storyline before the current climate discussions. The novel's portrayal of a once familiar setting transforming into a terrifying and unliveable space strongly aligns with the emotional phenomenon known as solastagia. Singh illustrates the impact of obliteration of social and environmental stability on the psychological health through Manomajra, the Sutlej, the railway, the refugees and the figures like Hukam Chand and Jugga. The narrative finally conveys that

home transcends a simply physical locale; it embodies an emotional, social, cultural and environmental realm. When that space is obliterated, the repercussions can endure profoundly in both personal and communal recollection

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