Chapter-2

Khushwant Singh:
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I

Khushwant’s biggest attribute is that he speaks what he feels. He is honest to the extent that he offends even his friends and icons revered by people. It does not matter to him that it jeopardizes his chances in life. It is this quality that made Gandhi into a Mahatma. In Indian literary history Khushwant Singh’s name is bound to evolve as one of the finest historians and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observer and social critic. He is attributed with freethinking. Kushwant Singh’s comparisons of social and behavioral characteristics of Indians and Westerners are the examples of his acid wit. He brought history to our doorsteps. Khushwant Singh is very truthful about himself. Singh says:

“My concern is not with my outward appearance, my untidy turban, unkempt beard or my glazed look. (I have been told that my eyes are those of a lustful budmash) but what lies behind the physical the real me compounded of conflicting emotions like love and hate, general irritability and occasional equipoise, angry denunciation and tolerance of another's point of view, rigid adherence to self-prescribed regimen and accommodation of others' convenience.”

Khushwant Singh was born on Feb. 2, 1915 at village Hadali in Khushab district Sargodha, Punjab - now in Pakistan. Khushwant Singh's family came from a tiny hamlet called Hadali that is located about seven miles west of the river Jhelum and about forty miles south of the Khewra Salt Mine range (now in
Pakistan). His parents, Lady Varyam Kaur and Sir Sobha Singh migrated to Delhi taking Khshwant Singh's elder brother with them. The young Khushwant Singh was left behind in Hadali in the care of his paternal grandmother. Hadali had a profound influence upon him. It was a small village with barely 300 families living there, most of them Muslims. The earliest influence on Khushwant Singh was that of his grandmother. He was extremely close to her and continued to share the same room with her till he was nineteen years old. He has written a poignant short story about her entitled, "The Portrait of a Lady". She would constantly be engaged in reciting the holy scriptures The Granth Sahib and Sukhmani, the psalm of peace. This greatly influenced Singh and probably triggered his interest in religion. This perhaps led him to later specialize in Sikhism. He translated the Sikh morning prayer Japji, composed by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. He also wrote a book entitled, The Sikhs. His parents had rented a small shack where his father had taken contracts for the building of a new capital of India, New Delhi. The life of a contractor as Singh saw his father lead has been presented in meticulous detail in the chapters like "The life of a contractor” and "The Builders” in his novel Delhi. The diplomatic attitude adopted by Sir Sobha Singh and by the other Indians in their dealings with the British officers has been depicted by Khushwant Singh in his second novel. “I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale.”

In Delhi Khushwant Singh attended the Modern School for nine years. It was a nationalist school; leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sarojini Naidu were invited to address the students. By Singh's own admission these were the worst years of his life. This was due to the fact that he was neither good at studies nor at games and was caned quite often. Singh's school days touch upon some raw nerve in his psyche. Khushwant Singh passed his matriculation in 1930. Thereafter came the most carefree years of his college life. He first joined St. Stephen's College in Delhi which was run by the Cambridge Mission and was regarded as the best in northern India. Academically, Khushwant Singh fared as poorly as he had in school. By this time Sir Sobha Singh had acquired a large double-storied house with three acres of lawn, a fruit and vegetable garden, a
tennis court, two cars, and hordes of servants. The number of family members has also increased and he now had two more siblings: a brother and a sister. Khushwant Singh and his elder brother were given motorcycles and this was a major factor that led him to have a good time in college. There were only five boys in St. Stephen's with motorcycles; all Sikhs. The prosperity of his father and of the other contractors and the resultant consequences upon their children has been presented in Delhi. Khushwant Singh's two years at college were not outstanding in any manner, and were spent more in playing mediocre hockey and tennis than in studying. Singh was probably instigated towards his literary aspirations during this time. He attended the Bible classes regularly which though optional, interested Singh immensely. This is because he began to love the language of the Old and the New Testament. His favourite reading was the Old Testament, not for the teachings but for the "sonorous language."

The Government College was known for its excellence in sports. The Indian Olympic hockey team always had four or five players from the college. Khushwant Singh's proximity with hockey and other sports in St. Stephen's and in Government College led him to later write the short story, "Man How the Government of India Run !". This story focuses upon a volleyball match. There were several literary influences on Singh as well. Like Ahmed Shah Bukhari, a member of the staff, who was one of the best after dinner speakers in English that Singh, has heard till date; and he was also a writer of extremely witty Urdu prose. There were also a couple of Urdu writers - Tahseer and Imtiaz Ali Taj. They translated the English classics, *Figaro* and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* into Urdu. There was Faiz Ahmed Faiz whose poems were widely published and highly acclaimed by the critics. He was later to become the bright and rising star of Urdu poetry. Other contemporaries at college who made a name for themselves later were: actors Balraj Sahani and Dev Anand. Actress Kamini Kaushal (then known as Uma Kashyap), and directors Chetan Anand and B. R. Chopra. In this way, college was a rich, varied and creative experience for Khushwant Singh. He later wrote an essay. "Chetan Anand" in his book entitled, *Women and Men in My life.*
Khushwant Singh had little hope of entering either Oxford or Cambridge as he passed his Bachelor of Arts examination in the third division. Of all the London colleges where he could be admitted, Singh chose King's College only because of its regal name. This indicates that the desire to be different from the masses was embedded in Khushwant Singh's subconscious. Later it led him to make a distinct name for himself in the literary world. He planned to qualify for the Bar. Accordingly he set off for England in 1934. His first sea voyage was aboard the Italian ship, conte Rosso. The ambience that he experienced has probably been recreated later as a backdrop to his story, "Maiden Voyage of the Jal Hindia". In England, Khushwant Singh fell in love with the country and the people. Although preoccupied with girls most of the time, he did manage to pass in his first year tests. During his summer vacations in India, Singh bragged a great deal about his exploits with English girls. This perhaps was his first attempt at creating fiction. The fascination of Indians for western women found expression later, in various stories like: Mr. Singh and the Colour Bar", The Sardarji and the Starlet", Maiden Voyage of the Jal Hindia" and The Great Difference". Back in England, Singh moved into the country. He took a room with a retired professor, F.S. Marvin, who had written several books. This association probably attracted him towards the literary world. His keen love for nature too was kindled during this time. His regular walks in the woods with the profusely flowering azaleas and resounding with the intoxicating melody of bird song cast a spell over him. Later Khushwant Singh imbued his fiction with a wealth of detail when describing flora, fauna, the seasons and various natural phenomena. This is seen in his description of the monsoons in his first novel, Train to Pakistan. His empathy for animals is evident in the short story, "The Fawn" and also in the first chapter of his second novel, I shall Not Hear the Nightingale. Singh has also written a book entitled, Nature Watch. During this time he came across Kaval Malik who had been his junior in Modern School. She had grown into a veritable beauty and was courted by several highly eligible young men. Khushwant Singh fell desperately in love with her. His chances of marrying her were slim because he did not belong to the coveted Indian Civil Service and was studying to become a mere lawyer. Also, his father was a builder and had to take contracts from the Public Works Department
Khushwant Singh returned home in 1939 with the simultaneous outbreak of the Second World War. His marriage in October 1939 was celebrated on a lavish scale. That was due to the fact that his father was the biggest owner of real estate in Delhi, and his father-in-law had become the Chief Engineer of PWD (the first Indian to become one). After a brief honeymoon to Mount Abu in Rajasthan, the newly weds shifted to Lahore. Sir Sobha Singh had provided the couple with a new Ford and rented an apartment and office near the Lahore High Court. His love-life and marriage find almost no parallel in his fiction. This is probably because while being autobiographical to a great extent in his works, Singh drew a clearly discernible line as far as his intimate personal life is concerned. In Lahore, Khushwant Singh was accepted everywhere due to his well-to-do status and family connections. He joined the two exclusive clubs of Lahore including the Gymkhana that rarely admitted Indians. The long hours spent in the clubs found expression in his fiction. He has grounded one of his stories entitled, "India is a Strange Country" in the Gymkhana club. Socially he was also invited to the homes of judges, ministers and eminent lawyers. But all this did not bring him any clients. He made virtually no progress as a lawyer. In spite of hobnobbing with the British, Khushwant Singh remained true to his Indian roots and was contemptuous of the wogs, an abusive term for Asians, or the westernized oriental gentlemen. This is expressed in his various stories like the memorable, "Karma", and the poignant, "A Bride for the Sahib". As Vasant A. Shahane rightly points out:

"Khushwant Singh's art and mind are permeated by a genuine Punjabi consciousness. His art is deeply
rooted in the soil deriving vitality from the vigorous energy that characterizes a Punjabi. Unlike the work of some other Indo-Anglian writers, his writing has grown out of the grass roots of the social milieu. His *Mano Majra* is a novel centering on a Punjab village and his real experiences provide him with the necessary setting and understanding of men and situations in rural India."  

Khushwant Singh spent some of his time in his office and some in the hearings of other senior lawyers' cases. He even worked as a junior to the then top criminal lawyer. Finally he began taking undefended murder cases for a pittance. He also became a part-time lecturer at the law college. Soon law ceased to interest him. It is evident that the aversion lasted a long time because Singh has not based a single story or novel that is associated with or deals with the legal profession. Instead he took to reading English classics and poetry which he had bypassed during his college days. Thus subconsciously he was laying the foundation for his literary career. Khushwant Singh depended upon his father to maintain himself in the style he was accustomed to because though his practice had increased somewhat, his earnings were not much. Sir Sobha Singh being a generous man and perhaps being overly fond of his son bought him a sprawling bungalow and twice replaced his Ford car with new ones each time. All through the war Singh stayed in Lahore. During this time he developed a deep and abiding friendship with Mansur Qadir. Mansur was rising rapidly in the legal profession and later went on to become the foreign minister and the chief justice of Pakistan. Khushwant Singh has written an extremely touching essay, "*Mansur Qadir*".

"We would often ask ourselves: Will Mansur approve of this? Such combination of ability, integrity, consideration and kindness, I have never found in any other human being". 

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Khushwant Singh had no intention of becoming a writer, and he did not have any illusion about his capacity to handle words. He had actually trained to be a lawyer. However, since not many cases came his way, he had plenty of time to read and indulge in gossip. The first few cases that came his way as counsel appointed by the court were to defend those people on trial for murder who could not afford lawyers. He received Rs.16/- per day to do so. Singh made it a point to visit sites where the murder had taken place, interviewed the person arrested and talked to his friends and relatives. All this gave him an insight into the lives of the Punjab peasantry and exposure to the countryside. This was a fairly new experience for him as well as for his friends. So he would relate his experiences to his drinking companions and became something of a raconteur. It came as a pleasant surprise to him to observe that he was able to hold the attention of his listeners. Sometimes one of his friends would make the suggestion that he should write about them. However, Khushwant Singh’s poor academic record deterred him from taking up the pen. Writing was for those who had a brilliant academic record, and not for someone like him who had barely scraped through his exams. It took him several years to overcome this feeling of inferiority. He was able to do so only after he heard stories read out by men with great academic distinction, and read Indian novelists who had become successful, like: Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan. This led him to conclude that one does not have to be a good student to be a good storyteller. And finally he gained confidence to venture into the field of writing. The opportunity came to him after the independence of India and the Partition. Khushwant Singh’s discovery of his own talent should serve as an inspiration to all budding writers who have doubts about their own abilities. The British had decided to pull out, but after the division of India. Lahore was to become a part of Pakistan. Violence had broken out in 1946. Hindus and Sikhs were being massacred brutally in northwestern Punjab, Lahore and Amritsar. By the middle of 1947 it was evident that Hindus and Sikhs would have to leave Pakistan. Singh was reluctant to love; but the mutual hatred between the two communities had escalated to a great extent. Khushwant Singh decided to leave Lahore temporarily (entrusting his home to Mansur) until the violence subsided.
He was unable to return and came back after a couple of years as a guest of Mansur Qadir.

All this caused considerable anguish to Singh who went on to write the deeply moving, and award winning novel, *Train to Pakistan* based on the events just prior to the Partition. On the eve of the 50th year of India’s Independence, a commercial film was made on the same novel. It has been directed by Pamela Rooks and stars the award winning actor, Nirmal Pandey. This film gives the post-independence generation a feel of the heart rending events that preceded the Partition. Even though Singh lost his home and livelihood, he was secretly relieved because he had the perfect excuse to give up law which he had begun to hate. He applied for a job in the Ministry of External Affairs. Khushwant Singh was appointed as an information officer in the High Commission in London. Thus he was back in London where he happened to land in the middle of a tricky situation. At that time the high commissioner was Krishna Menon who had been hand-picked for the job by Indian's Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru. Singh's boss was Sudhir Ghosh who considered himself to be superior to Menon. As a result they clashed frequently. The Home Minister Sardar Patel was also in charge of foreign publicity and supported Ghosh. Ultimately matters reached a climax and Menon had sent Ghosh back to India, making Khushwant Singh the scapegoat. Patel avenged this by transferring Singh to Ottawa. However, this proved to be a blessing in disguise for Singh. Later he wrote an article, "My Days with Krishna Menon" included in his book, *Not a Nice Man to know*. In Ottawa Khushwant Singh's boss happened to be his wife's Uncle, H.W. Malik who spent most of his time at the golf course and at diplomatic receptions. In any case there was not much work to be done and Singh began, writing short stories, and cultivated as a writer, poet and editor of literary journals. It was here that his works began to first appear in print, in publication like Harper's ‘The Canadian Forum and Saturday Night’. He developed a close and long lasting friendship with several Canadians. He traveled all over the country, went skiing, took long walks in the beautiful Maple forests, hiked in the majestic Rocky mountains and revelled in the glory of nature. This close communion with nature gave him a keen eye for
detail when describing the natural surroundings in his stories and novels. This gave a realistic and earthy flavour to his fiction. Whether it is the picturesque depiction of the Punjab countryside in "A Punjab Pastoral" or the mystique of the wooded hills in "The Memsahib of Mandla". Khushwant Singh's power of observation is clearly evident. Much later he also made a highly rated television serial, The World of Nature for Doordarshan. Simultaneously he began to have differences with the high commissioner. Just before matters came to a head he received his transfer orders back to England. Jawahar Lal Nehru had taken charge of external publicity and on Menon's insistence; Khushwant Singh was to be appointed as the public relations officer. He later wrote a story based on a supposedly fictitious incident that occurred with the public relations officer of the Indian High Commission entitled, "The Interview". His second posting in England led Khushwant Singh to take a concrete decision regarding his future career. He soon grew bored with the endless socializing that consisted of numerous lunches, cocktails and receptions.

Keeping in tune with his literary aspirations Singh made his home a virtual meeting place of journalists. He had brought several cases of premium scotch with him from Canada. Scotch had become scarce in post-war England. As a result, his parties were immensely popular. Eminent journalists like: Kingsley Martin, Harold Evans, William Clarke, David Astor; writers like: C.P. Snow, Prof. C.E.M. Joad; and poets: Auden, Louis MacNeice, Dylan Thomas; all frequented his place. He was later to write an essay entitled, "Ungentle into the Good Night: Dylan Thomas". This was a part of his book, Need for a New Religion in India and Other Essays. At this time his first collection of short stories, The Mark of Vishnu based mostly on his experiences in Lahore and Ottawa was published by the Saturn Press. It received good reviews everywhere. At this point Khushwant Singh began seriously toying with the idea of taking up writing as a full-time career. He was also becoming disenchanted with the High Commissioner, Krishna Menon. Menon's discourteous behaviour and attempts to humiliate him became unbearable, Singh decided to quit instead of asking for a transfer. He was fast approaching forty and he had to decide soon about the rest of his life. Khushwant
Singh took a hard decision and resigned in 1951. He gave up the privileges of diplomatic life, invitations to the Buckingham Palace, embassy receptions, unlimited supply of duty-free liquor, and the like; in favour of an uncertain future. He did not consult any one, not even his wife because at that point of time the communication channels between the two had almost broken down. Khushwant Singh sent his wife, two children and servants to India.

This scenario proved useful to provide the background to the story, "The Sardarji and the Starlet". This story is based on a true incident that involved his classmate of a Government College. Khushwant Singh has also written an essay on him entitled "N. Iqbal Singh" in his book, Women and Men in My Life. He soon realized that he would have to specialize in some subject in order to make a distinct name for himself in the literary world. He decided to take up the study of the Sikhs. He also wrote The Sikhs, a book about the history of his people. In this book, Khushwant Singh made the controversial prediction that by the next century the Sikhs would merge back into the Hindu community. By now, Singh had run through his savings and since none of his three books had earned him much, he decided to return home. In the summer of 1951, Khushwant Singh was back to square one, in Delhi, living in his father's house and dependent upon his generosity. This was a difficult period in his life. He had to suffer the caustic comments and sarcastic remarks of his friends and relatives. Everybody believed that he had made a mess of his life. To escape from this depressing atmosphere, Singh decided to shift to Bhopal. Sir Sobha Singh owned an ice cream factory, an orchard and a house adjacent to the lake. Khushwant Singh has given a description of his train journey from Delhi to Bhopal in his essay, "Sex in Indian Life". This is one of the essays in his book, We Indians. He began living all alone in the house and worked every morning on his first novel based upon the Partition of India. He spent the rest of his time bird watching, walking through the woods and drinking himself to sleep. He completed the rough draft of Mano Majra (Train to Pakistan) in three months and returned back to Delhi.
Singh’s struggle was not over yet. He was still dependent upon his father. The children's education was being paid for by his wife. And to top it, his marriage had almost reached breaking point, with his wife's close association with his old friend E.N. Mangat Rai. In desperation he took a job with All India Radio. He was in charge of the English overseas programmes. This gave him a chance to make friends with Nirad C. Chaudhari who then wrote scripts for their programmes and Ruth Pawar Jhabalvala, who came sometimes to record radio talks. In his essay “Scholar Extraordinary: Nirad C.Chaudhari”, Khushwant Singh wrote:

At times he lost his patience with me and loudly called me a fool. His wife protested that by using that kind of language he would lose the few friends he had. “But he is a fool,” retorted Nirad, “if he doesn’t know these little things, what else can I call him? 4

Vasant A. Shahane has pointed out that whereas Chaudhari looks at the West with admiration, and even adulation, Singh's attitude to the West is neither adulatory nor overly critical. This contrast between Nirad Chaudhari and Khushwant Singh is even more pronounced in respect of their approaches to India. Singh has observed India both as an insider as well as an outsider. He is unsentimentally observant of the West too. He had achieved a delicate balance between his deep involvement with India and his unscrupulous objectivity in assessing her achievement. Meanwhile, Singh got his novel typed by Tatty, the American wife of the English diplomat Walter Bell. Tatty Bell believed that the novel was worthless. Despite this disparaging assessment Khushwant Singh sent the manuscript to the Grove Press of New York. They had just announced a thousand-dollar award for the best work of fiction from India. By this time he was in his second year with the ‘All India Radio’. Once he happened to interview Dr. Luther Evans, the Director General of UNESCO in Paris. There was an instant rapport between the two. Soon after Singh received an offer to take over as the deputy
head of The Mass Communication Division of UNESCO in Paris. A thoroughly relieved Khushwant Singh jumped at the offer and resigned from his job. He set off for Paris by ship. His numerous sea voyages have found a place in several of his stories like, "My Own My Native Land". In Paris too there was not much work to be done. Khushwant Singh spent most of his time in writing letters and in attending various conferences and receptions in different parts of the world like Madrid, Geneva and London. It was during his stay in Paris that the Grove Press Award was announced for his novel. This was the best news that Singh had had in a long time. His novel had been accepted by a number of European publishers including Chatto and Windus (London) and Gallimard (France). The book was published under two titles: Mano Majra and Train to Pakistan. In German it was entitled Dia Brucke am Satledsh. The novel received rave reviews everywhere. By now Singh had got tired of the petty office politics that prevailed in his organization. He soon resigned and sent his family back to India. Khushwant Singh moved into a cottage near Houndan and began work on his second full length novel. He had the rough draft of the novel, I Shall not Hear the Nightingale, and read in three months. Nissim Ezekiel in his review of this novel wrote:

"Whatever else may be said about Khushwant Singh's second novel, it must be said that the characters in it are interestingly odious".5

Subsequently Singh sailed back to Delhi. Once again Khushwant Singh had to endure the barbed shaft of everyone. This was because writing was regarded as an amusing hobby and not a serious profession. And, even now his wife was paying for the children's education and he himself depended upon his father's help. In order to prove his worth, Singh took up a job as the chief editor of Yojana. This was a weekly publication (in both Hindi and English) brought out by the Planning Commission Khushwant Singh worked extremely hard to make the publication a success. He traveled the length and breadth of the country with his photographer T.S.Nataranjan. Singh learnt a great deal about the real India and
wrote about everything he saw. But it was all in vain. The circulation of *Yojana* refused to pick up. The reading public dismissed it as government propaganda. The distribution of the journal was also poor. Khushwant Singh was unable to deal with the mutual rivalry between senior officials and government ministers and often found himself caught in between. This time too, fate came to Singh's rescue and he happened to meet the talent scout of the Rockefeller Foundation. The scout had read *The Sikhs* and offered him the chance to do a more comprehensive work on the same subject. Singh readily took it up because this would give him the opportunity to make up for the shoddy work he had done on his own community in *The Sikhs*. He prepared the project report and got the Aligarh Muslim University to sponsor his application. He deliberately chose a Muslim University in order to prove that the mutual antagonism between the Sikhs and Muslims was a myth. As soon as his application was accepted, Singh resigned from his job at *Yojana*. Although the Rockefeller deal was not very lucrative, it did prove beneficial towards furthering Khushwant Singh's career. At that time his son was studying in King's College, Cambridge; the expenses for which were done by his wife. He left his daughter in a school in Mussoorie and left for London with his wife. Khushwant Singh was able to accomplish a great deal in London. He accumulated a lot of material on the Sikhs at the India Office Library. He wrote a biography of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, as well as a book on the ten years of turmoil that followed his death. This was done in three months time after which his wife returned to India, and Singh left for America and Canada. He intended to gather information about the Sikh community that had settled there. Here Khushwant Singh was able to gather considerable material, which had until then remained untapped. Finally after he was clear in his mind about how he would shape his book. Khushwant Singh began writing with the help of Yvonne Le Rougetel. This English woman had been his secretary at UNESCO.

After several months of hard work the book began to take shape. His fellowship soon ended and he was not granted an extension. But with dogged determination Singh persisted regardless. At long last the two volumes were ready
after four years. This work gave him a sense of satisfaction as he had never felt before. He believed that at last he had justified his existence.

A History of the Sikhs, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2 were published by both, the Princeton and the Oxford University Press. By now Khushwant Singh began to be regarded as an authority on the Sikhs. He was asked by the Encyclopaedia Britannica to write their items on Sikhs and Sikh History. Overnight he was in demand everywhere. The Spalding Trust of Oxford invited him to deliver a series of lectures on Sikhism. Princeton University invited him to teach Comparative Religion Simultaneously several of his short stories and articles appeared in American, British, and Indian journals. He was commissioned by the New York Times and the Observer (London) to write for them. Thus, Khushwant Singh entered the world of serious journalism.

After a short period at Princeton and Hawaii, Singh began to teach Indian Religious and Contemporary Indian Politics at Swarthmore College. These lectures were later published under the title, Vision of India. His stint at Swarthmore laid the foundation for the pattern of life that Khushwant Singh follows to this day. It was here that he developed his legendary respect for time. He began to eat little, drink more and became a stickler for time. Khushwant Singh follows a strict regimen in his daily life to this day. He gets up around 4 a.m. prepares tea for himself and his guards. Then read The Hindustan Times, listen to music on the transistor. The rest of the day is spent in reading other paper, book (he read one book everyday), letter (he make it a point to answer each one to them), writing review translating book and poetry, working upon his column, and books. In the evening a swim provides additional exercise. This is allowed by some reading, some T.V. and then his quota of three scotches, an early dinner and bed by 10 p.m. Guests are invariable asked to leave by 9 p.m. The credit or keeping to this regimen goes to his wife as well. She makes sure that guests, howsoever distinguished, do not overstay their welcome. The routine varies somewhat when he is socializing, or is out of Delhi. This discipline has no
doubt helped Khushwant Sing to make a distinct name for himself in the literary world. In order to prepare for his lectures, Singh read a lot about India and in this way learnt a great deal more about his own country. It was here that Khushwant Singh studied and learnt about the major religions of the worlds, like; Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shikhism. Based upon his understanding of the various religions, the agnostic Singh developed his own personal religion. This has been outlined in his article. "Need for a New Religion in India ". He has written several other essays like “Religion”, “Opium of the Masses” and “Religion versus Morality”. Several books also followed on the same topic, some of which are: Shri Ram : A biography, Religion of the Shikhs, and Guru Gobind Singh - the Saviour. Singh had now become a professor with several books to his credit, starting with an incredibly poor academic record. In spite of such laudable achievements, Khushwant Singh did not develop a swollen head:

I had no illusion about my being a good teacher or a great writer. But I always managed to raise a laugh whenever I spoke. I am a born jester. And whatever rubbish I wrote, got published.

While Singh was still at Swarthmore he was invited to take over as the editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India. He had been offered the position earlier as well, but he had been unable to take it up. At that time he had been committed to the Rockefeller Foundation. This time round he had no such compulsions.

In 1969 Khushwant Singh reached Bombay to join The Illustrated Weekly. In anticipation, his son Rahul had resigned his job with The Times of India as he did not wish to work at the same place as his father. Rahul Singh took over the editorship of Reader's Digest instead. Everyday Khushwant Singh was in office an hour before anyone else. During that hour he managed to finish his entire day's work. This consisted of writing the editorial, making captions, editing stories and articles, and answering the unanswered mail. Khushwant Singh realized that just as he had not known much about India prior to his job at Swarthmore, likewise
was the case with most Indians. So he started a series on the different sub-communities of India like Lingavats, Jats, Aiyers, Chitpavans, Aiyengars, Vokkalingas, Gujars, Memons, Khojas, Boharas and the like. The result was miraculous. Each issue was a sellout. The Weekly, which had till now been at the bottom of all the TOI publications shot to the top with a wide margin. As the circulation of the Weekly climbed, so did Khushwant Singh's reputation. He became a cult figure of sorts and acquired a formidable reputation at this time.

He came to be admired by many and at the same time was hated and envied by several of his colleagues. Khushwant Singh had three assistant editors, of whom, Fatima Zakaria the junior most managed to become his number two. This was by virtue of the fact that she was an excellent organizer. She assumed the role of a mother hen to the other more prolific writers like: Bachi Kanga, R.G.K. Raju Bharatan, M.J. Akabar, Jiggs Kalra and Bikram Vohara. Khushwant Singh's social life too began to revolve around the Zakarias. He made friends with almost all the friends of the Zakarias. These included Faisal Essa, Consul General of Kuwait, Rajani Patel-The architect, Ibrahim Qadri, the Chudasamas, and numerous others. However, he did make a few friends on his own like: Ghafoor Noorani, the Palkhiwalas, the Sorabjis, Saryu Doshi, Devyani Chaubal, Nina Merchant, Nirmala Matthan, Trilochan, Bir Sahni and the Advanis. For his book, Women and Men in My Life, he wrote a couple of essays about the friends he made during this time. The essays in Khushwant Singh's inimitably witty, forthright and poignant style are: "Devyani Chaubal" and "Nirmala Matthan". It was during this time that the bulb logo that graces Khushwant Singh column was designed by Mario Miranda. Apart from him, R.K. Lakshman was also a regular visitor at his office. Khushwant Singh's tenure with the weekly was quite controversial. His views about religion for one, were unpalatable for many. He is an agnostic and boldly wrote against the conventional religiosity and the cult of so-called god-man. He frequently published photographs of inadequately clothed young women along with a reasonable excuse each time. The result was angry protests. It was alleged that The Weekly, formerly a family magazine was being turned into a trashy rag. At the same time the circulation kept on increasing, and
by the time Khushwant Sing was fired, the circulation had increased from a mere 80,000 to over four lakhs. It was the nine famous or infamous years with *The Weekly* that gave Singh his "unsavoury reputation" that has lasted till today. He became the most widely-read journalist, the most discussed editor, sought after by socialites, Industrialists and politicians alike. In 1975, he was honoured with the Padma Bhushan by the Indian Government for his distinguished contribution to literature and journalism.

However, just as all good things come to an end, so did Khushwant Singh's tenure at *The Weekly*. The end was as bad as his editorship was good. Singh had already been given two extensions at the Weekly and he expected to get a third. But the political compulsions of the day dictated otherwise. Khushwant Singh had always supported Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi. This was unacceptable to the Prime Minister Morarji Desai. This was conveyed to Singh by the proprietor Ashok Jain. M.V. Kamath was to take his place. Accepting all this, he had written a touching article bidding everyone a nostalgic farewell. He expected a poignant farewell party with favourable speeches from some, as the staff had almost become an extended family. He got a rude shock instead. A week before he was to leave, he arrived in office and was abruptly handed a letter asking him to quit immediately. Apparently somebody had spread the false rumour that he had written a bitter piece on the highhandedness of the management. Greatly distressed, Singh left promptly. The hurt of this inglorious exit haunts him till this day. His farewell piece was published in several papers subsequently. It is included in his book, *Not a Nice Man to Know* under the title, "Farewell to the Illustrated Weekly". Soon after Khushwant Singh resumed work on his novel *Delhi* on which he had been working off and on. A couple of months later he left for Delhi. He had received several tempting offers but chose to edit Indira Gandhi's *National Herald* without any pay. This was a losing proposition right from the beginning. The staff was often on strike because of not having been paid for months. Twice the police raided the office in an attempt to implicate the manager in some illegal business deals. Tired of all the petty intrigues, Singh resigned after three months. He took up the editorship of *New Delhi*, a fortnightly
magazine that had been launched by the Anada Bazaar Group of Publications. This too did not take off properly. The reason was that the magazine was printed in Calcutta and almost never appeared on the stalls in time. Khushwant Singh's trials did not last long. Mrs. Gandhi was soon back in power and remembered him for unwavering support through her bed years. He was offered the choice of becoming either the High commissioner in London, or a member of the Rajya Sabha as well as the editor of *The Hindustan Times*, he chose the latter. In 1980 he became a member of the Parliament and, also the editor of the largest circulating newspaper of Delhi. Singh's six years in Parliament coincided with an important phase in the history of modern India. This was the time when trouble in Punjab erupted. Khushwant Singh being a nominated member was not expected to speak against the government on controversial issues. Regardless of this, he spoke fervently against the army storming the Golden Temple (he returned his Padma Bhushan as a protest) and the massacre of the Sikhs following the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. Due to his apparent disloyalty in the Parliament, his three-year contract with *The Hindustan Times* was not renewed. The proprietor, K.K. Birla, however, asked Singh to continue writing his weekly column "*With Malice Towards One and All*". This column was through the years picked up by over fifty papers and enjoys a faithful readership to this day. Khushwant Singh was well aware of the fact that he would not be given a second term in Parliament as well. This was because Rajiv Gandhi was completely against his renomination, even though the President, Zail Singh was all in his favour. Khushwant Singh has based several of his essays and articles on this period of his life. He has sketched a pen portrait of Prabha Dutt, who was his hard-working assistant in *The Hindustan Times* (included in his book, *Not a Nice Man to Know*). He has also written articles entitled: "*Khalistan*", "*My Years in Parliament*", "*Giani ZailSingh*" and "*M. Hidayatullah*" in his book, *“Sex, Scotch and Scholarship.*

The growth of Khushwant Singh's literary career has to be seen in the context of Punjabi literature. Creative works in Punjabi are characterized by a realistic and earthy flavour. All aspects of the physical, whether it is violence or sexual explicitness, even crudeness, form an integral part of the Punjabi literary
psyche. This has come down through the ages in the form of rustic tales and folk songs. This uninhibited approach towards the physical is seen in the works of Amrita Pritam, Shiv Kumar Batlavi, Kartar Singh Duggal and several other Punjabi writers. Vasant Shahane believes that Khushwant Singh as a writer of fiction has been influenced by Indo-Anglian writing as well as Punjabi creative writing. The health, realistic spirit and tradition of Punjabi and Urdu works seem to have inspired him. His roots have also influenced his style of writing. His use of language is down-to-earth, realistic and often an exact translation of the Hindi or the Punjabi dialect. His language is a living and vital entity that can be termed as Indian-English or Indianism. The critics are of the opinion that Singh specializes in the use of Indianism which faithfully depict the gestures, attitudes and the vernacular of Punjabi villagers. In 1986 Khushwant Singh retired in order to concentrate solely on freelance journalism and writing. He also became the consulting editor of Penguin. In 1989, he was at the Wilson Centre of Smithsonian in Washington to update his two-volume *A History of the Sikhs*. There he learnt from the library computer records that there were 58 titles to his credit till then. This included translation like: *Umrao Jaan Ada: Courtesan of Lukhnow* by Mirza Mohamman Hadi Ruswa. *I Take This Woman* by Rajinder Singh Bedi, *The Skeleton and other Writings and Selected poems* by Amrita Pritam, *Shiqwa and Jawab-i-Shikwa - Complaint and Answer*, *Iqbal's Dialogue with Allah* by Muhammad Iqbal and several others. He has also been the editor of several books like: *Land of Five Rivers: Stories from the Punjab, Gurus, Godmen, and Good People, Sunset of the Sikh Empire*, and some others. He has also written a lively play entitled, *Tyger Tyger Burning Bright*. This entertaining play has never been enacted on stage as yet, which is somewhat surprising. In 1990 his third novel *Delhi* which took him twenty-five years to complete was published. A *German translation* of the book has also been published. As of date, Khushwant Singh has 72 titles under his name. His book, *The Best of Khushwant Singh* was published in 1993. The foreword to this book was written by one of the brightest stars of the Indian literary firmament, Vikram Seth.
Today Khushwant Singh is the most well-known author, columnist and journalist of India with an international readership. Since the past several years he had been working upon his autobiography. This was intended to be his swan song. But knowing Singh's penchant for not mincing words, it was to be expected that the autobiography would cause some ruffled feathers. And it did. In October, 1995 an extract of his autobiography, Truth, Love and a Little Malice, was published in India Today. This greatly upset Menaka Gandhi, the younger daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi and then Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment. She felt that portions of the book infringed upon her privacy. Consequently she filed a case seeking a stay upon the book. However the question of privacy does not arise because, Khushwant Singh has written about the widely-publicized fracas between Indira Gandhi and Menaka Gandhi. The incident had occurred in full view of public servants, personal secretaries and police officers. Subsequently Menaka had to leave the prime ministerial house. At the time this had happened, Menaka had herself rung up Khushwant Singh so that he could alert the foreign press. Much later the two fell out with each other. The first round has gone to Menaka Gandhi with the Court ruling in her favour in April 1997. The Book was scheduled to be released in January 1996 but it was published in 2000. Now literary circles are waiting for Khushwant Singh's next move.

Singh's importance continues to grow, regardless of all such controversies. He has travelled extensively all over the world on invitations to give lectures. This has resulted in several travelogues like: "Australia Lone Land of Magnificent Distances", "Southern Safari", “In Japan without Money or Passport", and numerous others. What makes Khushwant Singh’s travelogues special is his total lack of inhibition. He tells it all as he saw it, missing out nothing whether it was a rebuffed pass at a girl, a joke at his expense or a lecherous intention that came to nothing.

The invitations continue to pour in to this day in spite of his advanced age. Khushwant Singh is 95 years old now. The media seeks his opinion regarding every important event in the country. In October 1997, he was honoured with the
Mondello award, a literary award given in Italy. He received it for *Train to Pakistan* which was translated into Italian. Singh appears regularly on various television programmes that are broadcast by the numerous channels. In spite of his stature, he continues to guide and encourage young aspiring writers and journalists. At the same time he retains his modesty about his literary abilities. He said in a discussion forum on a television programme:

I must dispose of the question which people often ask me: `What do you think of yourself as a Writer? Without appearing to wear the false cloak of humility, let me say quite honestly that I do not rate myself very highly."

In Order to comprehend the works of Khushwant Singh, it is first necessary to understand his ideas on fiction and his major concerns. This will give a better insight into his choice of themes upon which he has based most of his writings. It is fairly obvious that his personal experiences and the historical events that shaped the country play a major role in his works. Critics believe that the Punjab countryside, the capital of India-Delhi and the city of London are the most important influences upon him. Exposed as he has been to the ideas and attitudes of the West, Singh is essentially an Oriental who has succeeded in maintaining his Indian self and individuality.

**A: Honours and awards:**

1. Reckefeller Grant (1966)
B: His Works:

a: Shorts stories:


b: Novels:


c: Non-Fictional Works:

7. *Not Wanted in Pakistan*, New Delhi, Rajkamal, 1965
14. *Khushwant Singh on War and Peace in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, edited by Mala Singh, New Delhi, Hind, 1976
20. *We Indians*, New Delhi, Orient, 1982
26. *Women and Men in My Life*. New Delhi, UBS Publisher Distributors, 1995
28. Editor, with Peter Russell, A Note...on G.V. Desani's "All about H. Hatterr" and "Hali." London and Amsterdam, Szeben, 1952
31. Editor, I Believe. New Delhi, Hind, 1971
33. Editor, with Qurratulain Hayder, Stories from India. New Delhi Sterling 1974
41. Translator, With Others, Come Back, My Master, And Other Stories, By K. S. Duggal. New Delhi Bell. 1978
43. Translator, Amrita Pritam: Selected Poems. New Delhi, Bhartiya Gnanpith 1982
When Singh began his career as a writer, he decided to make a thorough study of his own people, the Sikhs:

Writing on Sikhs was a calculated move. I felt that in a highly competitive field my best chance was to specialize in a subject on which very little had been written. No Sikh had published a book on the Sikhs either in England or the United States. This is also involved a study of Sikh religion. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject, he read about all the religions of the world. As a result of this, he has written several books and essays upon religion. Hence it is but natural that one of the major themes in his fiction would be religion. In India, there is a close relation between religion and politics. And Khushwant Singh is not only a writer but a journalist as well. So he cannot remain unaware or untouched by the events that have shaped our country. He is keenly aware of the history, culture and polity of India. An important aspect of his fiction, especially his novels, is his views on politics.

As Singh believes that the "ring or truth" is the essential hallmark of all good fiction, he has mostly written about what he is personally acquainted with. His personal experience, close association, and intimate knowledge about the subject taken up, always comes through in all his fiction. His first collection of short stories, *The Mark of Vishnu* was the result of his briefless days as a lawyer in Lahore. "Almost all of them are based on real life experiences or those related by friends. I took minimum liberties with the facts and this only to give them some punch." Naturally the autobiographical note in his fiction is rather pronounced.

Khushwant Singh has written four novels and five collections of short stories. The details of novels are given below.
Singh's first novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956), originally entitled *Mano Majra*, is one of the finest realistic novels of post-World War-II Indo-Anglian fiction. The Plot and the narrative sequence of the novel is divided into four parts:

(i) "Dacoity", (ii) "Kalyug", (iii) "Mano Majra" and (iv) "Karma". Mano majra, a tiny village in the Punjab, serves as the fictional setting of *Train to Pakistan*. It is situated on the Indian border, half a mile away from the river Sutlej. In spite of bloodshed and rioting in the frontier area, life in Mano Majra remains to be peaceful. The Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus are living in harmony and amity. Partition has not touched Mano Majrans… "no one in Mano Majra even knows that the British have left and the country is divided into Pakistan and Hindustan."

Life here is regulated by trains with their arrival and departure. The villagers are not acquainted with the progress of science and ignorance of scientific progress is bliss to them.

The Peaceful life in Mano Majra comes to a jolt when on an August night the village money-lender's house is raided by Malli, a dreaded dacoit. The dacoits drop bangles in the house of Juggut Singh of the same village. Later Juggut Singh is arrested as the suspect of the murderer and dacoity. People's party of India sends its representative Iqbal Singh to work for peace when there are communal disturbances there. Police also arrests him as a suspect in money-lender's murder case. The situation at Mano Majra aggravates further. A commotion is created with the arrival of the ghost train from Pakistan. This engulfs Mano Majra. Madness takes over the people of different communities. It follows senseless killing, looting burning and raping. The partition of India caused a great deal of
turmoil to Khushwant Singh and the result was his incomparable masterpiece, *Train to Pakistan*. Since he was a witness to the violence that occurred, he gives a graphic description of the communal riots right at the beginning of the novel:

The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. From Calcutta, the riots spread north and east and west: to Noakhali in East Bengal, where Muslims massacred Hindus; to Bihar, where Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs roamed Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar.¹⁰

Such a narration is clearly an indictment of the repercussion of the partition, rather, the partition itself. Even though the novel essentially describes the horrific events of the Partition, Khushwant Singh resists the temptation to sit in Judgment on the political leaders of the day. Some of the characters do speak in a biased manner at times, but this is in keeping with the demands of the story.

*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is the story of two families, one Sikh and the other Hindu, set against the last period of British Raj in the Punjab province and just about five years before the achievement of India's independence. Although the novel substantially deals with India's concurrent political situations in Punjab, yet it is not a truly political novel since the politics in it apparently lacks a deep involvement with the situations, interest and commitment to the political motives and even the political philosophy. The novel has a limited range and a restricted milieu and it does not go beyond an obvious limit of a socio-political narrative interests, though it has substantive elements of intensity and fullness of passion. Khushwant Singh has no apparent political motive of involvement.
*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is set in Amritsar in 1942 during the height of India’s freedom movement. It explores the impact of the freedom movement on the family of a magistrate Buta Singh, a loyal servant of the British Raj. Unknown to him, his son Sher Singh becomes the leader of a group of anti-British revolutionaries. The son is arrested; if proved guilty of treason he could be sentenced to death. The English Deputy Commissioner John Taylor, offers the son two alternatives: either betraying his comrades and saving his life, or else being hanged.

This novel explores rather a despicable side of India’s history— that of servile Indian government servants in the British regime. How unbelievably the Indian civil servants of that time would degrade themselves stopping short of nothing to be in the good books of the British. The novel depicts the British themselves as bemused by such Indians at their beck. Buta Singh typifies those oily Indians awaiting even that slight nod of approval from the British Raj. While the ending of the novel is dominated by the mother Sabhrai trying to save her family from falling apart, the opening chapters of a Sarus Crane chasing the killers of its mate gives the reader gooseflesh. A startlingly written character of Champak is unanticipated. She is the sexually demanding wife of Sher Singh who is growing tired of her incessant sexual needs. She incites his desire by massaging his legs and then talking vulgar, imagined things that happened to her during the day to arouse him to perform. Another interesting character is of Madan Lal, Sher Singh’s friend and comrade against the British. Madan Lal is the cricket star of college, a swashbuckling casanova who has both Champak and Sher Singh’s sister Beena lusting for him, while his own wife remains mysteriously away. But does it not surprise that when authors like Irwing Wallace and Sidney Sheldon add sex in their stories we lap it up with glee. But if some Indian author does it there is a hue and cry. Probably we think that writing about sex is very western. Khushwant Singh or Shobha De don’t go about claiming that they are writing literary masterpieces. So whether it is for market demands, personal pleasure or pure hormonal kicks the sex in their novels is entirely their prerogative. Besides that, Khushwant Singh populates I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale with utterly
believable characters and situations. His style is delightfully sarcastic, mocking at each of his characters. Human behaviour, questionable values, cultures are all pointed fingers at, laid bare and maligned. There is much humour throughout the book as there is also a chance that you may shed a tear or two too, all making it a very readable book.

His third novel Delhi is a queer blend of history, romance and sex. The chapters of the novel contain the vivid picturisation of history commencing from Mugal period of Zahiruddin Babar and ending to the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The novel sometimes appears to be a fine travelogue when Khushwant Singh presents of vivid pictures of various roads, lanes and historical places of Delhi in its real names, forms and features. The historical events narrated in the different chapters of the novel are seen nicely wrapped with sex and romances. The narrator's being himself the novelist, sexual encounter with the Bhagmati, a `hijra' (hermaphrodite), creates a sinister feeling among the readers.

The Company of Women may be regarded as "the millennium’s last Great Indian Lascivious Novel" giving the "voyeuristic view of male and female anatomy and titillating accounts of the innumerable sexual encounters of his protagonist'. The author's narrative skill is so superb that a reader feels like watching a blue film rather than reading a fictional novel.

The novel begins with its hero Mohan Kumar, a successful Delhi's businessman, breaking off with his wife and his everlasting "lust" efforts to set up a more flexible arrangement for appeasement of his physical needs. The initial endeavour begins at his home with the sweepress and extends to the wide world of lonely women beyond the neighbourhood to the Princeton, having most bizarre of his "triumph" in one night encounter with a devout Muslim woman from Pakistan. The novel chronologically presents the most sensuous pictures of the nine women with whom, the hero beds, including his wife. Of the eight on the description, one each is African-American, Kashmiri Pandit, Muslim, Dalit Hindu, Hindu Brahmin, Tamilian Christian, Goan Roman Catholic, Sri Lankan Buddhist and an
unnamed women of easy virtue in Bombay. Singh seems to have extending the slogan that the love and sex know no caste, class and community bar.

In order to explore the novels of Khushwant Singh, it is first necessary to understand his life and his ideas on fiction and his major concerns. This will give a better insight into his choice of the themes upon which his most of the writings are based upon. It is fairly obvious that his personal experiences and the historical events that shaped the country play a major role in his works. The researcher believes that the Punjab countryside, the capital of India-Delhi and the city of London are the most important influences upon him. Exposed as he has been to the ideas and attitudes of the West, Singh is essentially an Oriental who has succeeded in maintaining his Indian self and individuality. The researcher has found his autobiography a useful tool to explore his growth as an individual well as a great contemporary Indian novelist writing in English. When he utters these words “I am not a nice man to know.” His autobiography informs us a lot about him-about milieu, moment and race.

Khushwant Singh as a short story writer pursues and follows the art of short story as in its early twentieth century. He is considered as a realist and humanist in one, and this picture of him is revealed in his short stories. They reveal his gentle irony and his faculty of being ironical on the part of his countrymen. Irony forms one of the basic characteristics in his style of story writing. Irony in its literal sense is considered as a device with dual or two meaning: One the literal or actual meaning and the second which bring other meaning in the sentence or situation than the actual one, in other words Irony is the word that says one thing but means another.

The story, “The Mark of Vishnu”, is one of the remarkable and highly appreciated stories among Indo-Anglican Stories. The title is weighed by the religious values, but the irony of the title is revealed through the story from which the author mocks at the superstitious Indian. In this story, a Hindu devotee, Ganga Ram, has much belief in black cobra generally called Kala Nag. Ganga Ram, like
many Hindus, considers Kala Nag to be a deity. Ganga Ram is a pious and devoted Brahmin, and, as a mark of Hindu worship of Kala Nag (Shesh-Nag), he used to pour milk in a saucer for the Nag. He shows great faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (or Shiva), the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer gods respectively. As his symbol of faith, he wears a “V” mark on his forehead with the sandalwood paste. One day a black-hooded, six feet long, rounded and fleshy cobra is seen on a rainy morning. As soon as some school children see the snake, they surround him and hit him on the hood. The Nag reaches a state of pain and agony due to the wound on his hood, it is reduced in “squishy-squashy pulp of black and white jelly, spattered with blood and mud”.

The children then lift the cobra on a Bamboo stick and later place it in a small tin box, and tie it with a rope. They take the box, the very next day, to present it to the science teacher. As soon as the lid of the tin is opened, the Nag comes out with bloodshot eyes, surveying the scene. He, by a hiss and forked tongue, makes a dart, he also wants to leave the place but his wounded belly does not allow him to move. But some how he manages to drag his body to the door as his back is broken but his hood remains undamaged. Ganga Ram waits on the door with a saucer in his hands, and as soon as he sees the nag, he places the saucer in front of him. After placing the saucer he himself sits on his knees on the floor in orders to pray to the Nag to forgive the school children for their misbehavior. The Nag, in fury, bite Ganga Ram all over his body, the teacher wipes the blood droplets from his foreheads & sees a “V” mark, where Kala Nag has dug his fangs. This story has ironically been placed and structured. Irony is implied through the title itself. The title is symbolic as “The Mark of Vishnu” means the divine function of preservation of life on Earth. But here the irony, the “Mark of Vishnu is implied as the ‘mark of snake bite’. In Hindu religion the devotees of Vishnu (the preserver), called the Vaishnavaites, normally bear three straight stripes of sandalwood on their forehead. But Ganga Ram places a “V” mark on his forehead instead of three straight stripes, it shows that though the practice of bearing a three stripes of sandalwood is symbol of devotion of Vishnu, the preserver; but here the “V” mark acts as a symbol of devotion to Kala Nag
(snake), the destroyer, and the mark of his fangs is also of “V” shape. The story reaches no end; the author leaves the end to be decided by the readers.

The other story by Mr. Singh, is “The Voice of God and Other Stories,” which is representative of both verbal and situational irony, which makes the title, meaning and structure of the story ironical in a whole. It is a tale of people of two villages in Punjab, Bhamba Kalan and Bhamba Khurd, its both cool places where nothing unpleasant happens but the peaceful life of the people is disturbed by the election flue and gale of politics. Mr. Forsythe, an English deputy commissioner arrives at Bhamba apparently on an official visit but his actual visit is to campaign for Ganda Singh, who previously helped British Government by subjugating the present agitation and the Congress movement, in his bid for Punjab Assembly election. Ganda Singh is a chief of dacoits and thugs, as is said in the story, “his men robbed with impunity and shared the proceeds with the police”. Mr. Forsythe praises Ganda Singh and appreciates his work and pretends him as a pride of the district. Though the people hate Ganda Singh for his inhuman activities and injustice to the people. After the speech Ganda Singh distributes sweet to Zaildars, Lambardars and Village Officers in reference to their promise to vote for him in the election. His rival in the election is Kartar Singh, who is a Nationalist nominee and an advocate by profession. Seth Sukhtankar, a millionaire, who is involved in cloth business and owes cloth mills, supports him. He calls the people for a meeting to convince them, “if 400 million Indians united and spat in a tank, there would be enough spit to drown the entire English population in India.” This comment by Mr. Singh reveals his deep irony and humour when he says, “But somehow the facilities for such a mass suicide had never been provided.”

One more contestant Baba Ram Singh is found who is a devoted worker among poor peasants who call himself a kisan (an ordinary farmer). Polling takes place on the specific date and Sardar Ganda Singh is declared elected over his nearest rival Sardar Kartar Singh by a margin of 2,220 votes. Baba Ram Singh not only loses election but also forfeits his deposit. On this occasion the comment by
Mr. Singh shows deep irony and humour, when he says, “The people had spoken. The voice of the people is the Voice of the God”. Here the disbelief and hypocrisy of the people is shown by the ironical comment. During the time of election there values are subsided by the pressure of the contestants and once the person is elected he behaves as a Mini-God and forgets his promises and views made to the people.

Another short story, “Karma,” reveals the psychology of an educated Indian in British India and his character is presented in an ironical way, this character helps the author to present his irony for such people. Sir Mohan Lal’s encounter with the mirror shows the values of such Indians, their indifference and varied native feelings. The mirror is Indian made and “the red oxide of its back had come off at several places and long lines of translucent glass cut across its surface”. This comment is an ironical example of Indians with British likings in British Raj. The mirror is a symbol of everything Indian and native, inefficient and indifferent, dirty and intolerable to Mohan Lal. In this incidence Mr. Singh, fully and in fine manner, shows his irony for the Indians in British Government. Mohan Lal wears the suit tailored at Saville Row, the symbol of British aristocracy and upper class Culture; and Balliol tie, a symbol of exclusive Oxford upbringing and educated human being. He is married to Lachmi - who is ironically being called Lady Mohan Lal by the author but she has no resemblance to her husband. Sir Mohan Lal is depicted as an educated Indian in contrast to his illiterate wife. In an incidence the harsh irony of the author is depicted when Sir Mohan Lal in suit and tie is presented sitting in a first class waiting room, quietly sipping his “Ek Chota” (a Small Peg). While his wife, a fat and an illiterate woman is found eating chapattis and pickles and chewing betel leaves while sitting on a steel trunk on the platform. Sir Mohan Lal travels in first class compartment along with all educated and well placed people, whereas his illiterate wife is adjusted in ladies general class compartment.

The later half of the incidence is full of ironical behaviour of the people with both Mrs. and Mr. Mohan Lal. Later the train arrives and both are adjusted in
their respective coaches, Sir Mohan Lal enters in first class compartment and Lady Mohan Lal in a general ladies compartment. As soon as he enters in the compartment he does not even find a single person in it, but, after some time, two English soldiers arrive, one soldier say to another to let him down. And they start shouting at Mohan Lal, “Ek Dum Jao” (Go at Once). They lift his suitcase and throw it out on the platform. The train starts moving and they pull him by his arms and throw him out of the compartment. The irony of his fate is presented here, as he lay on the platform after humiliation whereas his wife is found comfortable in inter-class compartment. As, “the train speed post the lighted part of the platform, Lady Lal spat and sent a jet of red dribble flying across like a dirt”! This action of lady Lal is presented as a victory of a simple Indian woman over a learned, arrogant and proudly Indian man, who pretends to be foreigner.

"The Black Jasmine" is, no doubt, a bawdy story, which betrays Khushwant Singh's predilection for the risque. Yet, it offers one of the best illustrations of comic irony reinforced by irony of situation. When the protagonist of this story Bannerjee was in Sorbonne pursuing higher studies, a curvaceous African girl Martha Stack became friendly with him. Since she was quite a smasher, the other male students were almost envious of Bannerjee. One day in a highly romantic mood she offered herself but ironically Bannerjee, who had wasted many hours on daydreaming the way he would seduce her, failed to seduce her. Nearly thirty years after this incident Martha who is “one enormous mass of hulky flesh” comes to India as a tourist and meets an old and worn-out Bannerjee. Ironically, Bannerjee now decides to make up for the earlier failure. The missed passion warms up his limbs under the influence of liquor and overwhelms his senses. Khushwant Singh’s remarkable technical skill is evident in “Black Jasmine” which deals with a single passion of unromantic sexual exploration. The whole story centres on the single character Martha. The one and only action that Bannerjee undertakes is to seduce Martha and this he accomplishes at an unexpected moment. There is no digression or diversion. As a result, there is no flagging of interest.
The story entitled “Paradise” begins with the cause revealed by the heroine Margaret Bloom why she felt bound to go to India. It was, perhaps, the same reason that compels the people from every corner of the world, to come to India, particularly Europeans, to find peace. Margaret Bloom gives the real account of the relationship between her parents. Her father was a big-built man while her mother was small and extremely attractive, with golden brown hair, dark blue eyes and boobs to die for. She asked to herself Why she agreed to marry her father, who was a coarse man. He was never able to understand. He was the chief sales manager of a large, Jewish-owned department store; she the personal secretary of a member of the Board of Directors who wanted her to be his mistress. The man hounded her, so she told him where to get off and became the secretary of another member of the Board. She also agreed to marry her father who had been making passes at her for a long time. European women, come to India impelled by different purposes. Some of them are drawn by the prodigious variety of the Indian life, the others come for a better knowledge of India’s Geography, art and culture. Still others come to India in search of Peace of Mind and Soul. They are attracted by the Indian saints who, they believe, have the power to unravel to them the mystery of life and to offer them the light of truth.

It is an indisputable fact that Khushwant Singh has excelled almost all other Indian English short story writers in artistry. All his stories have a rounded perfection. “The Portrait of a Lady”, “The Fawn” and “A Love Affair in London”, “A Punjab Pastorale” with their rich suggestion can stand comparison with any story of the masters in this field.
References

2. Ibid., Pg.36
13. Ibid., p.11
14. Ibid., p.17