Chapter-3

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Historical fiction is a genre in which the plot is set amidst historical events, or more generally, in which the author uses real events but adds one or more fictional characters or events, or changes the sequence of historical events. Historical fiction may center on historical or on fictional characters, but usually represents an honest attempt based on considerable research to tell a story set in the historical past as understood by the author's contemporaries. Those historical settings may not stand up to the enhanced knowledge of later historians.

Khushwant Singh's name is bound to go down in Indian literary history as one of the finest historians and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observer and social critic. His vast and profound knowledge and understanding of India's history, political systems, and literary heritage is reflected in his prose works which included a history of his own community, *The Sikhs*, published in 1963. His novels, which are deeply rooted in the recent history and political situation of contemporary India, include *Train to Pakistan* (1956), one of the most compelling accounts of the Partition of India in 1947; *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1961); and *Delhi* (1990), a picaresque history of India's capital narrated by a eunuch. Singh has translated into English the works of Iqbal (1981), and the celebrated Urdu novel *Umrao Jan Ada* (as *The Courtesan of Lucknow*, 1961); he has also introduced the works of the Sikh poetess Amrita Pritam to an English-speaking audience. The researcher has chosen his three novels for its historical perspective. Recalling not merely the titles of his work, but their thematic preoccupations, we can draw some provisional conclusions. With a few exceptions stories revolve around Indian characters.

Khushwant Singh’s book, "*A history of Sikhs*" remains to this day a well-researched and scholarly work. It is a classic two-volume book on Sikh History.
and is used as reference by many scholars. But here the researcher concentrates on historical perspective in his three novels.

The best works of one of India's most widely read and celebrated author witty, eloquent, outrageous, and always entertaining, Khushwant Singh has acquired an iconic status as a writer and journalist. This research study brings together three of his novels written over four decades. *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh’s first novel, published in 1956 brought him instant fame. A powerful and moving account of the tragedy of partition, set in the small Indian frontier village of Mano Majra, it is also the touching love story of Sikh dacoit and Muslim girl.

*I shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959), his second novel, deals with the conflict in a prosperous Sikh family living in Punjab in the mid 1940s. The father is a magistrate who works for the British, while the son dreams of glory as the leader of a terrorist group rebelling against foreign rule.

The best-selling novel *Delhi* (1990), a vast erotic, irreverent magnum opus centered on the Indian capital, is the third book in this study. The principal narrator of the saga, which extends over six hundred years, is an ageing reprobate who loves Delhi as much as he does the ‘hijda’ whore Bhagmati. As he travels through time, space and history to ‘discover’ his beloved city, we find it transformed and immortalized in our minds for ever. Khushwant Singh's phenomenal success as a writer springs from a most unwriterly virtue: he writes for the reader, not for himself. He has the knack of seeming to speak directly to the reader, shrugging himself out of the confines of the printed page.

Train to Pakistan (1956) is a magnificent novel where Khushwant Singh tells the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events that followed with human history. On the eve of the partition of the Indian
subcontinent thousands fled from both sides of the border seeking refuge and security. The natives were uprooted and it was certainly a ghastly experience for them to give up their belongings and rush to a land which was not theirs. Partition touched the whole country and Singh’s attempt in the novel is to see the events from the point of view of the people of Mano Majra, a small village. The peaceful life in Mano Majra suddenly came to a jolt when the village moneylender’s house was raided. This and the other events narrated in the novel can only be described as breathtaking.

The novel begins with a reference to the summer of 1947 which was noted for its scorching heat and rainless period and marked for hot and dusty atmosphere:

The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers”. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. It was hotter than usual, and drier and dustier. And the summer was longer. No one could remember when the monsoon had been so late. For weeks, the sparse clouds cast only shadows. There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins. ¹

The summer before, communal riots, precipitated by reports of the proposed division of the country into a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan, had broken out in Calcutta and several thousands had been killed. The Muslims said that the Hindus had planned and started the killing. The Hindus, on the other hand, put the whole blame on the Muslims. The truth was that both sides had killed. People belonging to both sides were shot, stabbed, speared, tortured and raped.

From Calcutta the riots had spread north and east and west. In Noakhali in East Bengal, Muslims massacred Hindus and in Bihar Hindus massacred Muslims.
Mullahs were reported to have roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. The Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier were made to abandon their homes and flee toward the Sikh and Hindu communities in the east. They had to travel on foot, in bullock carts, cram into lorries, cling to the sides and roofs of trains.

By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people - Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs - were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of North India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding.²

Mano Majra is the place of the action of the novel. In fact the novel was originally titled Mano Majra. It is a tiny village situated on the Indian border, half a mile away from the river Sutlej. The Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus lived in perfect harmony in this village and there was a time when no one in the village knew that The British had left the country and the country was divided into Pakistan and Hindustan. The only thing that made an impact on them was the arrival and departure of trains. But soon things began to change. Partition began to take its toll in this tiny village also.

Partition touched Mano Majrans at both levels—at the community level and at the individual level. At the community level it affects very badly the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The dark clouds of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries. Yet feelings of brotherliness have not disappeared, and they meet for consultation in a scene that is both intensely humane and touching.³
There were only about seventy families in Mano Majra, and Lala Ram Lal’s was the only Hindu family. The others were Sikhs or Muslims who were about equal in member. The railway station occupied an important position and a small colony of shopkeepers and hawkers grew up around it to supply travelers with food, betel leaves, cigarettes, tea, biscuits and sweetmeats.

The routine life of Mano Majra was disturbed one evening in August 1947. The village moneylender’s house was raided by dreaded dacoits.

On the roof of his house, the money lender was beaten with butts of guns and spear handles and kicked and punched. He sat on his haunches, crying and spitting blood. Two of his teeth were smashed.

When Ram Lal, the moneylender failed to hand over the key of his safe, one of the dacoits lunged at the crouching figure with his spear. Ram Lal collapsed on the floor uttering a loud yell with blood spurting from his belly.

The dacoity had its evil effects on Juggut Singh who was a resident of the village. The dacoits dropped bangles in his house and later he was arrested as the suspect of murder and dacoity. He was in love with Nooran which in a sense cut across religious barriers. After his release from police custody, he came to know that Nooran had visited his mother before leaving for the refugee camp carrying his child in her womb. Nooran was a Muslim weaver’s daughter. Juggut Singh, meanwhile, had a dubious distinction of being ‘a budmash number ten.’ His father and grandfather were also dacoits and were hanged for murder. But they were reported not to have robbed own village-Folk. According to Meet Singh, Juggut had disgraced his family through his acts. Hukum Chand plays an important role in the novel. Walsh writes:

“Mr. Hukum Chand, magistrate and deputy commissioner, for all his tastes for skin-lotion, perfumed talc and young girls hired from venal
guardians, his administrative cunning and corrupted conscience, yet surprises us with an authentic basic human kindness—even a sort of innocence.4

Hukum Chand is perhaps one of the best drawn characters in the novel. Married to an unattractive and illiterate woman, he looked for love and sex elsewhere, but he was not exactly immoral. Cowasjee writes:

Through the portrayal of Hukum Chand, Khushwant Singh shows how the much maligned Indian bureaucracy was itself caught between the hatred of a people and the bungling of politicians.5

Hukum Chand considered Hindu women to be unlike other women. When it was reported that the Muslim mobs had tried to molest Hindu women, they had killed their own children and jumped into wells that filled to the brim with corpses, Hukum Chand’s reaction was as follows:

Our Hindu women are like that: so pure that they would rather commit suicide than let a stranger touches them. We Hindus never raise our hands to strike women, but these Muslims have no respect for the weaker sex. 6

It is interesting to hear from Hukum Chand more about how he looked at partition and its impact. He wanted the Muslims to go out peacefully if possible. He was of the view that bloodshed would not benefit anyone. According to him bad characters would get all the loot and the government would blame people like him for the killing. For the same reason he was against killing or destruction of property. But at the same time he gave instruction to the inspector to be careful not to allow the Muslims to take too much with them.
Hindus from Pakistan were stripped of all their belongings before they were allowed to leave. Pakistani magistrates have become millionaires overnight. Some on our side have not done too badly either. Only where there was killing or burning the government suspended or transferred them. There must be no killing; just peaceful evacuation.  

That there is a wide gap between what he preaches and what he practices is clear from the fact that he is revealed as womanizer. Women were brought to him and he paid their service generously:

“He brought the girl’s face nearer his own and began kissing her on the back of her neck and on her ears. He could not hear the goods trains any more. It had left the countryside in utter solitude. Hukum Chand could hear his breathing quicken. He undid the strap of the girl’s bodice.”

He never hesitated in filling official records with half truths. Even before he received the full details of Iqbal, instruction was given to the Inspector to enter against his name that he was the son of ‘Mohammed Something-or-other, or just father unknown.’

Iqbal was one who created a mild sensation in the village. He approached Bhai Meet Singh with a request for shelter and he took it for granted that he was Iqbal Singh! In fact he did not have to say what Iqbal was.

“He could be a Muslim, Iqbal Mohammed. He could be a Hindu, Iqbal Chand, or a Sikh, Iqbal Singh. It was one of the few names common to the three communities.”
He was a social worker. He had come to that village as he knew that something should be done to stop the bloodshed going on as a result of partition. His party had sent him there, since this place was a vital point for refugee movements. He had a strong feeling that trouble would be disastrous. He belonged to district Jhelum and had been in foreign countries a long time. He had his own views on morality and a host of other things.

Morality… is a matter of money. Poor people cannot afford to have morals. So they have religion. Our first problem is to get people more food, clothing, comfort. That can only be done by stopping exploitation by the rich, and abolishing landlords. And that can only be done by changing the government. 10

For them truth, honour, financial integrity were “all right,” but these were placed lower down the scale of value than being true to one’s salt, to one’s friend and fellow villagers. 11

But he was well aware that criminals were not born and were made by hunger, want and justice. He always thought that if the fear of the gallows or the cell had stopped people from killing or stealing, there would be no murder or theft. Even though a man was hanged every day, ten go murdered every twenty-four hours in the particular province he was in. The population explosion also was causing great concern to Iqbal.

The whole country was like an overcrowded room. What could you expect when the population went up by six every minute—five millions every year. It made all planning in industry or agriculture a mockery. Why not spend the same amount of effort in checking the increase in population? 12
It might appear strange that independence meant little or nothing to the people in Mano Majra. They never realized that it was a step forward and that what they needed to do was to take the next step and turn ‘the make-believe political freedom into a real economic one.’ They were not quite sure why the English had left them. Iqbal tried to enlighten them as to what it all meant.

They left because they had to. We had hundreds of thousands of young men trained to fight in war. This time they had arms too…. The English were frightened. They did not shoot any of the Indians who joined the Indian National Army set up by the Japanese, because they thought the whole country would turn against them. 13

But as far as the villagers concerned, view differed. There were some among them who liked English soldiers. Meet Singh told Iqbal that his brother who was a havaldar was of the view that all sepoys were happier with English officers than with Indian. Iqbal in turn asked whether he would like to continue to remain slaves all their lives. But Meet Singh had his own argument.

“Freedom must be a good thing. But what will I get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes?” 14

Freedom was for the educated people who fought for it. He was sure that people like him were going to be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis. The lambardar was of the view that the only ones who enjoyed freedom were thieves, and robbers. Iqbal found himself in a predicament and was not in a position to do anything to save the situation:
Could he stop the killing? Obviously not. Everyone—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Congressite, Leaguer, Akail, or communist—was deep in it. It was famous to suggest that the bourgeois revolution could be turned into a proletarian one.\textsuperscript{15}

In an unexpected move, the police arrested Iqbal. It was extremely foolish for the police to have done that and they knew that they had made a mistake, or rather, two mistakes as they had arrested Juggut Singh also.

Arresting the social worker was a blunder and a likely source of trouble. His belligerent attitude confirmed his innocence. Some sort of case would have to be made up against him. That was always a tricky thing to do against educated people.\textsuperscript{16}

Iqbal’s pride had been injured. He was under arrest in connection with the murder of Ram Lal. Everyone knew that he had come to Mano Majra after the murder. He had taken the same train that the policemen had taken and they could be witness of his alibi. The situation was ludicrous but Punjabi policemen were not the sort who admitted making mistakes. He tried to convince Juggut Singh who was arrested along with him that he was not a villager and had come from Delhi and was sent to organize peasants.

When the truth was revealed the sub-inspector was irritated. When the fellow policemen told him that Iqbal was a stranger staying at the Sikh temple, he burst out:

\begin{quote}
I do not suppose you have any brains of your own. I leave a little job to you and you go and make a fool of yourself. You should have seen him before arresting him. Isn’t he the same man who got off the train with us yesterday?\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}
The police were doubly wrong as Jugga was out of his house on the night of the dacoity. Even Hukum Chand was angry and was surprised to see the police arresting people without finding out their names, parentage or caste.

Police who were always known for their cruelty asked Iqbal to remove his dress. Iqbal loosened the knot in the cord. They pyjamas fell in a heap around his ankles. He was naked save for the handcuffs on his wrists. He stepped out of the pyjamas to let the policemen examine them. The inspector thus ensured that he was a Muslim. When he said that he was sent by the Peoples’ Party of India, the inspector asked him whether he was sure it was not the Muslim League. Mob attacks were a common phenomenon in those days and when they attacked they never waited to find out whether the persons concerned were Hindus or Muslims. The other day four Sikh Sardars in a jeep drove alongside a mile-long column or Muslim refugees waking on the road. Without warning they opened fire with their stenguns. Four stencil guns! Good alone knows how many they killed.

A lot of women were abducted and sold cheap. Police stations were concentration camps and third degree methods were adopted to extricate ‘truth’ from those who were caught. Hindus were pinned under legs of charpoys with half a dozen policemen sitting on them. Testicles twisted and squeezed till one became senseless with pain. Powdered red chillies thrust up the rectum by rough hands, and the sensation of having the tail on fire for several days. All this, and no food or water, or hot spicy food with a bowl of shimmering cool water put outside the cell just beyond one’s reach.

Some succumbed to hunger and others to the inconvenience of having to defecate in front of the policemen. The arrival of the ghost train is another important ‘event’ in the novel which makes the reader flabbergasted. The arrival of the train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Majra. People stood on their roofs to see what was happening and all they could see was the black top of the train stretching from one end of the platform to the other. Later the villagers were asked to get all the wood there was in their houses and all the kerosene oil
they could spare. They were asked to bring them to the motor trucks on the station side for which they would be paid. The villagers soon ‘smelt’ something wrong:

The northern horizon which had turned a bluish grey, showed orange again. The orange turned into copper and then into a luminous russet. Red tongues of flame leaped into the black sky. A soft breeze began to blow towards the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene, then of wood. And then—a faint acrid smell of searing flesh. 21

There was a deathly silence in the village. The train had come from Pakistan and everybody knew what had happened. Even Hukum Chand felt feverish to see a thousand charred corpses sizzling and smoking while the train put out the fire.

The Sikh officer said there were more than a thousand. I think he just calculated how many people could get into a bogie and multiplied it by the number of bogies. He said that another four or five hundred must have been killed on the roofs, on the footboards and between buffers. In fact fifteen hundred innocent people getting killed were only part of the story. Similar things were happening at other places also.

Muslims of some villages had started leaving for the refugee camp. Chundunnugger had been partly evacuated. Pakistan army lorries with soldiers had been picking them up whenever information had been brought. Hukum Chand believed that an individual’s conscious effort should be directed to immediate ends like saving life when endangered, preserving the social structure and honouring its conventions. His immediate problem was to save Muslim lives. Meanwhile, rumours or atrocities committed by Sikhs on Muslims in Patiala, Ambala and Kapurthala began to spread.

They had heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the marketplace. Many
had eluded their would-be ravishers by killing themselves. They had heard of mosques being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on the premises, and of copies of the holy Koran being torn up by infidels.  

The Sikhs were angry and announced that Muslims would never be trusted. The last Guru had warned them that Muslims had no loyalties. All through the Muslim period of Indian history, sons had imprisoned or killed their own fathers and brothers had blinded brothers to get the throne. They had executed two of the Sikh Gurus, assassinated another and butchered his children. And Muslims were never ones to respect women. Sikh refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims. Those who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered.  

A trainload of Sikhs massacred by Muslims had been cremated in Mano Majra. Hindus and Sikhs were fleeing from their homes in Pakistan and having to find shelter in Mano Majra. The villagers ultimately decided to be angry with the Muslims. Soon the Muslims began to come out of their homes, driving their cattle and their bullock carts loaded with charpoys, rolls of bedding tin trunks, kerosene oil tins, earthen pitchers and brass utensils. There was no time even to say goodbye. Truck engines were started. Pathan soldiers rounded up the Muslims, drove them back to the carts for a brief minute or two, and then on to the trucks.  

To sum up, partition had a tremendous effect on the people of Mano Majra. It adversely affected the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The communities which lived in amity for centuries became enemies overnight. There was mutual suspicion and hatred became the order of the day. However, it cannot be said that feelings of brotherhood were completely missing. When Imam Baksh, the mullah of the local mosque came to the lambardar to ask for his comments on their continuing their stay in the village, his reply was that it was as much his village as it was theirs. “If anyone speaks rudely to you, your wives or your children, it will
be us first and our wives and children before a single hair of your heads is touched.²⁵

But he had his own problems. They were very few and the strangers coming from Pakistan were coming in thousands. Who will be responsible for what they do was the moot question as far as he was concerned. Thus they were asked to lock their houses with their belongings and move to the refugee camps. Eventually Sikhs and Muslim villagers fell into each other’s arms and began to weep like children. The Muslims who were made to stay in refugee camps were later transported to Pakistan by train.

*Train to Pakistan* is a wide story taking the backdrop as India-Pakistan riot in the year of 1947. Here truth meets fiction with huge impact upon the society as the author narrates the trauma and tragedy of partition through his characters. In actual sense it is the story of an isolated village that is plunged into the abyss of religious hate. As the story proceeds it concentrates on the story of a Sikh boy and a Muslim girl whose love lasted and exceeds the destructions of war.

Pramod Kapoor writes in the introductory section of the special edition of *Train to Pakistan*, published to commemorate sixty years of Indian independence, as:

…an exercise in perpetuating the memory of those who perished and a lesson for future generations to prevent a recurrence of this tragic chapter in our history. ²⁶

In his own preliminary remarks, Khushwant Singh opines that,

for millions of people, history has been divided into two distinct eras: "BP (Before Partition) and PP (Post-Partition)." He characterizes Partition's
aftermath as "beastlier than anything beasts could have done to each other", describes the "deep sense of remorse" that "set in on both sides when ill-temper and hatred abated", recounts several touching stories of relatives and friends whose lives were indelibly altered by these events, and proffers his opinion that "the only way to prevent their recurrence is to promote closer integration of people of different races, religions and castes living in the sub-continent.  

II

While *Train to Pakistan* has partition as its central theme, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* has its roots in the freedom movement of the 1942-43. In this novel, Khushwant Singh presents the colonial encounter between the Indians and British Government against the background of Punjab family. The conflict between the colonizer and the colonized happens to be a major thematic concern in many Indian English novels like R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* and Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. In these novels different aspects of colonial encounter between Indians and Britishers like protest, submission, love-hate relationship and compromise are highlighted and are, therefore, comparable to similar novels by Commonwealth writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi and Patrick White.

In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, Khushwant Singh presents the colonial encounter between Indians and the British Government against the background of the Punjab. Punjab, the land of five rivers is known for its own distinctive geographical features, its military history and Sikh religion which easily set it off from the other ethnic cultures of India, although it belongs to India politically. Khushwant Singh has tried to give a very microscopic picture of the
Punjabi life in the novel even when he concentrates his attention on the political theme.

The novel deals with the India of 1940s, when the colonial encounter between the Indians and the British was moving towards a climax on account of the emergence of nationalistic consciousness among the Indians. There had always been a mixed reaction among Indians towards the British Raj. Khushwant Singh presents a microscopic picture of the strange mixture of attitudes to the alien rule through the depiction of life in Amritsar district. The situation presented here is easily comparable to those in other colonized countries like Africa and West Indies.

The characters in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* can be broadly classified into two groups: one, Sardar Buta Singh, Wazir Chand, John Taylor and Lambardar are pro-British in their attitude; two, Sher Singh, Madan and other student leaders are anti-British in their attitude. The central irony in the novel is evident in the fact that both the pro-British and the anti-British ideologies are cherished by different members of the same family. Buta Singh, for example, happens to be a District Magistrate who has a great admiration for the British rule in India: "loyalty to the Raj had been as much an article of faith with him as it had been with his father and grandfather who had served in the army. He, like them, had mentioned the English king or queen in his evening prayer, 'O, Guru, bless our Sovereign and bless us their subjects so that we remain contented and happy." Buta Singh tells his son that the Indians should help the British in their war against the Germans and other European powers:

"I do believe that in this war our interests and that of the English are identical. If they lose, we lose. If we help them to win, they will certainly give us something more than we have now. We should know who our friends are and who our enemies are. The English have ruled us for over a hundred years,
and I don't care what you say. I believe they have treated us better than our own kings did in the past; or the Germans, Italians, or Japanese will do if they win and take our India. We must stand by the English in their hour of trouble."  

Buta Singh knows that his sympathy for the British rule in India may earn him the scorn of his own countrymen. But he does not mind being unpopular with his countrymen as long as he has the patronage of the British rulers like, for example, the District Commissioner, Mr. John Taylor. Buta Singh's attitude to life is opportunistic in that he wants to accept the contingencies of political life and turn them to his own best possible advantage so that he can lead a life of security and ensure happiness for his family.

Buta Singh's son Sher Singh believes in a diametrically opposite philosophy of life. A young and energetic student in the local college, he heads the Student Union as its President. He is not very serious about his studies, but he is fired by the patriotic zeal and nationalistic philosophy popularized by Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and other leaders. He questions the very rationale of the British rule in India and pleads for self-government for the motherland. He is not influenced by his father's loyalty to the British. He, therefore, reacts very strongly to his father:

We are far too concerned with other people. Our Communist friends are only worried about what will happen to Russians; others think only of what will happen to Britain. Very few of us are bothered with our own future.

Sher Singh is, thus, deeply concerned with the Indian life. He becomes an embodiment of the nationalistic ideal. He enjoys the support of a large mass of
students and consequently conducts several secret meetings of students thereby planning to carry out terrorist activities in the city of Amritsar.

He has the cooperation of other leaders like Madan, son of Wazir Chand. Thus the conflict between the pro-British attitude and the anti-British comes into operation in one and the same family which may be said to be a microscopic symbol of the macroscopic phenomenon of the Indian political life.

The women folk of Buta Singh's family or of Wazir Chand's family are not bothered about the political life of the country. They are mainly concerned with the security of family life and comfortable living. Sabhrai, wife of Buta Singh, for example, happens to be a very religious lady who believes in the sanctity of Granth Sahib and supremacy of Guru Govind Singh. She believes that what her husband does is right and that her son Sher Singh should not be cross with his father. Likewise, Sher Singh's young wife Champak is also not bothered about his public life and nationalistic and terrorist activities. She is very keen on the enjoyment of regular matrimonial sex and even commits adultery with Madan secretly. The sisters of Sher Singh and Madan are concerned only with their studies. But all of them tacitly agree with their parental sympathy for the British rule in India.

Buta Singh's sympathy for the British rule is supported by his knowledge of the internal contradictions and conflicts of Indian life. He knows that there is no homogeneous society in India and that it is a mosaic of many castes and cultures, like the Sikh, the Hindu and the Muslim among others. He knows that the ethnic conflicts are sparked off in the country at the slightest provocation and result in violence and chaos. He, therefore, believes that the British rule can keep these violent and conflicting forces under check and offer a political unity to India.

The conflict between the pro-British and the anti-British continues all through the novel. Sher Singh expresses his nationalistic ideology in the fiery speech he delivers at the gathering of patriotic students,
"Comrades, we meet at a crucial time. The enemy is at our gates . . . Comrades, we not only have the enemy at our door step, we have enemies within our own house. . . Those who sacrifice the interests of the motherland for foreign countries are our enemy No. I. They have been rightly named as the Kaum nashts destroyers of the race . . . There are also people who want to cut off the limbs of Mother India and make another state of Pakistan. The two are our enemies.... But we are Sikhs who do not fear any enemies. We shall destroy all those who stand in our way." 31

His patriotic speech whips up the nationalistic zeal in the audience and elicits a great applause from them.

Buta Singh does not encourage his son to indulge in anti-British activities. Though he knows the general trend of his son's thinking, he does not know any details of his secret activities. He enjoys the confidence of the D.C. John Taylor and offers his suggestions to the latter in solving some of the local problems. When, for example, John Taylor issues an order banning the Hindu procession in the city, the Hindus feel insulted and irritated because the Muslim and Sikh processions were not banned earlier. Wazir Chand who is a Hindu wants to meet the D.C. and get permission for the Hindu procession by explaining the situation. But he is not permitted by the District Commissioner. He, therefore, seeks the help of Buta Singh and requests him to explain the sensitiveness of the communal issue to John Taylor and get at least a relaxation of the ban order. Buta Singh who enjoys the confidence of John Taylor meets the latter at his residence, explains the possibility of communal explosion in the city and finally but gently persuades him to relax the ban order against the Hindu procession at least for a few hours. Wazir Chand and his friends thank Buta Singh for helping them.
The ideological conflict between father and son continues all through the novel. When Buta Singh habitually admires the British people and their impartiality, and suggests that "We Indians have a lot to learn from them," Sher Singh boldly crosses his father and argues that the British "too have something to learn from us ... like hospitality ... tolerance." Buta Singh pin-points the mutual intolerance among Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims and highlights the so-called impartiality and tolerance of the British people. Sher Singh does not hesitate to show the racial discrimination practiced by the British elsewhere,

You can find examples like that everywhere. Most white people are anti-Semitic. It's not only Hitler who has been putting Jews in gas chambers, the Russians have killed many. Everywhere in Europe and America there is prejudice against them and only because they have better brains and talent than others. We do not have any racial discrimination.

Sher Singh's mother Sabhrai does not like his being cross with his father and asks him, "Tell me, son, what will you get if the English leave this country?" Then Sher Singh replies that the country will be free. He waxes lyrical and hopes that "Spring will come to our barren land once more . . . once more the nightingales will sing." The song of nightingales thus becomes a symbol of freedom and joy for Sher Singh.

Meanwhile, the members of Buta Singh's family grow closer to those of Wazir Chand's family. Buta Singh's daughter Beena and daughter-in-law Champak join Wazir Chand's son Madan Lal and daughter Sita and all go to Simla to spend sometime in summer. The ideological similarity between Sher Singh and Madan Lal has, obviously, brought the two families closer. Madan Lal, in spite of being a nationalist, is an unfailing seducer of women. On account of his physical handsomeness, sophisticated manners and abundant chivalry, he succeeds in tempting and finally seducing Champak, thereby creating a sexual jealousy
between Beena and Champak. Even when Sabhrai joins them in Simla to prevent the possible damage to Beena's virginity or Champak's chastity, she is very cleverly fooled by Madan Lal who shows her extraordinary respect and courtesy and silences her suspicion about the violation of the family's sexual morals.

Meanwhile, Sher Singh associates himself with the terrorists of Amritsar and begins to indulge in the terroristic activities in the city. He is so much preoccupied with the nationalistic-cum-terroristic activities that he remains blissfully ignorant about the loss of his wife's chastity. In spite of his knowledge about Madan Lal's being a notorious womanizer, he fails to know that he has been cuckolded by the latter. Though Sher Singh hates the British rule and the British officers, he is persuaded by his father to meet the District Commissioner Mr. John Taylor to develop some familiarity with him and consequently to change his attitude towards him. Buta Singh expresses his pure admiration for the British people:

As I was saying, these Englishmen take a lot of interest in other people, and it is not just curiosity, it is a genuine concern with their problems. Now Taylor knows all of you by name, what you are doing, how you have fared in your examinations-everything. He has an excellent memory."

Far from being impressed by his father's Anglophilia, Sher Singh offers his severe comment on the Englishmen,

"They have learnt from Americans. . . . They have reduced human relationships to a set of rules. They say you must know the name of the person you are talking to and use it as often as possible. You must know his or her interest and talk about them and never of your own. They write down whatever they
have discussed with anyone in their diaries and refresh their memories before the next meeting. It does not mean much because their real desire is to create a good impression about themselves. They are not one bit concerned with the affairs of the person they happen to be talking to.”

In spite of Sher Singh's strong dislike for the Englishmen, he yields to parental persuasion and wifely order and meets John Taylor by way of courtesy.

But when he meets John Taylor much against his willingness, he feels angry with himself. Although Taylor treats him with courtesy and advises him to relax in the summer holidays at Simla and even offers him permission to own a rifle, Sher Singh feels confused between the contradictory feelings in himself like respecting the authority of the District Commissioner on the one hand and his hatred for the British rule on the other. Similarly he feels confused between his fear of the empty cartridges fingered by John Taylor and his eagerness to drive out the British from India. He feels a sense of humiliation at having agreed to meet John Taylor and a sense of anger at his parents and wife for having pressurized him to meet the officer. He, therefore, returns home with a decision never to repeat such a compromising act.

Sher Singh dreams of harmonizing the contradictory philosophies of his family somehow or the other, without realizing the impossibility of such a happening in real life, i.e., in 1942 in India.

Britain had to get out of India herself or be kicked out, and Sher Singh would say that to Taylor's face. Could he? What about his father's views? his cousin in service and his hope of finding his name in the next Honours' list? And the unique honour he was getting in the way of an armed police guard outside
his house-the sentry who sprang to attention and
smacked the butt of his rifle even when Sher Singh
passed by with his college friends? Couldn't it
somehow happen that these opposite factors could
be combined into one harmonious whole? He
visualized scenes when his Nationalist and terrorist
colleagues honoured him as their beloved leader,
where Taylor read an address of welcome and his
father proudly looked on. Such were the dreams
with which Sher Singh tried to dope himself. They
were based on the non-discovery of one party by the
other. 38

Thus Sher Singh dreams of achieving his ideal and hopes to concretise his plans
by resolving the confusion in his mind. As his will power grows stronger with the
passing of time, he decides to resort to terroristic action. He, therefore, calls a
secret meeting of his student friends near the canal bridge outside the city. He
hides the arms in his garage to escape the notice of the Government police. He
also knows that some of his fellow conspirators might be informers against him
and therefore remains quite alert.

One day the village headman Lambardarji meets Sher Singh at his home
and pretends to be very friendly with him. Sher Singh treats him with buttermilk.
The village headman cleverly tries to elicit some information about the Hindu
boys who participated in the shooting party a few days ago. Then Sher Singh
begins to suspect that the village headman may not be really as innocent as he
appears, in spite of his courteous behaviour and fine manners. Suspecting him to
be an informant to John Taylor, Sher Singh offers him some money as a gift,
though inwardly he knows he has given it to him as 'black money.' He also knows
that he may have to give more money to the village headman to keep his secrets
concealed by the Government.
By this time, the nationalist activities begin rigorously in north India under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. The Gandhi-cap covered patriots begin to attack the shops and public offices. The British soldiers try to beat the patriots violently. Thus the nationalistic struggle gathers force and occupies the mind of Indians who tend to forget or neglect their personal problems. Shops are looted, roads are blocked and trains are stopped by the nationalist agitators. Sher Singh reads the newspapers full of news about the nation-wide agitation. He also receives a cyclo-styled letter with a caption, 'A Manifesto of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army':

"It drew attention to the arrests of the leaders and asked the youth of India to arise and rid themselves of foreign rule. It did not mince its words, 'Shoot English officials and the Indian toadies who serve them. Destroy roads and bridges; cut telegraph and telephone wires; create chaos and paralyse the administration. This is your sacred duty. Long live the revolution!'" 39

After learning about the spread of nationalistic movement all over the country, Sher Singh's rebellious impulse grows more and more intense. Finally he overcomes his confusion and oscillation and decides to indulge in terroristic action. He, therefore, calls a secret meeting of his fellow rebels and takes the oath of liberating the country from the foreign rule. They take the oath of secrecy before indulging in terroristic action. They are inspired by Mahatma Gandhi in general and by Bhagat Singh in particular. They define their terroristic targets clearly. As Sher Singh makes it clear, "The call is to destroy means of communication. A few bridges blown up, a few roads barricaded and the British Army will be stuck where it is." 40 Accordingly they take six hand grenades and initially blow the central bridge and think that nobody knows about themselves.
Since the nationalistic activities spread all over the country, the British officers, especially John Taylor, become very alert and try to control the situation as far as they can. John Taylor, therefore, sends for Buta Singh to track down the agitators unofficially. He also suggests to Buta Singh that he knows about Sher Singh's nationalistic activities. He explains to him clearly that they would leave India as soon as the war is over:

Your son could do a good service to his friends and his country. You know we are anxious to get out of India and hand over the reins of power to you people as soon as the war is won. But we will not leave the country to the Japanese or the Germans. And these acts are calculated to do just that hand over India on a silver platter to the Fascist powers.\(^\text{41}\)

An ardent admirer of British rule, Buta Singh decides to advise his son at his leisure.

Meanwhile, the village headman Lambardar meets Sher Singh at home and asks for compensation of Rs. 300/- for the medical treatment of his bullock which has broken its leg in the holes created by the grenades in the canal. Sher Singh treats him nicely by giving him buttered toast and asks him to see him at the canal bridge in the evening. Sher Singh inwardly suspects that Lambardar, being an informer to the British Government, was trying to exploit the situation. When Lambardar sees Sher Singh and his friends including Madan Lal near the canal bridge, there is an exchange of hot words between them. Lambardar's behaviour changes from the modest to the arrogant. Sher Singh and his friends like Madan grow certain about his being an informer to the Government and therefore, Sher Singh shoots him to death. Lambardar says to the earth cursing them, "I'll sleep with your mothers .... I'll sleep with your sisters .... I'll .." \(^\text{42}\) Immediately they bury the dead body and disperse from there.
After the death of Lambardar, his son Jimma Singh is appointed as the village headman and is given a revolver to defend himself. Jimma Singh has three wives and yet he has no single progeny. One day he disappears from the village for three days without telling anyone of his wives. The disappearance of Jimma Singh is attributed to his murder by one of his relatives. The same is reported to the Police Commissioner who sends the file to the Deputy Commissioner to have the case closed as 'untraced.' But the Deputy Commissioner sends a warrant to search the house of Sardar Buta Singh, the senior most Indian Magistrate of the district and another one to arrest Sher Singh. John Taylor wants to treat Buta Singh gently and therefore sends for him. When Buta Singh meets John Taylor at home, his house is searched by the Police Commissioner. The police constables beat Sher Singh, Mundoo and the dog called Dyer. They arrest Sher Singh and take him to prison. Champak is simply flabbergasted by the sight of what has happened to her husband and family. Buta Singh does not know what is happening in his house in his absence. He narrates the history of the loyalty of his family to the British Crown right from the days of Sikh rule:

"Sir, we can almost go back to the days of Sikh rule. In the annexation of the Punjab and the disbanding of Sikh force my great grandfather, who was a subedar and had fought against the British in the Anglo-Sikh wars, joined the British army. He served under John Lawrence. He also fought under Nicholson in the Mutiny of 1857 and was awarded a medal for the capture of Delhi; we still have it in the family. My grandfather was also in the British army. He rose from the ranks and retired as a Jamadar in those days to be a Jamadar was a big thing for an Indian. My father did not join the army, but he recruited many soldiers in the 1914 -18 war and our family was given lands in the Canal Colonies. I have
kept up the tradition of loyalty to the British Crown
and will do so till the day I die.” 43

Although Buta Singh expresses his loyalty to the British Crown, John
Taylor knows that the British are going to leave India in the near future. He,
therefore, says to Buta Singh,

I appreciate your sentiments of loyalty, Buta Singh,
but I do not agree with you about the future of
Indians and I am British. I feel we should pull out of
this country as soon after the war as we can – and let
you Indians manage your own affairs. I, for one,
have no intention of continuing in the Indian Civil
Service a day after the ceasefire. In fact I am not on
the side of Mr. Churchill but on that of Mr. Gandhi
and Mr. Nehru except, and this is important, I do
think the war has to be won first. Otherwise the
Nazis and the Fascists will put the clock back for
you and for us. I may be wrong, but that is my
belief.44

Then John Taylor gently asks Buta Singh about his son's nationalistic and
terroristic activities and his possible connection with the murder of the village
headman Jimma Singh. Buta Singh is simply shocked out of his wits and begins to
cry for shame. He covers his face with his palms and blurts out, "My nose has
been cut. I can no longer show my face to the world."45 John Taylor tells him
further that his son Sher Singh has been put into jail and gives him fifteen days
leave and allows him to see and advise his son as often as he can.

On receiving a telegram from Buta Singh, Sabhrai and Beena return from
Simla by train and are unexpectedly received at the Railway Station by Mrs. Joyce
Taylor and dropped at her home. Buta Singh explains to his wife how their son
has been sent to jail for his being connected with terroristic activities and murder of the village headman. Champak also feels crestfallen. Sabhrai is totally confounded by her son's behaviour. Although she does not fully understand the implications of her son's activities, she wants to have her piece of the moon back at home. Her emotional attachment for her husband as well as her son makes her not to bother too much about political ideologies. A lady of deep religious bent of mind, she believes in the spiritual powers of Guru Govind Singh and the holy Granth.

Buta Singh with his pro-British attitude is so much angered and insulted by his son's arrest that he refuses to go to the prison to talk to Sher Singh. Likewise, Sher Singh also knows that his father will not spare him in case he visits him in the prison. When Sher Singh's parents-in-law hear about his imprisonment, they take away their daughter Champak back to their place.

Meanwhile, Sher Singh is interrogated by the Sahibs. But Sher Singh wants to consult his father or a lawyer before that. Finally he is allowed to consult his father. But since Buta Singh flatly refuses to see him in prison, his wife Sabhrai wants to see him after four days.

Buta Singh fears that his son's anti-British activities may cost him his own job, pension and other amenities of life which he owes to the British sympathy. Feeling terribly insecure in life, he grows unusually religious and reads the holy Granth. Sabhrai spends a whole night in the golden temple bathing in the cold water and meditating and praying all through the night. She waits for the spiritual guidance from the Guru in the present crisis. The next day she visits her son in the prison, gives him the holy dust from the temple and advises him not to name the other culprits. She knows that Sher Singh has done wrong but she invokes the Guru to guide him.

After returning from the prison, Mrs. Sabhrai sends a letter thanking Mrs. Taylor for all the kindness shown to her. The letter is full of filial tenderness and
touched the heart of the addressee, Sabhrai sends the letter with the chauffeur to Joyce Taylor. Then she is down with fever and pneumonia.

Buta Singh thinks that only the Englishman i.e. John Taylor can help him out of the crisis. He wants to please the Englishman with some Christmas gifts. He, therefore, arranges to send some fine oranges to John Taylor and his wife and a finely composed letter in the name of his wife which shows their admiration for the British authorities.

The Christmas gift of oranges is luckily received by Joyce Taylor who shows the humanitarian courtesy by visiting Sabhrai. Joyce Taylor, who was trained as a nurse before marrying John Taylor, examines the health of Sabhrai. Sabhrai is in delirium and cannot speak but she shows her gratitude to Joyce Taylor by the quivering movement of her lips. Joyce Taylor tries to enhearten Sabhrai and her husband and daughter. She knows that Sabhrai is suffering from pneumonia. She is so much touched by the plight of a religious mother i.e. Sabhrai that she persuades her husband John Taylor to give a real Christmas gift to Buta Singh's family in the form of release of Sher Singh on the Christmas Day itself. John Taylor knows that he has ordered the arrest of Sher Singh on mere suspicion without having any solid proof about the murder of the village headman. His knowledge about Buta Singh's firm loyalty to the British, Sabhrai's religious bent of mind and physical suffering and his wife's pressure finally compel him to order for the release of Sher Singh on the Christmas Day. Sher Singh is ecstatic about his release when he is taken out of the prison into the city in a procession by his friends and nationalist zealots. Thus Sher Singh becomes a hero in the eyes of his fellow rebels and nationalists. He is garlanded, photographed and cheered by the enthusiastic audience. He thumps his chest and declares,

"Comrades ... I will cherish the honour you have done me today for the rest of my life. I've proved that I was called upon to do a small duty to my country and I did it ....You all know how well the
King Emperor-may peace be upon him-looks after his guests ...But they could not break the spirit of the son of India and God willing they never will.46

Obviously, Sher Singh's father, mother, sister and wife are very happy about his release. Sabhrai recovers her health temporarily and spends some happy moments with the members of her family. The doctors opine that she should not be allowed to be excited. The release of Sher Singh is followed by another happy event i.e. the declaration of O.B.E. title for Buta Singh in the New Year's Honour's list. Buta Singh initially refuses to believe it, but when the newspaper correspondents, colleagues and friends come to garland and congratulate him, he accepts it as real. Everybody in the family is very happy.

But alas, the happiness doesn't continue for long because Sabhrai, after four days's cheerfulness, begins to sink suddenly. She knows that she is going to die and says, "My time has come."47 She sends for all the members of her family and makes them read the holy Granth Sahib. Then she dies while uttering the prayer. Her funeral is conducted with due honour and dignity. The Taylors and many officials send garlands as a mark of their respect for the late Sabhrai.

Buta Singh's loyalty to the British Crown has earned him the right kind of reward. He, therefore, wants to thank Mr. John Taylor for the O.B.E. title and for his releasing his son so quickly and unexpectedly and Mrs. Joyce Taylor for her kindness shown to his family. He also wants to seek the help of John Taylor in fixing a job for his son. He wants to build a memorial for his late wife Sabhrai in consultation with the Taylors. He buys a new tie and wears it before meeting them and thanks them profusely and consults them about his son's job and a memorial for his late wife. The Taylors treat him with great courtesy and friendliness so much so that Buta Singh feels that he is one of their family friends. Thus the novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* delineates the paradoxical picture of the colonial encounter between the Indians and the British including both the positive and the
negative aspects, the submission as well as re-bellion simultaneously involved in it.

Apart from the colonial conflict depicted in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, there are other details in the novel which are very realistic and interesting. Khushwant Singh is known for his stark realism and evocation of the Indian, especially the Sikh culture, in the novel. He is not a puritanical writer who sugarcoats the truth of life. On the contrary, he is a realist and modernist in the sense that he has the courage to look into the face of harsh reality and describe it precisely and objectively without any sentimentalism or exaggeration. For example, apart from the depiction of Buta Singh's admiration for the British rule, Sher Singh's antipathy for the same and Sabhrai's religious nature, Khushwant Singh offers a very realistic picture of Champak's sexuality, like her shaving of pubic hair, Mundoo's juvenile curiosity about feminine nakedness, Shunno's anal bleeding and her sexual surrender to the Peer Sahib, Madan's shameless womanization etc., without any hypocritical slurring over them. In this sense, Khushwant Singh can be easily compared to Mulk Raj Anand, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and other Common-wealth novelists.

**III**

In *Delhi*, Khushwant Singh depicted the history of Delhi which is also the history of India. The novel is a creation by Khushwant Singh which has to be read by those who are interested to know about how India took its present shape over the centuries. The author has tackled subject starting from religion to politics. His capabilities are unlimited from fiction to non-fiction. The parts which deals with the present are somewhat lame whereas the first and the last chapters that tell of the present are extremely interesting. As a whole novel tries to clear the vision of the readers about that scenario of Delhi at that time and the author becomes very much successful in that.
The novel accounts the history of New Delhi from the eyes of an old Sikh guide named Mr. Singh. His passionate romance with Bhagmati who is a hermaphrodite and a representation of Delhi is beautifully paralleled. The story progresses with chapters divided in narrations by poets, sultans, soldiers, white memsahibs, etc. It starts early in this millennium, and with each alternate chapter proceeds through the centuries until the present time, alternating with chapters based in the present. The chapters dealing with the past are fantastic. The story is told from the viewpoints of various characters and with different styles.

While unfolding the saga of Delhi, the novelist tries to view every historical situation and the personages in a detached manner. The historical figures turn into three-dimensional and speak for themselves. The novelist tries to grasp the innate feelings and the essential strengths and weaknesses of the rulers who have moulded the destiny of Delhi, and of India. While unravelling the saga of Delhi and its people, Khushwant Singh makes his best attempt to remain as a detached observer. This stance is possible for Khushwant Singh as he sees himself essentially as agnostic.

The novelist begins the "reliving" of the past of Delhi with the times of Ghiasuddin Balban and of sufi saint, Nizamuddin Aulia. It is essentially a time of great transition, and society is in a state of flux. The novelist hints at that society, of Delhi or of any city and place, is never static and hence constantly evolves. Perhaps it is a time of bigotry, and also a time of re-conciliation and reintegration, made possible, through the self-sacrificing efforts of sufi saints like Nizamuddin. Through a fictitious character, Musaddi Lal, a new Hindu kayastha convert to Islam, the transitional times of Delhi are poignantly viewed at.

The life of the new convert to Islam along with his wife stands as testimony to the then-fast-changing society of Delhi. For the ironic and comic vein adopted by the novelist, the reader would have been swept by the winds of prejudices. The comic and ironic mode of the novelist helps him and readers rise
above prejudices, and lighten the weight of the subject. The predicament of Musaddi Lal, presented in a comic manner, speaks of him and also of many:

> I was disowned by the Hindus and shunned by my wife. I was exploited by the Muslims who disdained my company. Indeed I was like a hijda who was neither one thing nor another but could be misused by everyone. 48

The times are not devoid of saviours. The one to save Musaddi Lal and the like has appeared in the shape of Nizamuddin. "Nizamuddin was our umbrella against the burning sun of Muslim bigotry and the downpour of Hindu contempt." 49

By making clear his view of religion, Nizamuddin stands as a pillar of sanity amidst the prevailing frenzy of bigotry: "I believe that the best way to serve god is through love of his creatures .... God is an experience." 50 Further, he could stand aloof from the royal patronage, and pronounce: "Kings come and kings go. The will of Allah is eternal." 51

The Oxford History of India records the saintly greatness of Nizamuddin and the like who have won the hearts of masses among Hindus and help spread Islam in India in a faster and easier manner: "sufi saints or pirs were present in the Punjab in the eleventh century ... some like Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti of Ajmer and Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia of Delhi settled near cities where their tombs become centres of devotion. They appealed direct to the people and were the spiritual preceptors of Islam. The sufis rather than kings, warriors, or adventurers, were responsible for the bulk of the Muslim in the subcontinent. 52

The novelist's attempts to step into the shoes of Taimur result in an 'almost convincing' argument for the invasion of Taimur against India. It is aptly suggested that behind the facade of holy wars, there lies the question of personal ambitions and interests who take precedence always. It is also made clear that
most of the rulers and the people, irrespective of their religious affiliations, are simply men of their times only. Hence, one does not wonder at the expression of smugness by Taimur.

It is no wonder a book of history which views Taimur from another perspective and enlists the devastation caused by him during the invasion:

The city was thoroughly plundered for the days ...
all the accumulated wealth of generations being carried off to Samarkand along with a multitude of women and other captives. „53

In the episode of Banda bairagi, one can discern the spreading of Sikh religion among the lower classes of society of Delhi, and in what manner this bairagi has helped the lower classes develop self-esteem. But in the eyes of history, Banda bairagi remains an "impostor"54 only.

Likewise the novelist aptly captures the highly complex and multi-faceted personality of Aurangzeb Alamgir who remained to a large extent shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding, in the annals of history of Delhi and India. The novelist ably visualizes the penitent and god-fearing Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb is in his death-bed and is sour and sad, not because of the fast approaching death, but with the augurs of impending dismantling of his closely guarded empire, and with the sense of unfulfilment:

"I came alone and I go as a stranger. I do not know who I am, nor what I have been doing. The instant which passed in power left only sorrow behind it. . . . Life, so valuable, has been squandered in vain. . . . I fear for my salvation, I fear my punishment. I believe in god's bounty, but I am afraid because of what I have done." 55
The fall of mighty personality like Aurangzeb pushes Delhi into the hands of weak rulers. Presently it faces the invasion of Nadir Shah and has to suffer his plundering it. It is aptly suggested that the wheels of juggernaut of oppression and victimization have rolled further and Delhi as a whole has suffered.

Come the year of 1857, the year of "First War of Independence" along with all its "intrigues," Delhi finds itself in a new situation. For a change, the roles of victims and perpetrators of oppression have been taken up by a new set of people. In the episodes of "Alice Aldwell," "Bahadur Shah Jafar" and "Nihal Singh," it is clearly proved that what is ultimately significant is the manifested "inherent evil" in man. During this period all sections of the people including Europeans have suffered. Perhaps in certain cases victims have turned into perpetrators of oppression and vice versa.

The novel also marginally takes into consideration the havoc that was wreaked upon Delhi and a part of India during the partition and during the post-partition period. In the caricature of Mahatma Gandhi and in the fictionalization of his assassination, the novelist points out the corrupting influence of evil of bigotry and violence on the young minds as seen in the person of Mahatma's assassin, Nathuram and also the ultimate and undying victory of Mahatma over violence, and the sustenance of the voice of sanity.

It is not out of place here to establish the thematic affinity of the novels Delhi and Twilight in Delhi. Khushwant Singh's Delhi compares and contrasts with Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi. Both the novelists are ardent lovers of Delhi and its past. The plot of Twilight in Delhi, mostly viewed through the eyes of the protagonist, Mir Nihal, unravels the saga of Delhi from the watershed year of 1857 to 1911, the year of Coronation Durbar held by King George V and to the Home Rule movement. The novel progresses along the climb-down of Mir Nihal and the city, Delhi. Khushwant Singh's Delhi, though the span of time taken into consideration is long, is not thematically alien to Ahmed Ali's novel. In a way
both the novels testify to the existence of the higher reality, the cyclic process of birth-growth-decay-that governs the lives of City and Man.
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