Chapter-4

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Narrative is a telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee (although there may be more than one of each). Narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions of qualities, states, or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events (although a dramatic work may also include narrative speeches). A narrative will consist of a set of events (the story) recounted in a process of narration (or discourse), in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order (the plot). The category of narratives includes both the shortest accounts of events (e.g. the cat sat on the mat, or a brief news item) and the longest historical or biographical works, diaries, travelogues, etc., as well as novels, ballads, epics, short stories, and other fictional forms. In the study of fiction, it is usual to divide novels and shorter stories into first person narratives and third person narratives.

As an adjective, ‘narrative’ means ‘characterized by or relating to story telling’. Thus narrative technique is the method of telling stories, and narrative poetry is the class of poems (including ballads, epics, and verse romances) that tell stories, as distinct from dramatic and lyric poetry.¹

Literally speaking, Narrative is a story and it can be conveyed through pictures, songs, poetry, speech, fiction and non-fiction as well. When in the writing mode, its telling is relegated to a special person; it becomes a technique used by that person. This person who is consigned the duty of narration is the narrator and his perspective serves as a prism through which ideas are transmitted to the readers. Narrative technique is vastly an aesthetic enterprise. It is binding vine of the narrative. A narrator detains the past, holds present and prepares the reader for future. There has been much exaggeration in the narrative techniques since 1938 when Raja Rao’s Kanthapura was published. It was perhaps the first
most successful and influential novel by an Indian writer in English. Traditionally, narrative techniques are explained through point of view in novel. There are three points of view to present a narrative: first person point of view when the narrator is one of the characters: he participates in the action and also comments on the events, third person point of view when the narrator narrates the story in an objective manner and omniscient point of view where the narrator is God like and can also make his presence felt with authorial intrusions.

A narrator has plethora of options to narrate events. He can base his narrative on temporality and causality or he can narrate through focalization. Focalization changes the course of narrative as the reader receives images of character through the impression of the narrator. Focalization employs three dimensional strategies: the voice of one who narrates, one who sees and his understanding of events.

In the emerging narrative techniques a discernible reader can easily notice the double consciousness of the narrator. Since 1990 the narrators in Indian English Fiction speak in the language tinged with a deep anguish for the motherland. There is deep rooted awareness of the belonging to the periphery.

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*Train to Pakistan* has a fine blending of growth in space and movement in time. The novel grows out of a chronological sequence of time with a synthesis of reality and value. It expresses creatively as to how the movement of trains, which used to set tone of the village, signalling time for action, rest and sleep, became a symbol of despair, darkness and destruction. This technique of contrast is very suggestive.

The novelist has recreated imaginatively the likes of Hukum Chand, the commissioner, reformist, Iqbal, criminals Juggat Singh and Mali gang, still visible in the Indian society. In moneylender Ram Lal’s murder case Jugga and Iqbal are
put behind the bars, while the real culprit Mali is released after arrest. Is such a drama not enacted even today? Also, the lodging together of Jugga, the criminal, and Iqbal, the reformist, gives a peep into the police way of functioning then and even today.

In his realistic depiction of the then prevailing atmosphere of hatred and violence and distrust between the Hindus and the Muslims, Khushwant Singh narrative spares neither:

Mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims in Bihar.²

There were reports of Pakistani police helping and protecting Muslims who were attacking and killing Hindus. The atrocities inflicted on Hindus in Lahore have been described by the novelist through a police constable who reports:

…It was the Muslim police taking side which made the difference in the riots. Hindu boys of Lahore would have given the Muslims a hell if it had not been for their police. They did a lot of ZULUM… their army is like that, too, Baluch soldiers have been shooting people whenever they were sure there was no chance of running into Sikh or Gurkha troops.³

The novelist had maintained a balance in condemning atrocities on both sides. As a realist in his factual depiction of the violence scenes, he narrates the story of four Sikh Sardars on a killing spree in a jeep alongside the column of mile-long Muslim refugees on foot. “…without warning they opened fire with their stenguns, God alone knows how many they killed…”⁴
The novelist has described three levels of Governmental strata. Commenting on this, V.A., Shahane in his book, *Khushwant Singh*, says:

Three levels of Governmental strata are depicted. Hukum Chand belongs to the upper level of the Punjab district administration; the sub-inspector of police comes from the middle level; constables belong to the lower level of this hierarchical, administrative structure. Hukum Chand is a type as well as an individual, a person as well as a bureaucrat, and, in various ways, an evolving character.  

Khushwant Singh has beautifully portrayed the man’s multidimensional mind, especially in the case of Jugga, the criminal, in love with Nooran, the Muslim Mullah’s daughter. Jugga visits the Gurudwara and asks for the Guru’s blessings to prepare himself for the final sacrifice which he does make. This is also true in the case of Hukum Chand whose mind flies to Haseena, the dancing girl, heading for Pakistan with a hope that she would be safe. This ambivalence of mind has exquisitely been brought out by Singh in the novel. Shahane comments on the character of Juggat Singh and says:

One finds a “rare combination of the criminal and the lover, which is a baffling aspect of the realities and complexities of life. He embodies the ambivalence of moral values.  

In a rare narrative technique, the novelist has depicted forces of division and unity, hate and love, anger and affection and revenge and sacrifice alternating in the novel. Shahane commenting on this aspect says:
Train to Pakistan presents rural Punjab with its religious and caste divisions, which result in alienation, alternating with forces of union, which result in amity. Hate alternates with love; anger alternates with affection; the desire for revenge alternates with the impulse to sacrifice.  

Singh in this novel has also artistically explored the mind of the Sikh priest Meet Singh and the reformist Iqbal, who discuss the urgent need for stopping the communities on the Indian side from taking retaliatory actions by blowing the train heading for Pakistan with Muslim refugees from Mano Majra on the railway over bridge mid river. Meet Singh is helpless and so is the reformist Iqbal as the voice of sanity had been stilled and drowned in the communal frenzy, provoked and ignited by arrival and disposal of trainloads of the slain bodies from across the borders. Both Meet Singh and Iqbal in the given situation find themselves incapable of any positive action and both find themselves out of place.

But it is not the same case with criminal Jugga who gets reformed at the last moment and plays the role of saviour, climbs up the steel span of the bridge, tugs at the rope, stretches himself on it near the point of knot, slashes at the rope with small KIRPAN in face of a volley of shots fired at him by the communalists intent on derailing the train. But Jugga undeterred hammers on and finally cuts the rope in shreds, delinks it with the explosive and the train passes off the bridge safely to Pakistan.

Shahane hails this novel as a creative endeavour of Khushwant Singh: He says:

The art of Khushwant Singh is revealed in not merely probing deep into the real but in transporting the actual into symbol and image. His art of realistic portrayal cannot be described merely as an exercise in the book-keeping of existence: in fact, it
is a creative endeavour of transcending the actual, asserting the value of dignity of the individual, and finally, of expressing the tragic splendour of a man’s sacrifice for a woman.  

Truly, Jugga makes his sacrifice for his love, Nooran, who along with others of her caste was heading for Pakistan by the train which is saved from being derailed. Thus, his personal physical love for Nooran is transformed into the love for the entire trainload of Muslims. His love Nooran transcends his physical love for her.

Mahatma Gandhi used to say that ‘hate the sin, not the sinner.’ In the same vein, the novelist tells his readers through the reformist Iqbal: “Criminals are not born. They are made by hunger, want and injustice.  

Khushwant Singh uses the narrative technique of contrast which is his speciality in this novel. Taking a note of this striking feature applied by the novelist in *Train to Pakistan*; Shahane says:

The three scenes taking almost simultaneously to the refrain of the railway engine’s whistle demonstrate the three-fold mode of operation of the principle of contrast inherent in Singh’s art of fiction. Dacoity is contrasted with love, and a spiritual love is differentiated from sheer physical passion. The act of decoity is conceived in a world of growing materialism… Jugga’s genuine involvement with Nooran is based on strong emotion, whereas-Hukum-Chand’s association with Haseena, though delicate and ambivalent, is initially a transitory, superficial and casual relationship.  

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Singh’s narrative technique is such that in his portrayal he has not only created the real and life-like situations in the novel, but has also given a sense of largeness to life. He has a unique skill and ability to weave multi-dimensional thoughts into a perfect synthetic whole on a pattern seldom found anywhere else. He has a power to depict situations with down-to-earth worldliness.

Singh has a knack for painting the insignificant into significant, giving adequate word visuals for gestures, facial expressions and nuances of behaviour making the depiction vivid and effective as in case of the singer and the dancing party brought to the guest house to entertain Hukum Chand. The description is typically Indian and suited to the situation.

Khushwant Singh has presented Mano Majra on the Indo-Pak border in the Punjab as a microcosm of the communal temper during the days of partition. Applying a rare narrative technique, Singh sets the pattern of the village fusing its atmosphere with the whistling and puffing of the rail engines, regulating the village activities with the arrival and departure of trains. When the first stories of atrocities reach, the peace of the village is disturbed, but for the unsuspecting Mano Majra inhabitants the stories relate to a different world. They ignore the stories and prefer to live in the world of their own, sharing joys and sorrows of each other and discussing the village problems in the Gurudwara. There is a vivid description in the novel of the village harmonious atmosphere and the functional integration. Shahane rightly observes:

…train is a dual symbol. It symbolizes life and action, but it also stands for death and disaster. The scene of the train from Pakistan, which brings in countless corpses to Mano Majra, is awful and heartrending. The setting and appearance of the train are in tune with its funeral atmosphere.¹¹
Reflecting on the unceremonious burial of bodies from Pakistan and consigning the same to flames which rise to the sky, described by Singh as “red tongues of flame”, Shahane says:

The “red tongues of flame” has dual meaning. It symbolises poisonous and aggressive nature of the snake and shows how, in the heat of destructive lunacy men turn into poisonous reptiles.  

The dramatization in the narrative technique of Khushwant Singh has found full play in his description of Jugga determined to cut the rope linked to explosives to blow off the train from Mano Majra heading for Pakistan as it crossed the railway bridge over the nearby river. As the reader goes through line by line his excitement increases as he gets a visual of the dare-devil performance of Jugga. He says:

The man hacked the rope vigorously. The thick rope had been tied horizontally above the railway line on the first steel pan of the bridge. It was about 20 feet above the track. The rope was stiff as the shaft of steel.

The vigilant leader of the gang communalists who wanted to derail the train of Muslim refugees midriver raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired. He hit his mark and one of the man’s legs came off the rope and dangled in the air. The other was still twined round the rope. He slashed away in frantic haste. The engine was only a few yards off, throwing embers high up in the sky. Somebody fired another shot. The man’s body slid off the rope, but he clung to it with his hands and chin. He pulled himself up,
caught the rope under his left armpit and again started hacking with his right hand. The rope had been cut in shreds. Only a thin tough strand remained. He went at it with his knife, and then with his teeth. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan.  

Critics K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri in their book, *The Partition in Indian-English Novels*, commenting on Train to Pakistan echo the view of V.A. Shahane about realism in the novel. They say:

Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* pictures the brutal, realistic story of political hatred and of mass passions during the tragic days that preceded and followed the partition of India… Trains were halted and the unfortunate passengers were ruthlessly butchered. Men, women and children were indiscriminate victims of mad communal frenzy: they were molested and killed by armed bands of men. The novel depicts the fateful journey of one such train vividly and powerfully.

The narrative in the novel opens with a suggestive reference to the summer season of 1947 which the novelist describes as “longer, drier and dustier”. These expressions foretell the future happenings. The word ‘longer’ suggests continued oppressive heat and increased miseries of the uprooted people on either side of the Indo-Pak border. The word ‘drier’ suggests that the fountain of friendship, fellow-feeling and compassion would dry up, and the word ‘dustier’ suggests feverish movements of the uprooted people in search of new hearth and home kicking up blinding dust.
In the opening part of the novel, Singh gives a picture of unity of human and natural world and forecasts punishment for sins in the form of a cruel summer season. Thus, he has weaved into the narration of the novel a popular concept of sin and punishment.

Singh has lent significance to his narration on the theme of partition as the novel expresses concerns of the people and their anxieties at the dehumanization and degradation of human values. In his narrative technique Singh has applied both the reportorial and documentary modes of writing adopting a lucid and fluent style.

In the novel, Singh blames both the communities for the holocaust in his immaculate portrayal of the real situation. He says:

The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.16

In his narrative technique Singh has narrated the story in cause and effect, in action and responses, in tensions and conflicts. He has converted a historical fact of partition into a gripping plot giving it a comic-tragic effect. He has recreated the past into meaningful symbols of contemporary situation and future possibilities.

In this regard, A.N. Dwivedi, commenting on the two novels, *Train to Pakistan* and *I shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, says:

His two novels, *Train to Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, depict the tragic circumstances leading to India’s partition in 1947. There is a thick layer of disenchantment and disillusionment and bewilderment in them, the
vision remains realistic throughout, and the communal barbarism is depicted with a great deal of irony and satire. The style is tough and terse, concise and spare, in both the novels, and it is likely that Singh is influenced by Hemingway in this matter.\textsuperscript{17}

Horres comments: “Some of Singh’s best stylistic effects depend upon vivid accuracy and immediacy of apprehension”.\textsuperscript{18}

*Train to Pakistan* follows a repetitive pattern marked by phases of sanity and insanity, discrimination and patronage, corrupt practices and the value thinking and righteousness and responsibility. There is lying, bribery, hypocrisy, drunkenness, womanizing, unfair police and bureaucratic functioning.

In his narration of the story Singh has not lost sight of popular beliefs of the people about bad weather, disturbances in the weather cycle, symbolic use of birds and lizards to make a point which has suggestively been explained.

Singh in the novel has minimized elaboration, but dramatized the nuances behind the facts. The dialogues are simple, natural and yet lively and functional. He has made use of vernacular words, such as NAR AD MI for he man, which appear unavoidable for explaining a point.

The monologues, especially of Hukum Chand, are marked with irony. A feel of it may be had in Hukum Chand’s monologue full of bitter irony: “Yes, Mr. Prime Minister (Nehru), you had your tryst (with destiny)….\textsuperscript{19}

Singh however, appears dilatory when he deals with Monsoon in full three pages. This has been done with a view to explaining to foreign readers what Monsoon means for India and Indians.
Singh is a writer of human ethos, life and passions and his theme, style and treatment of the plot establishes his identity as a writer of Sikh life in the undivided rural Punjab. There is Indianness in his writings.

Writing on the Indianness of Indian Fiction in English, Sheo Bhushan Shukla, a well-known critic, observes that to establish a distinct identity, and abundance of explanatory ethnographic, social and environmental details, intended primarily for the consumption of foreign readers have been given by the Indo-English writers while writing “about particular parts of the country: Mulk Raj Anand and Khushwant Singh write about the Punjab.”

Singh’s narrative technique is of a plot, story and an action and communication through comic-tragic-ironical modes. He is a master of subtle ironic designs in which he records life and its passions and peeps into the forces for and against the interests of the people, society and the nation.

The sharp contrast brought into focus by depiction of a representative village, Mano Majra, having a mixed population in the period before and after partition is shockingly real.

Violence which erupted in the wake of partition is a part of contemporary Indian history marked with the bloodiest upheavals. Women, young and old, were abducted, raped, mutilated and the victims were ordinary men and women.

Singh in his novel brings out poignant scenes in which hands were raised by the people against their one-time friendly and helping neighbours on both sides of the Indo-Pak border. And above all the atrocities were committed on the people under duress in flight for their new destinations. Critics Sheo Bhushan Shukla and Rini Shukla say:

Khushwant Singh’s forte, however, is story telling and not characterisation. He is master of a forceful
narrative technique. His mode is dramatic and his presentation is graphic and lively. There is no suspicion of any artificiality anywhere in the plot and the whole organism emerges spontaneously and by itself. The climax in the novel is breathtaking and convincing. The novelist avoids the use of the marvellous and the improbable, but is compelling enough to make us read the novel from cover to cover. A subtle feature of his art is the use of spontaneous symbols and motifs which add to the vitality of his plots.\footnote{21}

They further comment:

Using the technique of distancing, he creates in powerful words the impact of cataclysmal happenings on Indo-Pak border on the consciousness of the people for whom independence means little. \footnote{22}

The novel points to as to how non-violence was discarded overnight and the voice of sanity was throttled. For the marauders, the orgies of violence were fulfilling some basic urgency. The basic urge of violence overtook the sense of balance and on a major test the creed of non-violence crumbled and gave way to violence which was encouraged and let loose on both sides with impunity.

Singh has interpreted man and his worldly ways, portrayed psychologically the thought process, as in the case of reformist Iqbal, bureaucrat Hukum Chand, Sikh priest Meet Singh, Muslim Mullah, the village Lambardar and others.

The novel however, suffers from inadequate emotional expressions of Nooran, who is pregnant and in deep love with Jugga, while being forced out of
Mano Majra to join her community heading for Pakistan without having even a glimpse of her lover who is in jail facing a murder charge.

The fulfillment and frustration of Juggat Singh has, however, been portrayed realistically and his preparation for sacrifice to save Nooran from the gallows of death is in conformity with the Sikh tradition.

Singh in his narrative technique includes popular beliefs to create the desired effect on the readers like: “It is all written there”\(^{23}\) Jugga’s mother says cursing her lot and slapping her forehead.

Khushwant Singh mixes Hindi words in his narration to reinforce the impact of his narrative. He has made typical usages bordering on bad English, such as:

- What honourable noun does your honour bear\(^{24}\)?
- Where does your wealth reside\(^{25}\)?
- It is absolutely sixteen annas’ worth in the rupee.\(^{26}\)
- …how the pig’s penis spoke to Chacha\(^{27}\)?
- You snored like a railway engine.\(^{28}\)
- Give him his bangles.\(^{29}\)

Urdu-Hindi words such as Salaam, Kalyug, Kos, Nar Admi, Annas, Karmat etc. have been used, but not out of place. However they add a rare flavour to the narrative.

On the strength of the above, it may be said that in his narration of the story, Singh has followed humanistic and realistic tradition in the Indo-English literature.
In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, Khushwant Singh with his intense awareness of the Punjabi life, religion and culture deals with issues of tradition versus change and raises socio-political, ethical and moral issues and exposes religious hypocrisy bringing in the scenes of overriding physical urge for sex in the secret affairs of Shunno, widowed servant, and Muslim Peer Sahib, who by religious and social tradition and command of God, are the least expected to indulge in clandestine sex.

The readers are aghast at Singh’s extraordinary zeal to discuss sex, weaving sex stories in the plot. This is proved by the depiction of a sex-hungry husband and wife escaping to fields for physical sex as they do not get time and opportunity for sex in homes in the presence of the elders. May be in the Punjab such things might be happening those days, it is, however, unknown to the couples in eastern Uttar Pradesh and even Central part of the State.

A rape case is often reported in fields of eastern and western Uttar Pradesh, but couples often make their physical contact during the dead of the night when elders in the house are fast asleep or have gone out. The couple keeps waiting for the midnight hour to strike when the wife stealthily opens the doors for her husband who hurries in and leaves the bed before it is dawn to escape attention.

Singh brings in sex as a professional writer to arrest the attention of the readers. He is however not elaborative on his characters, who are suggestive and types of their own, but his sex scenes are fully elaborative and in the novel under study Singh has written three lengthy paragraphs on sex.

In this context, a reference to the exhibitionist Champak travelling with Madan from Kalka in a train compartment may be made. The novelist sketches her thus:
Champak went into the bathroom and took a shower. She came back wearing her transparent kimono. She went to the window and let down the shutter. A gust of wind blew the kimono on either side, baring her from her feet to her waist. Her hair flew wildly like the snakes on Medusa’s head.  

At this Madan switches off the lights before coming towards her and this makes Champak remark: “Can’t you bear to see me as I am? Why do you want it dark?” This remark indicates that she feels pleasure in exposing her private parts.  

Responding to the remark Madan, however, presses the switch to light the compartment and Champak not satisfied with the exhibition of her private parts goes a step further:

“Champak took off her kimono, tossed it on the rack and lay down on the berth”, leaving an instruction or suggestion to Madan, “Now you can switch off the lights if you want to”.  

Madan who had not seen any other woman, not even his wife, like that was naturally amused at the stark exhibition. Before he was gathering himself together, Champak shot back: “Don’t look at me like that: it makes me ashamed of my nakedness.”  

To the affirmation of Madan that he had never seen one with absolutely nothing on, pert comes a reply from Champak: “I still have my wrist watch.”  

This descriptive detail of the gestures for sex is the art of Khushwant Singh whose keen eye and experiences goad him to write about these.
Socio-political and cultural complexities are subjects which Singh discusses in his novel with the minutest details, leaving the readers quite impressed. While he appears to be and is obsessed with sex in his novels, he does not make any significant reference to an elaboration of the Quit India Movement which is the subject in *I Shall Not Hear Nightingale*. The Quit India Movement had been launched by the Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi on August 9, 1942, a period to which the novel is related. In reference to the political upheavals during the period, Singh is only suggestive about the uprising of the Indian people against the British rulers.

Clandestine love affair flourishes at a sacred place in close proximity of what in general belief is the adobe of God, purity personified between a Hindu widow and a Muslim Peer Sahib on the one hand, and on the other such an affair is being carried on between a married man and a married woman at Shimla with its extension in a moving train’s second class compartment, the act of love-making matching with the rhythmic movement of the train.

In this description, Singh has emphasized the sheer physical necessity for sex and makes a point by stressing that the infatuation of Shunno for Peer Sahib and of Champak for Madan is born out of natural sexual instincts which override all other considerations of propriety or impropriety, morality or immorality, suitability or unsuitability, and even caste barriers.

The sex-hungry Shunno and tempestuous Champak in the household of Sabhrai, a pious religious lady true to her husband and the family, are characters which represent types in house which otherwise remain surcharged with religious activities.

The novelist has shown the intensity of sex-hunger being so powerful as it knows no bounds and breaks to pieces the shackles of all social, moral, ethical and religious virtues and even the feat of God does not deter either the Hindu widow or the Muslim Peer Sahib from sex.
The clandestine love-making of Shunno with Peer Sahib has been described by the novelist thus:

Here was a man twenty years younger, strong and virile tearing off the padding of respectability with which she had covered herself. He stirred up the fires of a volcano which had all but become extinct. It was all wrong, but it was deliciously irresistible. It was like an itch which begs to be scratched till it draws blood.\(^{35}\)

Singh in this description stresses that sex is a physical necessity which Shunno “had almost forgotten… Her instincts had been buried under a thick pad of conventional morality prescribed for a Hindu widow-religion, charity, gossip about sex, but no sex.”\(^{36}\)

As against her, Peer Sahib, too, was placed in the same situation:

With the vows of celibacy to which he was committed, sex got little chance of natural expression. He had to be satisfied with his own devices or occasionally take liberties with the little boys sent by their mothers to learn the scripture.\(^{37}\)

In matters of sexual urge, Singh points out that there is no difference between the high and the low. Champak in the family of a bureaucrat and Shunno, a servant, in the same household, feel in the same way.

Khushwant Singh has created a make-believe world of sex fantasy by skillfully painting weakness in his characters who become daring in their sexual exploits. Singh has appended a quote from the Guru Granth Sahib passing a
meaningful commentary on what Champak, Beena, Shunno, Peer Sahib and Madan indulge into:

O, Black Buck, why lovest thou
The pleasure of fenced-in fields?
Forbidden fruit is sweet but for a few days
It entices and ensnares
Then leaves one sorrowing.  

The description of physical reality has its peak in horror and elemental passion as it shows man as a naked animal, stark nude, mechanically following passions throwing to the wind all norms of decency, privacy, destroying in the process the family traditions in novelty.

Singh sketches Champak as a sex-maniac who in her exhibitionism does not spare her minor teen-aged servant Mandoo who saw:

Champak hid her nakedness with her hands between her knees. Her raven hair fell on either side of her neck. Her breasts looked out from between her arms. Mudoo stared stupidly at her without replying and then started to back out of the door.

But Champak is not ashamed of having been seen thus by her servant and instead asks him to stay saying: “what! Shall I mix the water in? Both the bucket and the canister are full.”

Mundoo responds as asked and “his eyes never rose above Champak’s knees, nor left them. Champak remained as she was, hiding her nakedness with her hands, watching the boy’s embarrassment.”
The reader is amused at Champak’s daring in allowing the servant to remain glued to the exhibition of her private parts. And the irony is that this has been going on in a house which is singularly religious because of the religiosity of Champak’s mother-in-law, Sabhra.

At another place, Singh paints a portrait of Champak who is examining herself before a full length dressing table mirror after shaving her private parts:

She loosened her hair and turned round to see how she looked from behind. Her hair fell to the point at which her buttocks rose like softly rounded watermelons. There were dimples on either side of her rear waist. She turned round once more, inhaled deeply, and lifted her breasts with the palms of her hands and then ran her finger round her nipples till they became like berries. She clasped her arms above her head and wriggled her hips in the manner of hula-hula dancers. She drew her belly in as much as she could and stroked it with her hand down on either side to her knees. She studies her face and figure in all the postures she had seen in photographs of nude models. She found the reflection in the mirror to her satisfaction.42

Rosanne Archer commenting on the novel says:

It is sometimes interesting in spite of one dimensional characters, heavy-handed plotting, a flattered climax, and dollops of sex piled on irreverently... Much of the book is awkwardly devoted to the rambles and paste board people through bed and bower. The book is saved
somewhat, however, by an easy style and by the charm and interest of its picture of the Punjab land and Sikh people.\textsuperscript{43}

In sexual bouts Madan Lal, son of another magistrate Wazir Chand, is a match for Champak, Magistrate Buta Singh’s daughter-in-law. Madan is like Lord Krishna with his Gopis. A Life-size picture of Lord Krishna adorns the drawing-room of Wazir Chand as against a Gurudwara temple with the Granth in the house of Magistrate Buta Singh. Lord Krishna’s picture is the only symbol of religiosity in the house of Wazir Chand. The two families maintain cordial relationships.

As against Madan Lal, his friend and Champak’s husband, Sher Singh, which means a lion, is not a match for sexual activities with his sex hungry wife Champak. He is failure as a husband. This provides a gap which is filled in by Madan Lal on the strength of the cordial relationship between the two families. As against Champak, Madan Lal has also been characterized as a sex maniac who does not spare even Beena, Sher Singh’s sister, and ensnares her in his false love promises.

Singh gives a view of Beena with Madan in a cinema hall and how Madan behaves with her:

\begin{quote}
Madan began to caress her arm. Beena did not move. Then his hand brushed against her breast. \textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

This Braji (brother) of Beena in his extended love affair makes an unbrotherly proposal to her at Simla on her swearing that to remain friendly with him she would do anything, and Madan asks: “Come to my room tonight when everyone is asleep.”\textsuperscript{45}
An unsuspecting Beena does go to his room to find it bolted from inside and her sister-in-law is not in her room. She finds Madan having sex with Champak who too is in Simla in the same house.

Madan is a victim of his own plans. He had invited Beena and when his arrangement with Champak was finalized he could not tell Beena not to come, apologizing to her as he had thought, for making an unbrotherly proposal at a rash moment. But he could not do so. The novelist has portrayed its effect on Beena thus:

She stood rooted to the ground like a statue. All longing turned to cold, sickening hate.46

The novelist brings out forcefully that the real cause of Champak seeking an outlet to quench her insatiable sex desire is Sher Singh himself. He befriends Madan Lal, a sports hero of the college, to come in limelight in winning students union election, depending heavily on the popularity of his friend who has almost the entire student community and the college staff as his fans. This very fact gives Madan Lal easy accessibility to Sher’s wife Champak, who is already enamoured of him for his manly qualities, sweet voice and handsome personality. J.B. Bryant, commenting on the novel, says:

Offering insights into the life and customs of the Sikhs in India, this short novel by a cosmopolitan Indian scholar presents a drama of family loyalties which can be enjoyed by western readers with little or no knowledge of eastern affairs….47

The love episode and escapades in the novel are rooted in causes and effects which have been portrayed in a winsome style by the novelist who is so powerful in his sketches of love scenes as to earn for him the reputation of a human psychologist, sociologist at the same time.
At time his sex scenes make the conscience of the readers itch. This gives an impression that the author is a non-serious writer given to unusual details and weaving an atmosphere of sex which lead astray the adolescent mind.

In his obscene depiction of sex scenes, Singh is more businesslike than an artist, crude and clumsy, irreverently elaborative, but in characterization he does excel and in painting human infirmities he has no peers.

Regarding weaknesses and redeeming features of the novel, Phoebe Adams says:

Mr. Singh is business-like writer, not given to frills and subtlety. Even so the novel is not entirely sober. There are mischievous caricatures, of minor officials… and a scandalously funny episode in which the family’s mistreated boy-of-all-work takes Rabelaision revenge. Mr. Singh gives an impression of being an artless and sometimes a clumsy writer, but his major characters come to life, and their mistakes have the power to make the readers’ conscience itch.  

Depictions of sex scenes are central in the novel. Excessive stress on sex is unhealthy for the adolescent readers. Politics has been discussed in a very casual way, thinly weaved in the story. What has been discussed in detail is sex and the Punjabi way of life, interspersed with wit and humour.
III

*Delhi*, Khushwant Singh’s third novel, first published by Penguin Books India Limited in 1990, has been written with a totally journalistic approach to sell. In fact, the book is “sex on sale”, containing an anecdotal version of history.

In this novel the narrator is a Sikh with dyed beard and obsessed with history, sex and anecdotes. Not conforming strictly to the novelistic parameters, this book is in the form of a tourist guide, selecting historical episodes connected mostly with the tourist places, known or unknown, Muslim period ruins, domes and mosques and tourist sites of Muslim-ruled India, giving rise to a suspicion that the author has foreign readers in mind.

The novelist however uses a special kind of narrative technique of interior monologue and the narration alternates between the past and the present. Besides, autobiographical element has been added to it.

The narrative technique also includes the use of relevant Urdu couplets and translation into English of Hindi phrases to enliven the narration in which rules of restraint in expression of obscenity and crudity have more been flouted than followed. In the author’s own admission:

> It may read like a ‘Fucking Man’s Guide to Delhi: Past and Present’, but that is not what I mean it to be.⁴⁹

This confession and profession of intention by the novelist appears mysterious to the readers, as *Delhi* and Bhagmati, the HIJDA whore with power of both the sexes, sound both mysterious and alluring.
The novelist known for his love for sex has bluntly dealt with all kind of perversities and described it with its horrifying nakedness and used filthy epithets which make the conscience of the readers itch.

The main theme of the novel is history, history confined to portrayal of Delhi in certain periods of history under certain rulers, history which is not all inclusive but selective. The novelist is also strictly personal and whimsical in selection of the period of history, encompassing six centuries, personages and commoners.

The novelist travels through time, space and history picking up threads of this choice to suit to the canvass of his narration. In his journey, however, the author has skipped over important events and personages of the past and contemporary India and as such authenticity of history, as detailed by him, may be questioned. But to chosen historical events and personages are only a cover for the message the author wants to give for the future and the lesson to be learnt from the past.

The book is in the nature of a guide for the tourists. The author has worked as such. From his experiences as a guide, the author says:

It was not very hard work. After I had memorised the names of a few dynasties and emperors and the years when they ruled, all I had to do was to pickup a few anecdotes to spice my stories.  

This passage explains the mode of selection of the period of history, the rules, anecdotes and spices added which the novel under study contains. The author thus has given the history, time and space the form of a novel which is the product of his knowledge in the intricacies of a successful guide. In this endeavour, his vast travel experience, meeting with men and women of diverse countries with varied food habits and manners, has come handy and his expert
knowledge of English and felicity of writing together with his literary and journalistic bent of mind added flavour to the narration.

In fact what follows in the novel in the form of history, places and anecdotes has been described by the author himself in the paragraph below:

At the Qutub Minar I told them of the number of suicides that had taken place and how no one could jump clear of the tower to come down in one piece. I told them of Humayun’s father, Babar, going round his son’s sickbed four times praying to Allah to transfer his son’s illness to him and how Humayun had been restored to health and Babar died a few years later. About the Red Fort and its palaces I had picked up a lot of interesting details from the times Shah Jahan built it the kings who had sat on the peacock throne and were later blinded and murdered; the British who had taken it after Mutiny of 1857; the trials of INS officers, down to 15 August 1947 when Lord Mountbatten had lowered the Union jack and Nehru hoisted the Tricolour on the ramparts. Having once done my homework, there was little more to do to impress the tourists with my learning.\(^5\)

The first VVIP visitor, Lady Hoity-Toity, famous archaeologist and cousin of the Queen, whom Khushwant Singh conducts as a tourist guide, is said to be interested in archaeological sites. The author-narrator is told about his assignment: “She wants to examine some old sites to see if she can dig up something.”\(^6\)

This explains that the novel is a tourist guide version of history, the fact being available in any book of history, but this history is added with spicy tales by
the author-narrator who keeps a date with tourists more often trying to seduce them and also getting presents from them.

The mischievous bent of mind of the author-narrator who does not miss an opportunity to flirt with the woman he acts as her guide may be noticed in the following:

She leaps out of bed stark naked: small wrinkled breasts; nipple looking downward and dejected; wrinkled belly with a slightly paunch beneath the navel; scraggy brown pubic hair. I put the gown round her shoulders and close my hands over her breasts. 53

But Sardarji (the novelist) has already hit his mark. The lady returns to him from the bathroom, puts her hands on his shoulder and demands:

Don’t be cross. I’m a bit of a cock-teaser. She gives a smelly kiss on the nose to seal her forgiveness. 54

And this is because she had initially objected to Sardarji being bold with her:

On the other hand, the author-narrator has pictured Bhagmati, the hijda whore, thus:

Delhi and Bhagmati have a lot in common. Having been misused by rough people they have learnt to conceal their seductive charm under a mask of repulsive ugliness. 55
The narrator who claims himself to be one of the lovers of Delhi maintains that both Delhi and Bhagmati “reveal their true selves” only to their lovers. This infatuation of the novelist with Delhi and Bhagmati is symbolic of the legendary love of Majnu with Laila.

No wonder, Singh loves Delhi with all its ugliness as he in the role of a guide, especially for foreign VIPs and VVIPs, had to sell the history of Delhi and he could not do it without having a basic sound knowledge of such stretches of history, spanning some 600 years, as may interest his clients; and to arouse their interest in antiquities he had to add spices to make his narration absorbing. These sundry jottings on historical periods, personages and manners, surroundings and historical monuments have been weaved into a gripping story.

The past and the present alternate in Delhi and the entire novel rotates around Bhagmati and the past of Delhi in its every chapter. The past illuminates the present and the present gives a peep into the past. This special kind of narrative technique leaves its readers impressed at the author’s comprehension of the mind of personages, such as Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb, Amir Khusrau, Musaddi Lal Kayastha, Timur, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Jaita Rangreta, Nadir Shah and others who have been given a somewhat sympathetic treatment.

History has been treated superficially in the novel. Its quantum is only that which generally is interpreted to the foreigners on their on the spot conducted tours of historical sites and places of interest which may interest them as sell.

The novelist, however, has given a new angle to the treatment of three characters, Timur, Aurangzeb and Nadir Shah who in their interior monologues have bared their real intention for invading India and ascending to the throne of Delhi. This is a rare narrative technique in which the author-narrator has no peers.

There are, in the novel, as many as nine historical chapters. Of these seven are monologues of ordinary men who include Musaddi Lal, Jaita Rangreta, Meer
Taqi Meer, Alice Aldwell, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Nihal Singh and such other people as narrate the events of the early 20th century.

Besides, historical personages have been dealt with in three chapters and they are Timur, Aurangzeb and Nadir Shah who in their interior monologues explain to the readers the driving forces and impulses behind their actions. Here the novelist is at his best in imaginatively portraying the real intent of the trio for invading India and in the final analysis they are made to concede that greed for power and wealth together with religious fanaticism goaded them to undertake a long and arduous journey to gain victory over India and rule it.

It is amazing that Singh who has worked on history should in this novel skip over a vast and important period of history before Balban and instead devote full four pages to give a long sermon on farting in the chapter allotted to Bhagmati in which the author-narrator is the main speaker. O.P. Mathur notes:

In fact, he has skipped over large and significant areas of the history of Delhi before Balban, all the Hindu rulers, a number of Muslim rulers including some of the Moghuls. The gradual rise of the East India Company, the Quit India Movement, the Indian Independence and Partition, and the China War and the two Pakistani wars. Among the events of more recent history, while the Kashmir problem and Emergency have been totally ignored, inordinately long space has been given to the Punjab problem and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. 56

This observation corroborates fully my earlier stand-point that only that part of Delhi’s history has been chosen for delineation which may interest the foreign tourists and readers and which had inspired the author to include in the
book and as such he is very selective and the selection is as per his like and dislikes.

The narrator’s sermon on farting is out of context, but the observations and anecdotes are interesting. This adds sense of humour and also enlightens the readers on the forms and types of farting. As usual, Singh has introduced sex in his delineation on farting. The narrator says:

Farting is one of the three great joys of life. First sex; second oil rubbed in a scalp full of dandruff; third, a long satisfying fart.57

Regarding the novel being a tourist guide with spicy materials, O.P. Mathur comments:

Singh’s deep love for Delhi makes him to work for twenty years, as he says, to write a novel on its past, a novel sui generis, a portrayal of the historical times, some of the important rulers and some unknown commoners through their own words, and the whole suffused with the author’s personality and views. It is a remarkable tour de force.58

Besides, commenting on the selection of periods from history, personages and commoners, Mathur in the same article observes:

The basis on which events and characters have been selected for delineation seems to be only the novelist’s personal predilection and the extent of inspiration provided to him by them.59
He further says:

Such a puzzling selection of events and persons seems to arise only from the author’s whims which have made his celebration of Delhi so lopsided and unrepresentative. Thus Delhi is as far as its basic historical material is concerned, at last a series of haphazard and whimsical forays into the past and contemporary history of Delhi. 60

Mathur is absolutely right as the novelist while writing about the Punjab and the anti Sikh riots of 1984 in Delhi has taken upon himself the job of historian and looked at the events from a Sikh psyche, using filthy languages and unseemly expressions. He is not suggestive, but crude in descriptive details incorporating filthy Hindi abuses, such as “bahnchod”, “machchod” 61 (Sister-fucker and mother-fucker).

Bhagmati on the role of police during the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, reports to the author-narrator:

“Police? ‘She asks contemptuously’: Those bahnchods are with the mobs.” “We give you thirty-six hours to finish every Sikh in the city”,62 they tell them.

It is popularly believed that police played a partisan role in the anti Sikh riots of 1984. But a writer of the stature of Singh instead of being carried away by Sikh sentiments should have observed, as a responsible citizen, restraint in his expressions. His returning of the Government of India Award after the Blue Star Operation and subsequent riots in Delhi was not a mild rebuff to the Government of the day.
Is it because of this sentiment in the Sikh psyche that Singh did not favour allotting any monologue to either Tilak or Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru or Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad or Indira Gandhi. O.P. Mathur rightly observes:

...none of these personages of modern history impelled Singh to allot monologues as apparently he did not consider them as “important as Nadir Shah”, Aurangzeb or Bahadur Shah Zafar to deserve a monologue: far from it, they have not received any worthwhile mention, if at all they have been mentioned.\textsuperscript{63}

Instead of giving a monologue slot to Gandhi, Nehru and Patel, Singh puts Gandhi and Nehru almost in a bad light through the utterings of RSS boys who, however recognise Sardar Patel as their friend, but Gandhi as Enemy Number One and Nehru as Enemy Number Two:

Gandhiji is our enemy number one. He says; ‘Get out of the mosques of Muslims’ homes’. I want to ask him: ‘Oi, Old Man if we got out of their mosques and homes, where we are to live? On the pavements? It does not behove who lives in Seth Birla’s palace to talk like this.’\textsuperscript{64}

These remarks against Gandhi contain both condemnation and irony. Singh has done this very cleverly as the condemnations of Gandhi conforms to the RSS line of thinking. The same treatment has been meted out to Nehru as well. The RSS boy says:

Nehru is our enemy number two. He calls us goondas. I want to ask him: ‘Oi Pandit, where was
your police and your army when Mussalman goondas were slitting our throats?\textsuperscript{65}

The RSS boys have some respect for Sardar Patel. And yet the novelist dismisses him by saying only a few lines about him through the RSS boys:

\begin{quote}
Sardar Patel is our friend. ‘They are not thieves and dacoits, but love their country,’ he says. Only to please Gandhi and Nehru he adds that we are ‘misguided.’ The police also are our friends. And why not? Most of the new police are refugees from the Punjab. They know the truth about Mussalmans and are not beguiled by Gandhi-Nehru bakvas.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

Gandhi has been caricatured not only as four-twenty but a step further as an RSS activist calls him twice four-twenty equal to 840 and 840 is the number allotted to the activist by the Sangh Chief to keep a watch on Gandhi. The direction to the activist is:

\begin{quote}
We must know what this Gandhi fellow is up to. Number 840, you will attend the old man’s meetings and report what he says and who comes to see him.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Singh does not stop here in belittling Gandhi. The RSS boys say about Gandhi:

\begin{quote}
If the old fellow had been a member of our Sangha he would not have a more appropriate number than mine. 840 is twice 420 which is the Section of the Penal Code defining fraud – and Gandhi is a double fraud.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}
Such an expression, whatever the party line of RSS, demolishes our national symbols and encourages the younger generations to see the greatmen of our contemporary history in a bad light. Mahatma Gandhi in an interior monologue should have been allowed to explain himself as has been the case with invaders if he was given a sympathetic treatment in the novel.

It would not be out of place here to refer to the fact that Singh has painted poignant scenes of partition and its aftermath in his first novel *Train to Pakistan*. He describes the Muslim barbarity, the flight to Sikhs from Pakistan and their horrible plight in *Delhi*, too, in first person through Ram Rakha, the anti Muslim feelings among the refugees and the RSS boys, the Sangha members and their hate for Gandhi and Nehru and finally the shooting of Mahatma Gandhi who keeps on insisting on the Hindu-Sikh unity.

The feeling of remorse that sets in the person who saw Mahatma Gandhi being killed has been described movingly. The man who is in a ‘fit of madness’ brings the killer down. Soon thereafter, the culprit is taken into the police custody. Ram Rakha, though he did not like Bapu, cries in the most poignant way:

I killed him with my own hands, I killed him.’ Then
I slap my forehead and yell, ‘Hai, hai’, I murdered my Bapu.59

The anguished cry of Ram Rakha is symbolic of the deep guilt and sorrow of the entire Indian nation.

Singh has though made humanist and rational approach in the novel to events and men weaving interior monologue based on historical materials, a pervading Sikh psyche is clearly discernible.

Finally, the author-narrator reveals his real self in “The builders” claiming rightly himself as one of the descendants of the builders of New Delhi. It is here
that he bares his personal perception of men and events. Especially connected
with the Operation Blue Star and anti-Sikh riots. He is the narrator of events and
history becomes a narrative in his hands, which in a sense is rather not an
objective statement of the tragic happenings of those days. O.P. Mathur rightly
comments:

As regards the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in the last
chapter, the narrator of the novel himself takes on
the task of the historian.\textsuperscript{70}

Khushwant Singh, however, has given a wonderful literary treatment to the
theme by putting the narrative in a contemporary framework blending into it
autobiographical elements, with its range covering six centuries. Alternating past
with present and present with past, the narrator and his mistress, the eunuch, the
novelist follows a recurring pattern and in the process makes a veiled inquiry into
the modern Indian politics which gravitates round Delhi, the capital of India.

The country is beset with the problems of regionalism, communalism,
extremism and violence. The novelist gives the message of fraternity and peace
through the turmoils, killings and the bloodshed of the past and the present.

What is agonizing for the readers is that they have to wade through a maze
of repulsive and ugly usages of language and perverse sexy humours which have a
repetitive pattern all through to get to the essence, the message of the novel, for
communal amity, peace and fellow-feeling.

IV

Khushwant Singh presents man not as figment of spirit but as a being with a body
who lives with all his elemental passions. Naturally sex-lust-sex has always been
present in his fictional world and \textit{The Company of Women} is not an exception.
The novel is probably quite accurate with regard to the social mores inherent in
middle class Indian society which dictate that sexual relationships with unattached contemporaries of similar social standing are largely taboo.

Kumar's relationships with a veritable range of Indian women from different parts of the subcontinent are initially fulfilling but lead ultimately to disappointment.

As the protagonist who brings women to his luxurious lair one may get the feeling that he uses women. But a closer examination of the individual encounters leaves one with the feeling that it is Mohan Kumar who is being exploited by the women folk in question, mainly for money and sex.

The narrative uses some interesting devices in terms of switching from the first person to the third person and flits niftily from one period of Kumars life to another. The novel also provides familiar insights into every day life in Delhi for those familiar with this sprawling and increasingly exciting Indian metropolis. Khushwant Singh commenced writing The Company of Women when he was eighty-three and finished at age eighty-five.

Sex is the principal driving force in the life of Mohan Kumar in Khushwant Singh's The Company of Women (1999). The book traces Mohan Kumar's amorous adventures in full detail. Not only the title of the novel, but even the chapter names (Dhanno, Sarojini, Jessica Browne, Yasmeen ... ) indicate that the book is an account of Mohan Kumar's relationship with various women.

Mohan Kumar's sex life does not begin with Dhanno. He has been initiated long back at Princeton by Jessica Browne. When Mohan Kumar admires Jessica's figure, she questions, "Want to see what I'm really like?" and strips herself off. She takes him to her bed, pulls him over her. Mohan Kumar vividly recalls how he lost his virginity at twenty.
He thinks his friendship with Jessica will hold as long as he is in the States, but it does not last long beyond spring. When he sees her go out with another boy, he feels "a stab of jealousy in my heart" and then begins an unending sex game.

Khushwant Singh's basic concern as a novelist has been the need to find the meaning of human existence in man's struggle against various negative forces. In spite of the loss of values in traumatic situations, Khushwant Singh is able to shore the essential human element, often surging from an unexpected corner.

He was distressed and disillusioned due to the crisis of values in Partition. The myth of the innate goodness in man was exploded. His belief that Indians are more spiritual and hence more peace-loving and non-violent was shattered.

From the memories of Mohan Kumar emerges a human figure who is cursed with lust but also has some good qualities of head and heart. He is a clever student with special aptitude for arithmetic. He is gifted with a good memory. He wins a state scholarship to DAV College. He tops the university in the degree examinations and wins a scholarship to Princeton. He does well in his studies. He finishes his final year at Princeton and stays another year to do an advanced course in finance. He is much attached to his father. From Princeton he writes to his father almost every week and sends him money every month. In spite of a bright opening in America he comes back for his father. "I would not abandon him in his old age." After coming to Delhi, Mohan Kumar goes along with whatever his father wants him to do. Though he does not like the social system, for his father's insistence he remains "a mute spectator, eyeing one girl after another." For his father's satisfaction he visits haridwar to have a dip in the holy Ganga as an act of penance. His domestic life is not successful. His married life is most unhappy. His wife, Sonu, is sadist and revengeful. In spite of his sex adventures at Princeton, he tries to begin his married life anew with no hankering back, but Sonu has no desire either to develop or continue that relationship. She finds fault with him, never responds to any of his efforts to be happy. As a result, Mohan
Kumar is also extremely dejected. She makes his life impossible. He cannot even enjoy his evening drinks and TV. He slowly drifts away from her.

It is true that Mohan Kumar has an exceptionally strong urge for sex. But due to his disturbed married life, he could not enjoy sex even for months. He is losing confidence in sex. But when he is able to enjoy sex in Bombay, he is happy that his sex instinct has not gone. Once again he recovers his zest for life. When he comes back to Delhi, he starts enjoying evenings with his friends. When the wife of one of his friends asks him the reason-lottery, another million, new sweetheart? “All those and more,” he replied and added cryptically, I have rediscovered my manhood.”

After Mohan gets back to India and settles in married life, his passion for women continues undiminished. He feels highly relieved after being divorced by his "nagging and ill-tempered" wife. But Mohan Kumar had never remained a faithful husband. His sex escapades, before the divorce and post divorce were unusual and varied, including his repeated relations with his ever-obliging maid, Dhanno, with her practiced charm on the bed.

Another woman in Kumar’s life was Tamilian Marry Joseph, described by the author as “a dark, plump woman in her thirties.” She worked as a nurse to Kumar’s son. She has been described almost inviting Mohan Kumar tacitly with these words, “Saar, one life to live, not to waste it on a drunkard husband. You agree?” Kumar has agreed.

The novel describes Kumar's rendezvous with madam Sarojini Bhardwaj, a Professor of English. And, when it came to sex, the lady professor proved that she was stronger than many men. Another lady appearing in the sex life of Kumar was Molly Gomes, who was “not only as an incarnation of sensual impulse, but also as a mistress of sexuality.” Likewise, Susanthika, “the small wonderful bird”, from Sri Lanka was really active on bed.
Like his other novels, Khushwant Singh deals with elemental human passions in his *The Company of women* too. So here too the seed is equally promising. In this novel, the main theme is sex. Khushwant Singh is not the first author in the history of man to write about sex. There are authors like D.H. Lawrence who deal with more controversial aspects of the experience. But they are not trapped in sexuality as Khushwant Singh is in *The Company of Women*. They explore psyche through sex. They deal not only with human body but with man. As Chaman Nahal says:

'Phallic consciousness' has a sort of symbolic meaning with Lawrence which need not necessarily refer to the sexual moments alone of our life and which covers the whole span of our existence, organic and inorganic. Applied to sex, it would mean an implicit acceptance of the power and the glory of the body and a sense of love for this power and glory. Virility is one of its aspects, but that it passes beyond virility and is with Lawrence more a projection of the beauty of the union is obvious from the tenderness, from the softness of his theme of marriage.76

Khushwant Singh’s narrative seems to be realistic giving a factual account of each encounter with all possible details. It seems that he revels in the very act of description. An artist’s ability to recreate essential reality that lies beyond the solid seeming wall of reality endows his work with multiple meanings.

Though sex is a physical action, it is also related to human psyche, and personality as a whole. It is not the companionship that Mohan Kumar seeks; only the company, not of a human being of opposite sex, but of female body just for mating. As a result, this long line of paramours points to no development or awareness in Mohan Kumar. It only confirms his belief that lust rather than love
shapes human life. "Love cannot last very long without lust. Lust has no time limit and is the true foundation of love and affection." But Mohan Kumar consciously lives only on the level of lust, guarding himself from any attachment. "As soon as I sensed a girl was getting emotionally involved in me, I dropped her." Mohan Kumar's approach to sex and his identification of manhood with sex drive tragically ends his life.

In brief, The Company of Women celebrates the universal and the eternal story of man's relationship with woman: the relationship of love, sex, and passion. The book presents this relationship in a very unusual and original style, which is not only uninhibited and erotic, but also enormously enchanting and engrossing. However, the story also serves as a sort of modern-day morality tale, with Mohan Kumar committing suicide as he realizes he has AIDS, in effect, paying for his promiscuity.
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