Chapter-5

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Undertaking a critical study of Khushwant Singh’s novels proved to be an enriching experience for the researchers. The final chapter contains some concluding remarks. Beginning with a poor academic record, Khushwant Singh has gone on to become one of the leading scholarly figures of contemporary literary circle of India. He has achieved this height by dint of sheer hard work, dogged determination and persistence. He has had a chequered career, changed several jobs, but consistently produced books on a variety of topics, most of them on Sikh history, politics and religion. However, one realizes that perhaps if Khushwant Singh did not have his father to fall back on, he would not have persisted in becoming a writer. He would then have been bogged down by the constraints of looking after the financial needs of his family. Instead, his wife also pitched in at one time and paid for the education of their children. Had he not received this help, he would not have been able to pursue a career that was not lucrative to begin with. Thereafter he has gone from strength to strength. He has been a professor at Princeton University, Hawaii University, and at Swarthmore College. He has also held prestigious positions as the editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, The Hindustan Times, The National Herald, Yojana and New Delhi. He has been a member of the Rajya Sabha and was also awarded the Padma Bhushan. He returned the latter as a protest against Operation Bluestar.

In spite of acquiring such widespread acclaim, he retains his modesty, and continues to guide aspiring writers. Khushwant Singh began his literary career by writing short stories. He has some very definite ideas regarding the form of a short story. But he has not enumerated the rules or principles that should govern a novel. This is just as well because his first three novels are diametrically different from each other, as far as their narrative structure and even content is concerned. The first novel, Train to Pakistan has a well-planned structure with a distinct
beginning, middle and end. It is a straightforward tale, which is fast paced, has an unexpected and gripping climax, and a suitable heart-warming ending. It tells of the effect of the partition on the lives of the people of Mano Majra. The second novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, is different from his earlier one. It paints a picture of the lives of the members of the Buta Singh household, against the backdrop of the Quit India Movement. This novel does not have a tight structure, and is rather haphazard. It fails to hold the complete attention or retain the interest of the reader because the pace slackens at several instances. There are too many digressions in the narration that detract from the main story. The climax is also fairly tame, and one is easily able to anticipate it. The ending, probably intended to be humorous, comes across as being rather flat, and in no way enhances the novel. The third novel, the magnum opus, *Delhi* is an entirely different entity. Here Singh follows a pattern somewhat reminiscent of the Indian mythological stories, where there is a Sutradhar who narrates different stories woven together into a single fabric. However; the only thing that the narrator in *Delhi* has in common with a Sutradhar is that he is the common link between the semi-historical chapters. Otherwise all the chapters have their own narrators. The novel has been structured in such a manner that each historical chapter alternates with a chapter depicting modern-day Delhi. Khushwant Singh has experimented with a different and somewhat unique narrative structure in this novel. The common thread running through the novel is the effect of religion, politics and violence in shaping the city of Delhi from the era of Ghiasuddin Balban up to the anti-Sikh riots in 1984.

In *The Company of Women*, Kumar moves through a series of bed partners neither discovering anything for himself nor offering to the readers any notable insight, experience or realization. There is indeed a tragic moment at the end of the novel when, looking at his limp "Baby python", he showers the worst invectives on it for getting him into his deadly predicament. Just at the moment he was reminded of all the pleasure he had known in life, and knew that he only had this little snake to thank for all of it. Khushwant Singh in deed ironically campaigns against the "deadly disease", when shows Kumar getting AIDS, all in a
matter of just six months from unprotected sexual encounter in Mumbai and ultimately dies.

He is best known for his trenchant secularism, his humor, and an abiding love of poetry. His comparisons of social and behavioral characteristics of Westerners and Indians are laced with acid wit.

From 1980 through 1986, Singh was a member of Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian parliament. Awarded the Padma Bhusan in 1974 for service to his country, in 1984 he returned the award in protest against the siege of the Golden Temple by the Indian Army. Undeterred, in 2007 the Indian government awarded Singh an even more prestigious honour, the Padma Vibhushan.

A self-proclaimed agnostic, lover of fine scotch whisky and admirer of female beauty, he nonetheless leads a disciplined life, waking up at 4 am each day and continuing to write his columns by hand. His works range from political commentary and contemporary satire to outstanding translations of Sikh religious texts and Urdu poetry. Despite the name, his column "With Malice towards One and All" regularly contains secular exhortations and messages of peace, brotherhood and tolerance. In addition, he is one of the last remaining writers to have personally known most of the stalwart writers and poets of Urdu and Punjabi languages, and profiles his recently deceased contemporaries in his column. One of the most striking aspects of his weekly writings is his outright honesty; he will openly admit to his weaknesses and mistakes, along with an acceptance of his declining health and physical abilities in more recent times.

As a public figure, Singh has been accused of favoring the ruling Congress party, especially during the reign of Indira Gandhi. He is better viewed as an establishment liberal. Singh's faith in secular forces has been shaken by events such as anti-Sikh riots that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination, in which major Congress politicians were alleged to be involved. But he has remained resolutely positive on the promise of Indian democracy.
Khushwant Singh is a man larger than life. Befitting his accomplishment, he was honoured by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar viz. Doctorate of Literature. The entire senate rose to deafening applause when the vice-chancellor introduced Sardar Khushwant Singh to the faculty. Khushwant Singh has been a lawyer, diplomat, critic, journalist, novelist, historian, humorist, naturalist and a politician - all rolled into one.

The personality of a particular writer cannot be divorced from his writings. Singh is a deep lover of nature, and over the years he has maintained a diary on nature. His treatment of nature forms an important facet of his fiction. He is also something of a voyeur, taking a keen interest in the behaviour and the mutual relationships of people. He also caters to the voyeur in all of us because Indians by nature are a curious people. So human relationships form an important theme in his fiction.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject, he reads about all the religions of the world. As a result of this, he has written several books and essays upon religion. Hence it is but natural that one of the major themes in his fiction would be religion. In India, there is a close relation between religion and politics. And Khushwant Singh is not only a writer but a journalist as well so he cannot remain unaware or untouched by the events that have shaped our country. He is keenly aware of the history, culture and polity of India. Important aspects of his fiction, especially his novels, are his views on politics.

He has mostly written about what he is personally acquainted with. His personal experience, close association and intimate knowledge about the subject taken up, always comes through in all his fiction. Hence they become veiled self projection.

Khushwant Singh by temperament is an extremely witty man. He prefers to see the lighter side of life rather than the dark and dreary aspect of it. He is also gifted as far as his ability to portray the humorous side of life is concerned. This
adds a great deal to his fiction making it well-rounded and appealing. In fact humour is the omnipresent link that binds all his works of fiction together. This element pervades in all his writings.

Khushwant Singh is a keen observer of nature and hence his fiction is marked by a frequent reference to flora, fauna and natural phenomena. Singh invariably writes about what he knows best and thus describes only that which he himself has observed. While this approach on the one hand makes his canvas limited, it at the same time endows his descriptions with a wealth of detail and gives a realistic and earthy flavour to all his writings.

The chief characteristic of Khushwant Singh's novels is that he has used nature effectively to either provide a realistic background, or to show up the actual character of a person, or to portray the growth in the story or the character. The tone of Train to Pakistan is set right from the first line through a proficient depiction of nature. The description of summer of 1947 was quite realistic. Use of nature serves to establish the stark realism that is an inherent part of the novel. It immediately establishes the setting in a fixed time and place as well. The summer is described as being extremely hot which seems to denote the passionate state of the people. It makes his prose poetic.

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale also begins with a description of one of the aspects of nature. The first chapter begins with a detailed portrayal of the killing. This type of depiction establishes the time frame of the story and reveals the hollow daring of the so-called would be terrorist of the Freedom Struggle of India. The killing of the crane, an extremely senseless act, symbolizes the recklessness of the boys. No right-minded Indian revolutionary would resort to such an act of stupidity. It gives a fair idea of the personality of the two main characters of the story: Sher Singh and Madan in a limited canvas. The title and description of nature imparts poetic touch.
In *Delhi A Novel*, Khushwant Singh begins the first chapter with a description of nature in order to give the reader a feel of the ambience of then Delhi when Pandit Nehru was the prime minister. Nature has also been treated in the manner of a prelude to forthcoming events. The narrator is savagely stung by countless bees. This is a preamble to the brutal and inhuman massacre to the people of Delhi by Taimur. This incident also serves as a link between the era of Mussadi Lal that chronicles the lives of the Ghori’s, Balban, Nizamuddin, the Khiljis, The Tughlaqs, and the invasion by Taimur.

Out of four, three novels of Khushwant Singh are based upon particular periods in the political history of India. *Train to Pakistan* is based upon the partition of India. The Quit India Movement of 1942 forms the backdrop of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. And *Delhi* covers the political events that shaped India from the time of the reign of Ghiasuddin Balban in 1265 up to the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the anti-Sikh riots in 1984. Hence his novels are categorized as historical political works.

The partition of India caused a great deal of turmoil to Khushwant Singh and the result was his incomparable masterpiece, *Train to Pakistan*. Since he was a witness to the violence that occurred, he gives a graphic description of the communal riots right at the beginning of the novel.

Such a narration is clearly an indictment of the repercussions of the Partition, rather, the Partition itself. Even though the novel essentially describes the horrific events of the Partition, Khushwant Singh resists the temptation to sit in judgement on the political leaders of the day.

Some of the characters do speak in a biased manner at times, but this is in keeping with the demands of the story. The conversation between Hukum Chand and the sub-inspector reveals their opinion of the events that were happening in the country. Hukum Chand says that in response to the convoys of dead Sikhs being sent from across the border, the Sikhs here also retaliated in kind. They
attacked a Muslim refugee train and sent it across with over a thousand corpses, with 'Gift to Pakistan' written on the engine. The sub-inspector believes that this is the only way to put a stop to the killings. Man for man, woman for woman, child for child. He wholly approves of the RSS getting the better of Muslim gangs. It was precisely this line of thinking which led to the spiralling killings on both sides of the border. Keeping in mind the inflamed situation, it is natural that people of a particular community begin harbouring feelings of hatred for the other community. The researcher found tremendous amount of passion into the scene of parting, as well as in the novel as whole. This is due to the fact that Khushwant Singh personal feelings for the subject. He was born, brought up, and spent the first half of his life in Pakistan.

The researcher found an interesting insight into the attitude of the peasants towards independence. When Iqbal tells the villagers that it is a good thing that the English have left, he is surprised to know that the lambardar preferred the English officers to the Indian officers. Meet Singh tells him of a colonel's memsahib sending things for his niece from England, something that no Indian officer's wife would do. They are not too impressed with the prospect of independence either. The peasants are of the opinion that freedom must be a good thing, but what would they get out of it? Educated people like Babu Sahib would get jobs the English had. But whether the peasant would get more lands or more buffaloes? According to them, freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. They were the slaves of the English, now they will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistani's. Their common-sense approach towards independence is found even after sixty two years.

In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, Khushwant Singh does not make any political statement as such. This, in spite of the fact that the story is based during the time when the call for the Quit India Movement was given by Mahatma Gandhi. This is perhaps because Singh did not really want to write about the repercussions of any political event as he had already done so in *Train to Pakistan*. Moreover, this novel is basically a chronicle of the lives of a family of
Punjab. However, the period in which it is based did give him an opportunity to depict the activities of would-be politicians, but more with the objective of exposing Sher Singh's character, and leading to the climax of the story, than for giving any kind of political view. Personal and public events co-exist here.

The novel begins with a description of the killing of the crane by Sher Singh. It is supposedly a part of the training of his terrorist group. This reveals the sheer immaturity and ludicrousness of his convictions. No revolutionary who fought for the freedom of India would have indulged in such a crude deed. It is amusing to note that Sher Singh's political activities are not due to any high flown notions of patriotism. Rather it is an attempt by him to make up for his inadequacy in the marital bed, and win the admiration and respect for his wife Champak. He is all public posturing and bluster, nothing else. He is after all, his father's son and wants to be on good terms with everyone. His hopes are belied by the village headman who informs Taylor about his activities. Such informers were probably responsible for the undoing of several underground organizations during the Freedom Struggle.

As Sher Singh's arrest shows, he crumbles easily in the face of the slightest trouble. This incident reveals that the divide and rule policy was used by the British on a much smaller scale as well Mr. Taylor deliberately sends Anglo-Indian and Muslim policemen from northern Punjab to arrest Sher Singh. He does it in order to intimidate Sher Singh, and succeeds. Sher Singh loses whatever little bravado he might have had, when confronted by the two people he loathed and feared the most. In jail he decides to reveal whatever was necessary in order to avoid a beating. If he cannot be loyal to his friends, he certainly will not be loyal towards his country. Cowardly youths like Sher, and greedy informers: both interested in securing their own well-being, were in some measure responsible for the long rule of the British. It is Sabhrai who advises Sher Singh not to reveal the names of his friends (since he was not physically abused he has no need to do so). And it is her illness, which brings about his release. His impending release gives
him the opportunity to manipulate the situation in his favour. He is after all a budding politician. He had emerged heroic at the end of his imprisonment.

There is an instance which reveals how religious matters turn into political issue. A deputation of Hindu merchants requests Buta Singh to help them get a license to take out a religious procession. Buta Singh convinces Taylor by saying, …‘Sahib's, order banning meetings and processions is being misconstrued by mischief makers as being directed only against the Hindus because it was promulgated after the Sikh and Muslim celebrations.’ His knowledge of delicate Indian milieu is quite apparent here.

Clearly the people in power must keep in mind that all the communities should be treated as equal. Conversely, if one community is discriminated against, it fosters hatred in the psyche of one for the other. This basic reality inherent among the people of India was amply exploited by the British. And this finally led to the Partition and the formation of Pakistan. In fact divisive tendencies had already taken root among the people. This is in contrast to the situation in Mano Majra, where the people were united even after the Partition. The researcher finds his Singh’s keen understanding of Indian psyche.

In this novel, Khushwant Singh’s main concern is to provide a glimpse into the lives of the members of Buta Singh’s family, caught in the middle of the rise of Indian Nationalism. But none of them rise to the occasion. It is strange that Singh does not make any comment upon Mahatma Gandhi in a novel based at the time when the country was behind Gandhi. History is mingled with family life here.

On the whole, this is not really a political novel. The Quit India Movement is an incidental part of the story, and not the main event. This is unlike his first novel where the Partition is the principal theme. And in the final analysis this difference is what makes Train to Pakistan a great novel and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale a mediocre one.
Delhi, semi-historical novel shows how the events of the past have shaped the minds and psyche of Indians through the centuries, and led to the political situation of today. The researcher found out that Khushwant Singh has adroitly depicted the exploitation of the religious sentiments of different communities by the rulers for their own selfish purposes. Today the politicians too are doing the same. One wonders why the people do not take lessons from history and stop being pawns in the hands of leaders who do not really care one way or another; but are merely interested in fulfilling their own ends. Khushwant Singh has attempted to throw light upon this in Delhi. The last chapter of this novel is an anguished cry of a sensitive individual who is immensely pained by all the senseless killings triggered in the name of religion. He has probably written so feelingly in order to somehow get people to realise the futility of turning religion (which should be an intensely private affair) into a political issue. The one strong political view that emerges from the novel is the horrific results of linking religion with politics. The next most important aspect that is brought out in this novel is the absence of able and just leaders in the country through the ages. And lastly, the existence of corruption from the earliest times to the present day. Thus Singh is keen spectator of past and present corrupt life.

India had always tried to demonstrate their superiority by destroying places of worship that belonged to the people following a religion other than their own. For instance, the Turks had demolished, twenty seven Hindu and Jain temples. Hindus would attempt to regain some of their prestige in different ways. An example of this is the inscription Sri Visvakarame Prasade Rachida on the Qutub Minar. When Allauddin Khilji came upon the throne of Delhi he set about despoiling the Hindu kingdoms of the South. His General, Malik Kafur extended his dominions right up to the seas. Tremendous wealth was brought into Delhi. Hindu women were given away to Muslims as reward for service. Numerous Hindu temples were destroyed. The atmosphere became so vitiated that even Hindus like Mussadi Lal who had adopted Muslim ways found life 'extremely difficult. Such partisan actions on the part of successive rulers were in a large measure responsible for fostering mutual antagonism between the different
communities. Kings irrespective of their personal relationships also followed such a discriminatory policy. 'Ghiasuddin' Tughlaq had married a Hindu princess. His son was also married into a Hindu noble family. Yet he behaved like a headstrong tyrant towards his Hindu subjects.

It is also found in the novel that the monarchs who ruled over India through the centuries spent all their time indulging in wine and women. This through the successive generations became a habit and a weakness. This was another factor, which allowed foreigners to hold sway over Hindustan. All the monarchs came upon the throne after slaying their own brothers, fathers and other male heirs. After coming to power they did not do much to alleviate the sufferings of the common man. Although Aurangzeb was free of the vices of his predecessors, it was his failure to foster unity amongst the people, which led to the gradual deterioration of the Mughal empire after his death. The invaders who came and became the rulers of India gradually imbibed the weaknesses inherent, in the former rulers. They too became lovers of a life of ease and luxury. Was it due to some intrinsic factor in India that led them to lose their leadership qualities? The Mughals were the descendants of Taimur and Babar. But they ended up being defeated by outsiders (Mohammad Shah by Nadir Shah, and Bahadur Shah Zafar by the British). History was repeating itself, and they were subjugated just as their own ancestors had vanquished the original rulers of Hindustan.

It is also found that the British understood well the importance of religion in India. They were quick to exploit this to suit their own purposes. So they partitioned the subcontinent.

They enlisted Indians in their army to fight fellow Indians by preying upon their religious sentiments. The Sikhs were recruited in the British army and told that they were to fight against the Mussulmans. And at the same time they enlisted Pathans, Biloches and Punjabi Muslims in order to fight against the Sikhs.
The revolt was also triggered as a result of religion. The Britishers asked Hindu and Muslim soldiers to put cartridges smeared with the fat of cows and pigs in their mouths. There was no need to prove that the Britishers meant to despoil both Islam and Hinduism and make everyone Christian?" In this way Hindus and Muslims united against the British. The rebels also used religion to provoke the Indian soldiers to go against their British officers. To the Muslim soldiers they sent Muslim representatives with the Quran and begged them to jihad against the pig-eating firangi. Brahmins carrying Ganga water in brass-pots were sent to convince the Sikhs to murder the cow-eating maleechas. The partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon was also a ploy to foster divisive tendencies amongst the Hindus and Muslims. Singh exposed how Curzon exploited religious feelings of all.

Khushwant Singh has not shied away from writing about the corrupt practices followed by his grandfather Sir Sujan Singh; by which he laid the foundation of the fortunes of the Singh family. He has also written candidly that his own father Sir Sobha Singh followed in his footsteps and did the same. Buta Singh in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is also modelled along the same lines.

It is also found that appointments to the most important posts were made on family considerations. A prime minister's son succeeded his father, a governor's son the governor, a judge's son the judge, a village headman's son the headman. Placing relatives in good positions, irrespective of merit, gained merit in the eyes of the people. Nepotism as an evil is an alien concept. Our languages do not even have a word for it.

After going through the historical views of Khushwant Singh in his three novels, it is evident that he is essentially a humanist. Whether it is a veiled censure of the political system or the open indictment of the political compulsions that led to the Partition, or the anti-Sikh riots, he speaks from the point of view of the common man. He cannot avoid becoming emotional at times because he can identify with the people who end up suffering in all the instances. His personal experiences and emotions have a great deal to do with the superb rendering of the
events described. He has not chosen to write about the Partition, or Delhi, because of an eye on the market; but rather because both the subjects have moved him deeply, and it was a compulsion with him to write about them.

It is evident that he tries to warn readers of the horrendous consequences of linking religion with politics; beginning with *Train to Pakistan* to *Delhi*. Religion is the only issue, which can either divide or unite large number of men and women; so it has always been exploited by politicians. In this emphasis on religion, the root cause of all problems that is economic disparity among the peoples is sidelined. The people in power are perhaps deliberately unwilling to face this problem. Serious measures are never taken to improve the living. He holds a mirror with a message of humanism to us.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh exploits the subject of the partition days during the year 1947 and draw a scenario which is both realistic as well as romantic. The narrative pattern in this novel suggests something of a labyrinth through which the human relations move in a zig-zag way, owing to the pressure of the hard times. In fact it is a period of weariness, fever and fret and in the absence of any clear vision, so many incidents and situations come to pass away unnoticed. The novel ends with the supreme sacrifice of a so called rogue Juggat Singh to his Muslim beloved Nooran. Juggat’s dearth highlights the basic feeling of life and duty which maintains no distinction of caste, colour or creed.

The forced departure from one place to another, the journey from known to an unknown destination gets better treatment in this novel. With the help of the controlled tension in the narrative and by making an access to the inner recess of mind presents a unique narrative pattern which exposes the human psyche. In the novel the tension mounts and the atmosphere is surcharged with revenge and hostility. The situation is deteriorating everyday. The Muslim of Mano Majra decides to go. They sense the hatred in the air. The tension deepens against the Muslims.
The partition days during the year 1947 focus on a scenario which is wonderfully deep and interesting for realism and romance. While the romantic piquancy to the narrative is welcome, the hackneyed romantic touch which is given by Khushwant Singh in this novel should also be seen in the light of narrative technique. Love is normal happening but the love between two members of opposite community highlights the fictional effect.

Khushwant Singh chooses to write about the sentimentality of the reader, and just draws a series of sketches of how the events influence his nicely crafted characters. The characters are closest to the villagers, Policemen and Magistrates. The conversations, the arguments, the brotherhood that extends beyond religion in villages, and the complexity of human nature is all brought out by this pithy masterpiece nicely.

What happened against the Jews in Europe wasn't the result of Hitler's personal vendetta alone, what happened in India wasn't a result of Jinnah alone. We need to look at these in the light of bloodshed that had preceded these events.

*Train to Pakistan* presents one of the best studies (in English) of Sikhs and villagers of India. Another novel from the same time *Maila Anchal* (The Soiled Border) by Phanishwer Nath Renu is a complimentary study of villagers in Bihar, as these villagers witness rise of caste based politics and changes in wake of India's freedom. Since the events during partition involved a million deaths, and uncountable inhuman excesses (rapes, slashed breasts, castrations), the novel provides context for very strong emotions. In the dark dance of death and murders, there are occasional glimpses of romance, friendship and kinship. The novel is a part of our painful heritage. It is perhaps not as descriptive as it should be for the taste of non-Indian, non-Pakistani readers, but it is sure it presents the Indian holocaust in a very delicate, refined and understated fashion.

The novel has well-conceived structure and well-regulated architectural pattern. The structure of the novel is based on conventional pattern and implies the
process and form of development of action and character. The sequence of events, the narrative and episodic arrangement in the novel are superb and are placed in a chronological sequence of time. Singh has imparted symbolic significance to the four parts of this novel

The fictional form of Khushwant's novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* comes out of its basic structure of social and political narrative of various incidents. The novel is essentially a social and human document. The novel contains the story of two families, one Sikh family another Hindu family, set during the period of decaying power of the British rule in the Punjab province, from 1942 to April, 1943 about five years before the declaration of Indian independence. It is of course, a political novel, containing social situations in its backdrop and presenting the political perturbances of 1942 or the ‘Quit India Movement’ launched by Mahatman Gandhi on August 9, 1942.

Although political situations are dominant in the novel, *I shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, there is a little of ideological contents also. The novel reveal extraordinary acumen in grappling with the realities of life and can, therefore, be recited as true creation of the realities of life. The novel has a limited range and a restricted canvas. It does not transcend the obvious limits of a social cum political narrative fiction of contemporary interests, though it has an element of intensity and fullness of passion.

The presentation of wide and extensive socio-political situations is the essence of the novel's narrative design. Although it is basically a story of two families, yet goes far beyond the limits of the family tale in the course of presenting the phases and changes in the social and political atmospheres of that period and their motivations. The narrative design of the novel, thus, has a historical and contemporary events rooted deep in the characters and the situations.
The theme and substance of the novel, however, is dominated with dialogue and disruptions of individual, social and political situations, and the implication arising out of the differences between them as well as the interaction of characters. The tension arises out of the differences between the novelist's desire to make a poetic communication about life and his real performance in depicting the bare physical reality of India. The symbol, theme, political ideal and realistic treatment are befitting to social and political situations presented in the novel. The form and structure of the novel are conventional and traditional. It follows the pattern of 19th century narrative fiction. Its ways of presentation, plot construction, character portraiture, nature’s description, setting, situation, climax and sequence of events are similar to that of 19th century English novels. Hence some critics categorized this novel as Singh’s finest novel.

A lingering sadness envelops the end of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* which is not merely the result of the death of the good woman, Sabhrai. It is the novelist’s strident awareness of a world passing, a set of values getting eroded and a "brave new world" (with a new connotation of 'brave') emerging in which people like Sabhrai and all that they uphold in the midst of trying and unnerving situations will become either strangers, out of place or extinct. Her death is marked by as much dignity as was her life; and her life was the embodiment of life-sustaining virtues. The title of the novel clearly suggests the brooding, sombre vision of the author and can be interpreted in two ways: i) as Sabhrai’s lament that she will not be able to witness the Independence of the country, and ii) as the death of beauty and goodness of the nightingale-symbolized by Sabhrai.

Thus, the deceptively structured surface of the book contains underneath a message, or a lament far more profound and shocking that can be discerned by a rapid, superficial reading of the novel.

The narrative of *Delhi* is first person. A city that has witnessed at least seven rounds of complete destruction and reconstruction, Delhi, the capital of
India, is a city of culture and calamity, of conceit and capability, of poets and pests, of politicians and saints. To capture the manifest and unmanifest faces of Delhi requires a canvas that delights and nauseates in equal measure. Khushwant Singh knew of this aspect of his beloved city, when he created a bawdy, old, reprobate protagonist, in love with a hijra (eunuch) whore, as the person seeking to describe his love-hate relationship with that whore and this city. While the principal narrator busies himself with unusual sexual acts with his half-man, half-woman partner Bhagmati, he also allows himself pleasures with foreign and native beauties, all leading him into another fold, another fleshy nook. This romance fades to backdrop as the narrator discovers the legends that lurk in various streets, forts, abandoned palaces, embankments, towers, temples, mosques, gurudwaras, memorials, burial grounds and coffee houses of the city. The greatest delight in the novel, lies in reading about Timur, Mir Taqi Mir, Nadir Shah, Hazrat Kaki, Nizamuddin, Bahadur Shah Zafar & Moghuls, Tuglaqs, Lodhis, First War of Indian Independence (The Sepoy Mutiny), emperors, temptresses, poets, saints, Sikhs who helped British win in 1857, bodies burning on banks of Yamuna, Englishmen, builders of New Delhi, Aurangzeb, neo-converts to Islam or Sikhism, Khusrau, assassins of Indira Gandhi and mobs who rioted after partition and after Indira Gandhi’s assassination and Mahatma Gandhi. The most captivating details of this novel tell us about these innumerable people who lend their blood, their faith, their best and worst aspirations and actions to provide that special character, mystery, mystique to Delhi. The novel is an ode by a Delhi’s son to his fascination with undying and relentless, razed and raging, crazed and craving, old and ageless, brutal and brave, buried and slaved, free and frayed, remorseless and mourning, Hindu, Islamic, Sikh and in equal measure sufi and atheist soul or spirit of Delhi. The narrative is at its best when Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah, Sikh fighter of 1857 war, Zafar, a refugee who wants to avenge deaths of his family members, or Mir Taqi Mir describes their lives and their times. These characters, chosen from several generations of possibilities, speak with honesty which is the characteristic of Khushwant’s narrative description.
While Ghalib is not mentioned outright as a narrator, his times are described quite well as he was contemporary of Zafar, and befittingly, the novel starts with an epigram from Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib: "I asked my soul: What is Delhi?/ She replied: The world is the body and Delhi its life." For anyone who has lived in India between 1970 and now, the name Khushwant Singh brings memories of his Santa-Banta jokes and his weekly column that appears in most newspapers, with a caricature of him sitting in a light bulb. In those columns as well as here, Khushwant always succeeds in telling us a good story, occasionally writing lines that are exquisite, occasionally saying things that are offensive to many or just seem like an injustice to the caliber that this grand old man of letters definitely has.

To love and discover Delhi, one must learn to ignore its hostile, acerbic reception to guests and visitors, ignore its age, bitterness, immensity and obscenity. To read Khushwant Singh, one must learn to ignore the trivia and trivial, that comes packaged with the historical and memorable writing. The notoriety of the writer, in this case, must not stop us from savouring fantastic details about Mehrauli, Hauz Khas, Nizamuddin and Red Fort, among others. After reading Delhi, the researcher have become increasingly convinced that Mr. Singh is our man for the future: he will be seen as the painter whose canvas is populated with the bylanes and backdoors that whisper realistic details about people and times that most of his contemporary authors fail to touch or write about. He writes without bothering to explain things to non-Indians, so foreigners will need to work harder to read him, but since he writes about people, politics and religion, issues that are and will remain important to every inhabitant of Delhi, Punjab and India, his writings will redeem him in eyes of one and all.

Khushwant Singh's narrative is laced with details about history and monuments of Delhi that take the reader through the familiar names and lanes, providing meaning and mannerism to rocks, stones, bricks, and ghosts from a bygone era. The dead and alive live in harmony in this city, the palaces turn to wilderness and wilderness to townships in manner of few centuries. The dominant
Gods change, the language and the tongues change, the spices and kitchens invent new flavors and aromas, and all that appears or disappears, stays as a memory or as song, in dust or in verse, through arts and crafts that traveled out of that time and place.

The temples were destroyed to create mosques, mosques razed to create ruins, ruins restored into housing colonies, housing colonies for refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tibet, Pandits from Kashmir. Roads raised over remains of slums, slums planted over public gardens, parks overgrown over unclaimed or reclaimed lands. In such a city, Khushwant Singh's characters receive their share of history by breathing the air that stinks of history and rage, that seduces with mango flavors and rum punches. In this history, they seek their own woes and pleasures. A city revealed, is a personality understood: it is the relationship with Delhi that defines the character of a Delhiwallah, the protagonist of the novel, the writer as well as the reader who wanders through a fifteen hundred square kilometer landmass with a population density of ten thousand per square kilometer. Delhi’s air is packed with centuries of whispers; Khushwant packs many interesting ones into this novel.

Khushwant Singh believes that the most important thing in an individual’s life is sex. One should get unconditional sexual pleasures throughout one’s adulthood till he gradually loses libido due to old age. In old age one starts pondering over his/her past encounters (marital & extra-marital). He believes that if the sexual tension between a couple dies out and no chemistry between them prevails any longer, they should understand each other’s need to look for new partners and bring their relation to an end with a good will. This becomes necessary because if the main binding force of man-woman relationship dies out, i.e. sex, all kinds of ugly problems like nagging, bickering, quarrels, they start forfeiting to adultery, etc. spring up which leads to a sour divorce instead of a healthy separation. This explains his love for sexual narration in all works.
The framework of the novel *The Company of Women* is very fascinating. It opens with a third person narrative about Mohan Kumar entitled "The Secret Life of Mohan Kumar" The novel ends with a similar section called "The Last Days of Mohan Kumar." The bulk of the narrative is in first person, which gives it more immediacy. The entire second section called “The Memoirs of Mohan Kumar” is in first person. This entire section is a flashback of his youth, aspirations, relationships with his father, life of love and lust at Princeton University, homecoming, marriage, honeymoon, failed marriage and other love affairs.

Mohan Kumar, who completed his graduation from Princeton, America, returned to India after bedding uncountable number of girls there. Of all his relationships with girls, the ones he remembered were few. The first was with an African-American, Jessica Browne, at the hands of whom he was deflowered; Yasmeen Wanchoo, a plump and full-bosomed Pakistani politician. Mohan Kumar became popular among girls. When he returned to India, he married Sonu, a millionaire’s daughter. He impregnated her on their honeymoon. Sonu was spoilt child of her wealthy parents. She had a habit of bickering, nagging and harassing Mohan Kumar resented all this but was not able to do much about sexless flat life unless he asked for a divorce after twelve years.

Mohan Kumar was left forsaken with all his youthfulness, wealth, and peerless sexual prowess. He decided not to grow old like that and waste his prowess. He paid for an advertisement for a concubine partner in the newspapers. In the meantime he was served by his sweeper woman, Dhanno, who was dark but full bosomed and proficiently pleased him. Some critics accused Singh for such narrative that enchants foreign readers easily.

The first reasonable reply to his audacious advertisement was from a professor, Sarojini Bharadwaj. She was diminutive, petite, bespectacled but reasonably beddable to Mohan Kumar. Sarojini lived with him and everyone was told that she is a cousin who has been transferred to Delhi. This clandestine affair had to be cut short due to social prejudice. Hence they parted to never meet again.
The second response to his advertisement was from Molly Gomes, a Christian masseuse in Goa. She was short, stocky, dark and cheerful. She gave Mohan Kumar the best time and best sex he could ever get in his life. Since she was a professional masseuse, she knew the pressure points and all the tricks. Even though they liked each other a lot but the word love never occurred between their conversations. She left after spending two months of quality time with Mohan Kumar and never called back.

Mohan Kumar was again left alone when he found Susanthika Goonatilleke (Sue) at one of Delhi’s high class parties. Sue was a young, darkish, slightly built, unmarried, Sri Lankan second secretary in High Commission. Sue was interested to accompany Mohan Kumar to his visit to Haridwar to watch the majestic Ganga worship at Har Ki Pauri. The narratives of the saints waving their huge lighted candelabras during sunset, in the honor of Mother Ganga are quite interesting. Then they float oil lamps which filled the entire stream, bobbing up and down. The sunset, movements of the candelabras, clanging of the temple bells and quivering myriad of floating oil lamps is described to be the most resplendent scene in the world. Mohan Kumar bedded Sue in Haridwar and this led to a two year long relation of sheer love-making between them. At the end of the second year, Sue was transferred to New York High Commission.

Although Mohan Kumar was in his late forties, he started losing his potency and found he could no longer get his member to get upright. This made him feel very sad. He overcame this agony in Mumbai where he hired a prostitute and had sex with her. He was relieved to find out that he still retained his manly powers which fueled his desire to live.

All this came to an unexpected end when he found out that he has AIDS. He sank into deep sorrow. He incriminated his lecherous behavior for all the shame agony, and his life. But soon realized that it was because of his libido he was able to relish all the good times he had in his life, without which life will lose
all its meaning. He felt gratified by all he had got from life in the form all the women he had bedded. He thanked god and left for his heavenly abode peacefully. Thus, Khushwant Singh’s narrative focuses on the urban, modernized, westernized men and women. The protagonist of the novel Mohan Kumar inhabits such a society. Khushwant Singh presents human relationships in unusual and original style. The novel 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. There is poetic justice in Kumar’s having AIDS.

Khushwant Singh presents himself as a character in his novels. Now what does Khushwant Singh achieve by this device of making himself a character in his own novel? One major objective, which it achieves, is shifts in narrative voice. Another objective that the author achieves by this device is distancing. This bifurcation of the narrative prevents readers from thinking this novel as autobiographical or mere senile fantasies. It justifies what Khushwant Singh admitted in an interview with The Hindu that the idea for the book emerged when he heard of a man who indulged in various liaisons after a broken marriage.

The homecoming, the arranged marriage with Sonu and the subsequent honeymoon are discussed in first person in the second section. In these chapters, Khushwant Singh is at his satirical best. The over-protectiveness of Mohan Kumar's father, the lack of finesse in the marriage advertisement, the girls of marriageable age on display and crass vulgarity of the nouveau-rich are all scathingly exposed. The protagonist Mohan is quite scathing about opulence of his future in-laws. "They had everything I disliked about upstart Punjabi families. Pots of money but no class. I had seen enough evidence of that in their sitting room. Black marble, white marble walls, chandeliers more appropriate in the lobby of a hotel than a private home. A society that believes largely in externals and glamour is shown. Mohan's AIDS can be regarded as redeeming feature of this novel.

In short, Khushwant Singh depiction of history in his novels is realistic and his narratives are deceptively simple to convey serious issues. His novels
widen one’s awareness, all at the same time. Through his writings, Singh has tried to fulfill his duty as a writer. He has pointed out the drawbacks that plague India, which hold her back from moving ahead on the path of progress. He does this with his artistic simple narrative style.

This critical study of Khushwant Singh’s novels may aptly be concluded with researcher’s belief that Singh’s fiction lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar. Moreover, poets as well as novelists are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. The researcher’s critical study of Khushwant Singh’s novels has been a highly fascinating endeavour resulted in making “not a good man to know” really “an endearing man to know”.

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