Chapter IV

Delhi: A Novel
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It is said that the strategies of contemporary fiction have been struggling to escape the grips of external reality. One of the most provocative themes was that of the relation between the followers of different religions, many of whom forgot the quintessential teaching of their faiths and indulged in violence of all kinds to which even the partition provided no permanent solution.

Delhi, Khushwant Singh’s fourth novel, is totally based on the religious and political aspects that monopolised India for the past six centuries. In his down-to-earth attitude he reconstructs the history of Delhi, and in a way, the whole India as the fate of Delhi has always affected and moulded the destiny of the entire country. This is not a historical novel in the ordinary sense. In Delhi, the novelist lets the history of Delhi ‘relive’ and ‘speak’ for itself. This ‘reliving’ of past at times, borders upon fact and fiction combined as the novelist does not mean to maintain fidelity to facts only. The aspect of romanticization of the past is admitted by the novelist himself. In his ‘Note from the Author’ the author says, ‘History provided me with the skeleton. I covered it with flesh and injected blood and a lot of seminal fluid into it.’ This novel, Delhi can be said to be a corollary to Singh’s earlier history novels: Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale. He uses historical events and documentary evidence for his framework to unearth the sub-text and the hidden portions of history. In his attempt to conjure history he has assimilated other stories – other than history: fictitious, incredible, even private gaudy tales which put the official records in question. One may see Delhi as Singh’s revision of history that subvert the officious view and offer an assessment of the conventional historiography that is often authoritarian, monologic and prescriptive.
The point of discussion in this chapter is the basic assumption that a fiction of history is at once realistic and interpretative, of which Singh has made a satire. It is in addition, evaluative of the segment of historical reality as projected by the novelist whose techniques of writing fiction enable him to discover his or vision or world-view. As a product of history, the novel shares with it a formal concern for the authenticity of facts without compromising on its own autonomy. What seems to matter in this context is not a mere factual accuracy of details but the inclusiveness and moral significance. As T.S. Eliot aptly puts it in his essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talents’, “the historical sense involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past but of its presence”. It follows then that a historical novelist writes his fiction not in an antiquarian spirit but with a view to interpreting the interfaces of the present. On recreating and illuminating the events of the past, a novelist takes recourse to, what Bernard Bergonzi calls, “conscious realism” in demonstrating the function of history in fiction. In an influential essay, Henry James justifies the existence of the form of the novel in terms of its representational quality and establishes parallels between the picture and reality and novel and history. He declares: “The subject matter of fiction is stored up likewise in documents and records, and if it will not give itself away, it must speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian”. (The Art of Fiction)

Khushwant Singh’s Delhi published in the year 1990 is a remarkable work of history, romance and sex. The novel records the major historical events that have endowed Delhi with a glorious past, a mystic and an aura in the annals of history over a period of six hundred years. The chapters of the novel contain the vibrant picturization of history dating from the Mughal period (1265) of Zahiriddin Babar till the assassination of
Indira Gandhi. The novel sometimes appears to be a fine travelogue when Khushwant Singh presents impressive pen pictures of roads, lanes and historical places of Delhi in its real names, forms and features. The historical features narrated in the different chapters of the novel are seen harmoniously wrapped up with sex and romance.

Any discourse of Delhi must involve the narrative mode that builds up the assumptions, cultural moorings, sexual taboos and fetishes. The novel embraces a large number of autonomous, dissonant voices unintruded by the anonymous narrator, a Sikh. Travelling in time, space and history he discovers his beloved city Delhi: her invasions and possessions are revealed through a network of intricate metaphors apparent in Mirza Ghalib’s couplet, “I asked my soul: what is Delhi? She replied: The world is the body and Delhi its life.” (Delhi)

In Delhi, the novelist is not merely interested in re-enacting the past of Delhi. By way of reconstructing the history of Delhi, he intends to throw light on the higher reality – the cyclic phenomenon of birth-growth-decay that governs the lives of the City and Man. Further, the novel in a way endorses the fatalistic aspect that lies behind the man-inflicted havoc caused against another man and that there is a greater and omnipotent force, Time.

In his foreword to the paperback edition of the novel Khushwant Singh says: “All I wanted to do was tell my readers what I learnt about the city … my aim was to get them to know Delhi and love it as much as I do.” While narrating the saga of Delhi, and its people and rulers, Khushwant Singh in his typical realistic style, unveils all the gory incidents that have made up the story of Delhi. Perhaps there is so much horror and agony in the life of Delhi, and for that matter the situation may be the same in the case of
any city. The novelist does not hesitate to speak of ‘reality’ in all its details: “The essence of Khushwant Singh’s art of fiction is his innate capacity to capture reality in all its magnificence and horror.” (Shahane, Realism, 354) As in *Train to Pakistan*, here also Khushwant Singh, in spite of his acknowledging the near-all-pervasive inhumanity of the humanity, does not fail to notice the brighter side of the humanity. He rightly highlights the contribution of gracious people in strengthening and vitalizing the life of Delhi.

Despite the high seriousness of the theme of the novel, Singh deals with it in his typical comic and ironic vein. In fact, the Bhagmati episode which is present in every alternating chapter puzzles the reader. Perhaps the novelist attempts to tone down the seriousness of the theme by creating highly hilarious situations involving himself and Bhagmati, a hermaphrodite.

However, the Bhagmati episode is in accordance with the novelist’s established comically narrative mode. In his fictional world “the comic inextricably linked with social and moral criticism and also with the free play of mind in a spirit of detachment.” (Shahane, Realism, 344-345) Further, comedy is connected with laughter, since it serves as a corrective and arises from fragments of action and utterance.

While unfolding the saga of Delhi, the novelist tries to view every historical situation and the personages in a detached manner. The historical figures turn into three-dimensional and speak for themselves. The novelist tries to grasp the innate feelings and the essential strengths and weakness of the rulers who have moulded the destiny of Delhi, and of India. This stance is possible for Khushwant Singh as he sees himself essentially as agnostic: “Being an agnostic without any prejudices, I may have become the loudest voice against religious fundamentalism and stupid beliefs in miracles, astrology, and that of hocus-focus.” (Atma Ram, 02)
Bhagmati symbolizes Delhi and that the narrator is in love with her is made clear in the very first sentence by the writer: “I return to Delhi as I return to my mistress Bhagmati when I have had my fill of whoring in foreign lands.” (Delhi, 365) Bhagmati is a eunuch. Delhi has been widely reviewed along the conventional lines of fictionalized history. The veracity of the major historical personae and events interwoven with Singh’s imagination that runs wild at times into the narrative structure is larded heavily with sex and violence. But why does the writer make Bhagmati, a character who plays a central role and functions as a fictional parallel to the subject of the book, a eunuch? Khushwant Singh gives the reason in an interview for making a *hijra* the symbol for Delhi. “The *hijra* stands for a symbol of sterility. It can never conceive and I thought this was a wonderful symbol for a city in which so much has happened like a sexual intercourse that repeats itself. With Delhi all that has happened to it in the way of violence, in the way of change of dynasties, it has still not produced anything as great as one would have expected of it.” (Interview, 02) It is beyond understanding how violence committed on a city and the change of dynasties should make it produce something great. Secondly, the problem arises when Delhi is identified with Bhagmati in all aspects. While Delhi, as Singh states, was raped repeatedly, Bhagmati, on the other hand, seeks pleasure with or without money. Her stormy sexual escapades with the narrator indicate the satisfying sexual orgasms she derives from cohabiting with the narrator. Not only that, she develops an intimate and lasting emotional, sexual relationship with him. These differences become stumbling blocks while considering the structural unity of the novel. However, these anomalies can be accounted for, when viewed from a different angle.
It is this androgynous being, Bhagmati, who thinks of and feels for the narrator, when he is in danger during the fierce riots raging in the city in 1984. No male or female comes to his rescue, but ironically it is a transgender who is anxious to save him. Bhagmati comes to the narrator's house and insists on taking him along to a safe haven, Lal Kuan, the hijra's head-quarters.

Even in Khuswant Singh's other two celebrated novels, Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, the posit counterbalancing forces to urge for violence which overtakes people every now and then is presented. The lout, Jugga in Train to Pakistan is made to perform the noblest act of self-sacrifice for the sake of love. Sabhrai, the proto-typical mother-figure in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, who plays a pivotal role in the novel, becomes the condensed symbol of love and compassion. Khushwant Singh prizes humaneness, tolerance, compassion and fellow-feeling, and is against bigotry of all types, and more so against violence that follows in the wake of bigotry. All these values are invested in the persona of Bhagmati in the novel Delhi. In a fictional cosmos marked by disharmony, discord, violence and mayhem, the writer, through Bhagmati, communicates the message of harmony, peace, and love for humanity.

Though the novel seems to be a product blended with history and the author's personal life, it is really a satire on the follies and foibles of human society. "It may read like a ... Man's Guide to Delhi: Past and Present but that is not I mean it to be." (366) Right from the beginning to the end one can find a vein of satire running throughout the novel. The novel begins thus:

I return to Delhi as I return to my mistress Bhagmati when I have had my fill of whoring in foreign lands. Delhi and Bhagmati have a lot in
common. Having been long misused by rough people they have learnt to conceal their seductive charms under a mask of repulsive ugliness. It is only to their lovers, among whom I count myself, that they reveal their true selves. (365)

The very beginning throws light on the nature of the people living in Delhi. "The citizens of Delhi do little to endear themselves to anyone. They spit phlegm and bloody betel-juice everywhere; they urinate and defecate whenever and . . . urge overtakes them; they are loud-mouthed, express familiarity with incestuous abuse and scratch their privates while they talk." (365)

It is certain that Khushwant Singh has a special liking towards Delhi. His contempt is not for the place but its people. "I make Delhi and Bhagmati sound very mysterious. The truth is that I am somewhat confused in my thoughts. What I am trying to say is that although I detest living in Delhi and am ashamed of my liaison with Bhagmati, I cannot keep away from either for too long." (366) The writer is so much attracted towards Delhi that he neither wants to be there nor get away from the place.

Khushwant Singh's satire is mostly gentle but strong in expression. He is not afraid of telling what others might hesitate to express. For instance, he expresses the much familiar idea of Indian punctuality by commenting on the schedule of Air-India planes which were often behind schedule.

Singh attacks the customs department where officials always force passengers to part with goods purchased abroad. He spares neither the pompous politician nor the common porter. The taxi driver charges double, when he takes the narrator in his cab another day. When he goes to his house there is no electricity, no water and when he
wanted to complain to the caretaker he finds two girls chatting in the late hours. At last after several attempts he gets the line. The man at the other end tells him to dial Assistance and there he is again said that ‘Number out of order please, dial complaints’ (370) The narrator gives up in disgust says, “I will write letters to the papers about delays at the airport, the manners of customs inspectors, cheating by cab-drivers, the inefficiency of the electricity company, Delhi telephones, Delhi water supply ....” (370)

The next morning he goes out in his car to have a look at the city and finds:


This throws light on the tendency of the Indian public to call for a strike on the most flimsy grounds.

The sarcasm filters out when newspapers flash out such items:

Minister of Cabinet (name to be disclosed next week) has impregnated his daughter-in-law. . . . ‘Confession of Connaught Circus Girl.’ Poor things complain of misuse by the Indian staff on an African embassy. . . . A college lad writes a letter complaining that his step-mother raped him while his father was out on tour. . . . He promises to give advice on how to deal with such women in the next issue. (373)

Singh visits the Nighambodh electric crematorium and finds the parents of a young dead girl crying bitterly. With a heavy heart he returns to his house not able to
forget the crying voice of the dead girl's parents and philosophizes, "That's Delhi. When life gets too much for you all you need to do is to spend an hour at Nigambodh Ghat, watch the dead being put to the flames and hear their kin wail for them. Then come home and down a couple of pegs of whisky. In Delhi, death and drink make life worth living." (376)

The next episode entitled *Lady JHT* (Hoity-Toity), describes a famous woman archeologist and a cousin of the queen who had come with the narrator in last mornings flight. This section of the novel takes the reader into details of visits made by the narrator with the lady to different places like Tilpat, Suraj Kund, etc.

Though a brief chapter, Singh takes the advantage by exposing the nature and attitude of both the Indians and the foreigners. Maybe the author's personal experience with the Englishmen and women at England had made him depict a character like Hoity-Toity. Even in the novel *The Company of Women*, Mohan Kumar's relationship crashes when he sees Jessica Browne going with another boy. It is an undeniable fact that the English always look down upon the Indians. But the Indians always keep the British in high esteem and serve them whenever chance permits.

The narrator is asked by the Secretary, Ministry of Education, to take the lady to various places to help her in her archeological study. Like any other Indians he too is ecstatic as he thinks: "I could take her to Moti Mahal on Qawwal Nite. People would ogle, whisper, envy. And to my friends: 'Jane said to me ...' 'who is this Jane yaar ...?' 'You don't know Lady Jane Hoity-Toity ...? Cousin of the Queen ... renowned archeologist!!' Well, we were ... we became close friends ... ." (377-378) In *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* Buta Singh has the same notion.
To Hoity-Toity, the narrator is but a guide and she snubs him whenever possible. It is only later that she comes closer to him. She makes him prepare drinks for her and sometimes even asks him to handover her dress lying on the table. This sort of servility is exposed in Singh’s other novels like, Burial at Sea where Mattoo works for the foreign governess, and in I Shall not Hear the Nightingale Buta Singh humours the Taylors.

On the way to Tilpat the narrator finds Hoity wearing a bracelet with gold coins hanging from it. “They bear masculine names: Jim, Freddy, Dennis, Jacques. ‘Boy-friends,’ she explains. . . . ‘Rich and of all nationalities,’ I remark, holding the gold coin inscribed ‘Ali’. She laughs again. ‘Not all rich; I had some made at my own expense. And not of all nations. India is missing. Perhaps I’ll add an Indian this time,’ . . . giving me a meaningful leer.” (384)

Here Singh scorns the amoral nature of the Americans who just freak out with any number of men they like. Though it is a usual practice in their country, it is something that the Indians consider wrong. The episode ends with an unfulfilling desire to have sex with the lady with whom the protagonist has created a relationship.

In the episode entitled ‘Bhagmati’, Khushwant Singh describes how Bhagmati, a hijra had entered into the life of the narrator. Had it not for the eunuch, the novel would have been a failure. Through these episodes Singh satirizes many of the factual incidents and happenings in the country.

The episode entitled Mussadi Lal, deals with the atrocities of the various Mussalman rulers, their exploitation, religious bigotry, superstitious beliefs, etc. Mussadi Lal Kayasth is the son of Lala Chagan Lal, Hindu Kayastha of Mehrauli in the city of Delhi. He was born in the year 1265, in the beginning of the reign of Sultan Ghiasuddin Balban.
The underlying motive behind this episode was to satirize and bring out the facts about rulers who being religious fanatics destroyed the Hindu and Jain temples in the city. Singh in this episode highlights the various social evils of those days like – early marriages, racial discrimination, the atrocities of the various Muslim rulers, superstitions, religious bigotry, etc.

Mussadi Lal was the only child of his parents. He married a girl in Mathura at the age of nine when his wife, Ram Dulari was only seven. Later his father and mother pass away leaving Mussadi alone at the age of thirteen. Mussadi is sent to Madrasa to learn Arabic. At Madrasa the Maulvi Sahib gives Mussadi a Muslim name, Abdul in order to save him from being bullied by other Turkish and Hindu convert Islam boys. They called him Abdullah but he is not a convert. Many of the Muslim boys try to convert him to a Muslim telling that his prospects would be brighter and that he could marry as many women as he liked. "My Muslim friends suggested. . . . I could even aspire to become Kotwal of Mehrauli. . . . If I was lucky I might even get a widow or a divorce of pure Turkish, Persian or Afgan stock. 'If you are Muslim,'. . . . If you are up to it, you can have four at a time." (414) In spite of these compulsions, Mussadi doesn’t get converted. Ram Dulari’s parents refuse to send their daughter to lead a conjugal life because there had been a rumour that his parents had adopted the ways of the Mussalmans.

One could very easily trace the essence of racial discrimination that prevailed in those days. The Hindus and the Muslims considered each others inferior. Mussadi says, "If I became a Muslim, they would say, 'Didn’t we tell you? How could we give our daughter to an unclean maleech?'" (415)
It is only after knowing that Mussadi had not converted himself to Islam the uncle of Ram Dulari brings her to live with Mussadi Lal. Khushwant Singh very vividly brings out the prejudice that existed between the Hindus and the Muslims. Singh strongly condemns the religious bigots as he himself had been a witness to the harrowing incidents during partition.

Once he takes Dulari to see the Qutub Minar. They go towards the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque. He explains, “how the Turks had demolished twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples and buried the idols of Vishnu and Lakshmi beneath the entrance gate so that Muslims going to pray could trample on them. She refused to enter the mosque. As we were retracing our steps, she noticed the figures of Hindu Gods and goddesses on the pillars of what had been once been a Hindu temple had been mutilated: noses sliced off, arms broken, breasts chopped off. She put her head against a pillar and began to cry.” (416) Singh here comments on the religious fanatics who like fools had destroyed the idols which had to be admired as a work of art.

Though a rationalist, Singh was also an atheist. Through Mussadi he says:

The Hindus hatred of the Mussalmans did not make sense to me. The Muslims had conquered Hindustan. Why hadn’t our gods saved us from them? . . .

He had destroyed the temple of Chakraswamy at Thanesar and nothing happened to him. They said that the sea prostrated itself twice every twenty-four hours to touch the feet of Somnath. But even the sea did not rise to save Somnathji from Mahmud. (416-417)

Again as a humanist Singh was against war of any kind be it, racial or religious.

Mussadi Lal realizes that he belonged neither to Hindus nor to the Mussalmans. He is put in a critical situation. The Hindus “would look contemptuously at me and call
me a pimp of the Mussalmans.” (417) And he also says, “I was disowned by the Hindus and shunned by my own wife. I was exploited by the Muslims who disdained my company. Indeed I was like a *hijda* who was neither one thing nor another but could be misused by everyone.” (418) It is very obvious that Khushwant Singh in this regard draws out the hypocrisy of man. People like Mussadi live a life for others and not for themselves.

It is true that the enemy of man is man only. It is not only that the Muslims fight with the others but also fight within themselves. It is still surprising that even the learned people act like illiterates. They are more concerned with the religious aspects than humanism. Singh strongly condemns this aspect of men. Here the author delivers his ideas through Nizamuddin.

It was only after being put in such a situation that Mussadi Lal comes to know about Nizamuddin, the dervish of Ghiaspur. People called him auliya (Prophet) and also as Khwaja Sahib. Nizamuddin who is more concerned with love and humanity is opposed by many of the learned Mussalmans. They call him an imposter. Singh here brings out the fact that ‘Good people invite more enemies’. Once, the dervish is summoned by the Sultan to answer charges of heresy leveled against him. The ones who went against him were the ulemas. In his defense the dervish says:

O! mighty Sultan, it is true that I do not make any distinction between Mussalmans and Hindus as I consider both to be the children of God. . . . I interpret the sacred law differently. I believe that the best way to serve God is through love of his creatures. . . . The ulema know not that Allah cannot be understood through knowledge of books or through logic. (418-419)
The Sultan listens to both and is finally convinced by the humanistic attitude of Nizamuddin and dismisses the charges leveled against the dervish.

All the words uttered by the dervish to the Sultan are views of Khushwant Singh who emphasizes the fact that to serve humanity is to serve God. Through the ulema’s Singh satirically brings out the fact that there are people who like the ulema leader who depend on and blindly follow the religious books and fight in the name of religion.

One day Mussadi goes to Ghiaspur to meet the Khwaja Sahib. The Sahib looks at Mussadi Lal calls him by his name – Abdullah and says, “you live near the mausoleum of Hazrat Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. Go there every morning and recite the ninety-nine names of Allah. Your wishes will be granted.” (421) Next time by the request of Ram Dulari, he takes her to meet the Khwaja Sahib. The Sahib blesses her thus: “Child, Allah will fulfil your heart’s desire. If He wills your womb will bear fruit. Go in peace.” (422) While both Mussadi and Dulari return to their home there is a tremendous change in the behavior of Dulari. As a result, they spend their life happily as husband and wife. She develops the attitude of accepting both the religion and by the end of the year Ram Dulari gives birth to a male child. They name him as Kamal – it could either be a Hindu or a Muslim name. Next time they take the child to get the blessings of the Khwaja Sahib.

Singh exposes the difference between the true and the false spiritualists. Here the Khwaja Sahib represents the true ones who dedicated their lives for the world and its men. There are also false godmen who pretend as if they detest worldly life but behind the screen prove wicked. Singh also exposes the spiritualists in disguise who work to earn full benefits for themselves.
In the absence of the Khwaja Sahib a new dervish named Siddi Maula enters the scene. He is notorious by character. “He ran a langar in which confections, the like of which were only cooked in the royal kitchen, were served to the rich and the powerful. The Siddi also had an army of followers to sing his praises. They said Siddi Maula did not care a cowrie shell for worldly wealth or power and had even turned down the post of chief qazi. They said that the daughters of noble houses were eager to marry him but he would not have any of them.” (425-426)

As the Khwaja Sahib goes away to Punjab Sultan Ghiasuddin Balban’s eldest son, Prince Mohammed was killed when fighting the Mongols. The Sultan dies in grief. Here Khushwant Singh focuses on the beastly character of man who dies for power and wealth. “There were many claimants to the throne. They slew each other; I cannot even recall their names. Then Jalaluddin Firoze of the tribes of Khiljis, an old man with one foot in the grave, took his seat on the throne of Delhi. His sons could not wait for him to die.” (425)

Even the Siddi was known to be conspiring with one of the Sultan’s sons to overthrow the Sultan. As a result of this the Sultan outwitted the dervish (Siddi) and was crushed under the mighty foot of an elephant. The death of Siddi resulted in a period of crisis in Delhi. The city was full of starving beggars dying in the streets. Hindus prayed to their god. Muslims prayed to Allah. We prayed for the return of our Khwaja Sahib.” (428, 429) Their prayers were heard and Khwaja Sahib returns to Delhi. He gives an excellent sermon.

Here again Singh suggests ways to be humanistic and not to fight in the name of religion. Hence:

There is only one God though we call Him by different names. There are innumerable ways of approaching Him. Let everyone follow the way he
thinks best for him. His path may lead to the mosque or the tabernacle, to a temple full of idols or to a solitary cave in the wilderness. What path you take is not important; what is important is the manner in which you tread it. If you have no love in your heart then the best path will lead you into the maze of deception. (429)

Khushwant Singh not only satirizes the Hindu way of living but also the Muslims. After the death of Jalaluddin Firoze, Sultan Alauddin Khilji set about despoiling the Hindu kingdoms of the south.

Hindus like Mussadi were not able to live. He feels ashamed of his state – being neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. But this reminds him of Abdul Hassan, a poet, a double-faced man and a hypocrite. Hassan had made himself superior with the blessings of the Khwaja Sahib. “He was like an actor who takes off a mask which has moustaches painted insolently upwards and puts on another which has them hanging down in humility. The arrogant boaster suddenly turned into an ardent hem-kisser and tear-shedder.” (435) He is a boot-licker and an opportunist as well.

He had first been with Sultan Balban’s nephew, Malik Chajjoo. . . . Then he had joined the Sultan’s younger son and denounced Chajjoo. . . . When the ruler was a Muslim bigot, the same Khusrau proclaimed: Do not count Hindus among men for they venerate the cow, regard the crow superior to the parrot and read omens in the braying of an ass! (435)

Khushwant Singh is dead against such kind of double-faced men and often laughs at them.
Later many of the rulers like Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah, the Hindu Pawar Rajput otherwise called Sultan Nasiruddin Mohammed, Ghiasuddin Tuglak rule Delhi. They are all against Khwaja Sahib. Being against the Sahib is like being against God. All of them meet their end ceremoniously.

Mussadi ends the chapter saying that “No Sultan’s writ has ever extended to the sacred precincts of the mausoleum of Hazrat Khwaja Nizamuddin.” (446)

The episode entitled Bhagmati is a short one in which Khushwant Singh mocks at the insincerity of those who instead of serving the people while away the time in their personal affairs. The doctor who shouts at the narrator later apologizes when the narrator starts speaking in English. He says that English works very easily with the Indians. Once while the narrator is sitting on the floor of a colonnaded verandah at Haaz Khas a stone narrowly misses his head. He sees a pack of urchins throwing stones at a beehive. The maddened bees sting the narrator who rushes to the hospital for treatment. He describes thus the incident that takes place in the hospital:

I am more ‘emergency’ than most of them. Bee-stings on the neck and the ears can be fatal unless attended to at once…. He says ‘Excuse me,’ into the phone in English and snaps at me in Punjabi. ‘You are not dying! Take your turn.’ He apologizes to the phone and lists his favourite restaurants: Moti Mahal, Gaylord,… I’ll ring later. Ta-ta. Then he turns to me in a raging temper. ‘You beestingwalla, don’t you see I am busy? … English works like magic in independent India…. ‘Please forgive me for the delay. I am only an intern. (452-453)

Khushwant Singh in the episode entitled The Timurid, brings out the eccentric nature of some of the Muslim rulers. They come in telling the name of religion and later
empty Delhi of its wealth and put many of the natives to great suffering. This aspect has been dealt with in an elaborate manner. The Taimurs were of the opinion that the subjects of a country should always be in fear of the ruler. Singh not only expose their eccentric zeal for Islam but also on their greed. "The minds of Turks are as narrow as their eyes. In order to gain their support and to tie up their tongues, it is necessary not only to excite their Zeal for Islam but also their greed for gold." (457) The Taimurs agrees to share all that they get during the expedition to Delhi. Being moved by the words of the Taimurs the Kuriltay (a sect of people) drew their swords to follow the Taimurs to victory.

Here Khushwant Singh makes it very clear that the lust for power and wealth is predominant in both the King and the pauper.

After the death of Sultan Feroze Tughlak, his sons and grandsons followed each other in quick successions and it was now Mahmud who sat on the throne. Though he didn’t rule Hindustan, the two upstarts: Sarang Khan had Multan under him and his brother Mallu Khan Iqbal over the parts of Sutoon. Prince Mohammed Jahangir crossed the river Indus and besieged Sarang Khan in Multan.

The Taimurs marched towards Delhi and the citizens of Firozabad did not put up any resistance. Instead many Mussalmans came to offer them their services. The nobles warned the Taimurs that the infidels might use the opportunity to rise against them when they are engaged in battle against the Tuglaks. Singh here ridicules the unity among the Indians. They were ready to support their enemy but not ready to be with their fellowmen. The disloyal nature of men is clearly exposed through this episode.

As a humanist Khushwant Singh mocks at the strange attitude of the Muslims who plead to not shed the blood of Muslims, which obviously implies that the others can
be killed. Even the inhumanistic attitude of the rulers is brought out. When the men of Hindustan began to make excuses for their failure to pay the indemnity that the Taimurs had imposed on them and tried to escape with their properties, the Taimurs, “ordered out troops to enter these towns and extend the hand of rapine, to slay every able-bodied man and take his women and children as slaves. . . . There was no count on the numbers killed: 50,000 others 5,00,000 nor was there any measure of the quantities of precious stones, gold and silver taken by our valiant soldiers. Even the humblest of our footmen took over two dozen slaves.” (460)

By indulging in such atrocities the Taimurs exploited Delhi. “We loaded innumerable elephants and camels with the wealth of Delhi and with thousands upon thousands of slaves.” (461) Apart from exploiting the place they also destroyed many temples of idolatry. “At one place the Brahmins warned us not to touch the image of their god, Krishna, who was said to be so powerful that he could in one night impregnate 166 women. . . .wailing priests we smashed the idol with our own hands and ordered the priest to be beheaded.” (461) After a month they were informed that after their “departure there was no one to bury the dead. The rotting corpses had spread pestilence and the few who had survived had succumbed to disease. For many months the towns of Delhi were deserted save for crows, kites and vultures by day and owls, jackals and hyenas by night.” (461) But all these did not move the stone-hearted rulers. They just had the feeling that they “had fulfilled our life’s mission.” (461) and asked Allah for forgiveness.

Such were the men at whom Singh laughs at and strongly condemns.

In another episode entitled Bhagmati, Singh comments on the sexual urge among the Indian women, who pose as if they are chaste. Singh also criticizes the readings of
Hindu facist propagandas and how easily the Indian women fall an easy prey to flattery. He also stresses the lack of knowledge on the history of India.

A lady named Kamala, a Mudaliar from Tamil Nadu meets the narrator and introduces herself as Kamala Gupta, wife of Brigadier Gupta who is posted at a non-family station and that she had three children in the boarding school in Mussorie and was staying in the army mess. She takes up to writing because as she confesses to the narrator: “I have nothing much to do. Can’t stand army wives. So I thought I’d write a book or something. Your programme on TV gave me an idea. Why not something on Delhi and its monuments?” (495)

When the narrator expresses his surprise: “Mother of three! You look young enough to be in college.” (495) She beams with pleasure. “Not as young as you think. I am over forty. Been married more than twenty years. People mistake my daughter to be my younger sister.” (495)

Whenever the narrator tries an attempt to come near her, she retorts. Once when he invites her to his apartment she declines the invitation. Neither does she confess of her being unhappy with the life that she was leading. Their intimacy develops when the narrator gives her a miniature of the Ganapathy idol. She is drawn to such an extent that she kisses on his lips.

She is equally careful in keeping herself away from the watchful eyes of others especially when she was in the company of the narrator. Even when she takes him to her quarters she is satisfied to learn that no one had seen him coming with her. “I can see she is relieved that no one has seen us as come in.” (499) Saying so she takes the narrator to the lustful world.
The chapter entitled *Aurangzeb Alamgir: Emperor of Hindustan* depicts the life of Aurangzeb, scrutinizing his character to the utmost extent and revealing his ambitious nature and his firm faith in Allah.

It is a bitter episode that brings to light the true nature of Aurangzeb. Envy, lust for power, betrayal, lack of humanism, price for relationship, melodramatic events, racial discrimination, sex, etc. are the issues that Singh has attempted to focus on. Aurangzeb though not intentionally, puts to death everyone those who stand as an obstacle on his way to attain the throne. But he says that all he did was for the betterment of the nation.

Shah Jahan and Mumtaj, Aurangzeb’s parents, bore fourteen children in happy conjugation. Out of the fourteen seven die and the remaining are: Jahanara Begum, Dara Shikoh, Shuja, Rosanara Begum, Aurangzeb, Murad and finally Gauhar Ara. As it often happens in families, Shah Jahan was closer to the two eldest – Jahanara and Dara who were close to each other. Roshanara was close with Aurangzeb and Gauhar Ara attaches herself to Murad.

Of all the seven Aurangzeb’s resolution and intelligence proved that he alone can shoulder the burden of ruling India but was weak. This was the thought of Shah Jahan when he became the Emperor of Hindustan.

Since Aurangzeb proved resolute and intelligent among his brothers, Shah Jahan appoints him as the governor of the Deccan. He marries a girl named Dilras Bano who dies soon. As a result of this his brother Dara becomes envious. Once when Aurangzeb goes to meet his aunt at Burhanpur he meets Hira Bai, his aunt’s slave. He falls madly in love with her and with the consent of Saif Khan, the governor of Burhanpur and the husband of his aunt Saliha Bano takes Hira Bai to his harem. His love for her is so intense
that he starts showing less interest in the welfare of his country. But this happiness too
doesn’t last long for she too dies. This irresponsible act of Aurangzeb is taken to his
father by Dara who further poisons Shah Jahan’s mind against Aurangzeb. Shah Jahan
relieves Aurangzeb of the governorship and the latter suspects Dara.

Singh exposes the lack of judgement in a person like Shah Jahan who listens and
trusts gossip mongers and soothsayers and takes action without giving a second thought.

In this episode too Singh brings in issues on religious bigotry that is present more
in the Muslims. Aurangzeb too, though kind and righteous behaved entirely in a different
manner when it came to religion. “He used to impress upon us that though Allah was
bountiful, it was the duty of those who received his bounty to extend the domain of
Islam.” (507)

Aurangzeb comes to know while on a visit to Delhi that the emperor had
recognized Dara as the future king of Hindustan. Dara clings to his father’s apron
at Delhi and Agra while Aurangzeb administered the Deccan and many other places.
On 6th September 1657 Shah Jahan falls ill. When Aurangzeb writes a letter praying for
speedy recovery, his father sends him a very curt note saying that rumour-mongers had
exaggerated a minor stomach upset.

The matter that caused much disturbance to Aurangzeb is that, if Dara became the
king there would not be the rule of Mussalmans and also “The viciousness of sibling
rivalry. We knew that kingship knows no kinship. . . . no sooner are they old enough to
know the world than they understand that they must destroy their siblings or be destroyed
themselves.” (509)
It is certain that Singh is laughing looking at the whimsical nature of the rulers. If the Mughal rulers had really wanted to save this world by having one religion by wiping out the infidels they could have done it by fighting only against the Hindus and other people. But every member of the royal lineage concentrated more on their power than religion or God. It was just to hide their sins that they use the name of God or Allah. "The same fate had befallen our father who had also to suffer his sons Dara Shikoh and ourselves being taken hostages. When allah bestowed the empire of Hindustan on our father, he was compelled to remove his own brothers Dawar Baksh and Shahryar along with their male progeny." (510)

Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb’s own father plans to kill him with the help of women in the harem as soon as he has stepped into the palace. Sensing this danger, Aurangzeb refuses to step in and cuts off the water channel that ran from the river to the fort. Shah Jahan pleads for sympathy and begs for a pitcher of water and ironically praises the Hindus. “Only yesterday I was master of nine lakh troops, and today I am in need of a pitcher of water! Praise be to the Hindus who offer water to their dead, while my devout Muslim son refuses water to the living.” (511)

This certainly reveals the inhmanistic attitude of the rulers who thirsted for power.

Later Aurangzeb arrests Murad by handcuffing him and gave generous libations of opium and wine as long as he lived. Then he kills both Dara and his son Sulaiman Shikoh. He also kills the Sarmad who prophesied that Dara would be the king.

Khushwant Singh satirically reminds that “Kingship means protection of the realm and guardianship of the people, not the enjoyment of bodily repose or lust of the flesh.” (514)
It was two years after the death of his father, Aurangzeb sat on the Peacock Throne. He then feels that he should complete the mission that Allah had charged him with. He orders his commanders to cover all the four directions of Hindustan to extend the domains of Islam to the furthermost corners. "We leveled temples of idolatry to dust and raised mosques on their ruins. We imposed the jazia tax on non-believers to induce them to tread the righteous path. In everything we did, our only guide was the holy law of the shariat." (515) Here is once again a satire on religious bigotry and lack of humanism. All entertainments like drinking, dancing, music, etc. were put an end to.

He waged ceaseless war against the infidels. It is here that Khushwant Singh exposes Aurangzeb is lust for power, greed for wealth and his double-facedness. In case of others, he does not believe in prophesies like the Samrad prophesizing Dara about ascending the throne. But, when it comes to his own issues he believes in all the supernatural prophesies.

Nearing his end Aurangzeb justifies his doings by telling that if it had been someone else in his place, he would have treated the state treasury as his personal property and wasted it in extravagant living. Aurangzeb sewed prayer caps and made copies of the holy Quran: whatever they got for them in the market they spent on their food and personal raiment. By AD 1706 he loses all his three sisters. Roshanara, the sister who was close to him starts showing indifference and had been indiscrect in her behavior. This makes it very clear that though she supported her brother in the beginning she now began to realize her mistake. Jahanara agrees to show her due affection only after he gives her 1,00,000 gold pieces and a fixed pension of 1,700,000 rupees and the title of Padshah Begum.
Aurangzeb’s health starts deteriorating. Only his daughter Zeenat-un-nissa and his ageing wife Udaipuri Begum look after his needs. The only thing that hurt him was the treacherous path taken by the progeny of his own loins for all were not as steady as him.

Till the end he punishes all who came against his ambition. But at last he finds himself fearing that he was taking leave without fulfilling his mission. To Azam he writes: “I came alone and go as a stranger. I do not know who I am, nor what I have been doing. . . . I have not been the guardian and protector of the empire. . . . I fear for my salvation, I fear my punishment. I believe in God’s bounty and mercy, but I am afraid because of what I have done . . . .” (518) To Kam Baksh he writes: “Soul of my soul . . . . I am going alone. I grieve for your helplessness; but what is the use? Every torment I have inflicted, every sin I have committed, every wrong I have done, I carry its consequences with me. Strange that I came into this world with nothing, and now I am going away with this stupendous caravan of sin! Wherever I look, I see only God . . . . I have sinned terribly and I donot know what punishment awaits me . . . .” (518)

In the end he gives away all of the treasure to the poor and orders that no mausoleum should be built for him. “And carry this creature of dust quickly to the first burial place and consign him to the earth without any useless coffin.” (519)

Khushwant Singh here has brought out the philosophy of life. The words spoken in the climax by Aurangzeb is the message that Singh wants to convey to the society.

In this episode entitled Nadir Shah, Khushwant Singh brings to light many of the facts Delhi had witnessed in its life and the attitude and achievements of Nadir Shah. It focuses on how many of the rulers had exploited the wealth of Delhi, the relationship
between the Islam and Hindu rulers, the types of rulers and how they enjoyed their life and treated their subjects, the greed and lust for power of the rulers, the inhumanistic attitude of the same, etc.

The belief in superstition and soothsayers continue when Nadir Shah, long before has a dream in which he is turned to be a fisherman and that in his net he finds a fish with four horns. When he consults a seer who could interpret dreams, the seer says that he (Nadir Shah) is destined by Allah to rule over the four domains. He was a ruler of Isphahan and had become the Padishah of Iran and at time had captured Afganistan and was aiming at Hindustan.

Nadir Shah receives an invitation from Delhi. But the invitation was not from Nasiruddin Mohammed Shah, but from two noblemen of his court – Asaf Jah Nizam – ul – Mulk, the governor of Deccan and Saadath Khan, the Governor of Avadh.

Here Khushwant Singh satirizes the treacherous nature of men at court who were ready to turn traitors. “And what could better describe men like Nizam – ul – Mulk and Saadath Khan who, while eating their master’s salt, were plotting for his downfall than the vile serpent which crawls on the ground but is ever ready to bite the man who stands above it.” (525)

Though the invitation creates suspicion in Nadir Shah, he along with his men proceed towards Delhi saying that it was purely out of the zeal for Islam and friendship of Nasiruddin that they were going to Delhi. He develops such an idea in his mind because, “It had come to our ears from other quarters. It had been reported to us that he was seldom without a mistress in one arm and a glass of wine in the hand of the other. He was known as ‘Rangeela’ the colourful monarch.” (526)
Nadir Shah with his troops captures Delhi. Mohammed Shah surrenders his sword and is ready to be under the custody of Nadir. They go around Delhi and find beautiful architectural buildings. "Next we passed a new built mosque. This, we were told, had been erected by Nawab Roshan – ud – Daula, the keeper of Mohammed Shah’s treasury. Although it was small, its marble and gold spoke eloquently of the wealth of the treasury keeper. (We later learnt that Roshan – ud – Daula was a notorious bribe-taker. As in Iran, so in Hindustan money-makers were also the builders of mosque)." (532) An excellent reception is given to Nadir Shah and presented with the most beautiful girl in Delhi. Khushwant Singh also satirizes the inability of the rulers to rule a country and indulge themselves in personal entertainments.

Meanwhile the natives of Delhi create a tumult against the soldiers of Nadir Shah. He says, "The people of Delhi are both ungrateful and cowardly. Instead of thanking us. . . They had the audacity to insinuate that it was not the love of Islam but the love of gold that had brought us to their country." (537) May be here Singh is satirizing the real nature of the people of Delhi. It seems like Singh is attacking the natives for their ungratfulness and cowardice.

The tumult further develops into a riot. "These thugs had surrounded a party of our musketeers and burnt them alive. We were told that a large number of our soldiers had been killed and an armed mob led by the villain Niaz Khan was heading towards the Red Fort to try and lay their impious hands upon our person." (538) Nadir Shah having reached Chandini Chowk says: "What we saw there brought tears to our eyes. Many of our faithful comrades lay dead about the streets. Their bodies had been horribly
mutilated. The double-faced wretches, who only two days earlier had welcomed us with flowers . . . yelled abuse at us.” (540) He orders: “As long as this sword is out of the scabbard the life of every citizen of this wretched city is forfeit. Spare no one.” (540)

Singh exposes the cruel nature of the Muslim rulers. “While passing the gateway of Dariba we ordered our men to level every home in that accursed street inhabited by the infidels. Our soldiers slew every man, woman and child in Dariba and then set fire to the bazaar.” (540) Not only this, Nadir Shah ordered his men to enter the house of the omarah and rich merchants and take everything they could find.

Those who remonstrated were brought before us. We had them flogged in front of their kinsmen. The floors of their homes were dug up and their women stripped naked. Many unable to face themselves after the chastisement they had received, ended their miserable existence with their own hands. Gold and silver and precious stones flowed into our treasury as the waters of the Oxus flow into the sea. We send the good news to Iran with the proclamation that no taxes would be levied on our Iranian subjects for the next three years. For rightly has Hazrat Ali Murtaza said: ‘The better part of generosity is speedy giving.’ (541)

It is only Noor Bai who makes Nadir Shah realize his mistakes. “Is it all the people you have had killed. That was not a good thing to do.” (542) She further promises to send for the Hakeem Alavi Khan of Ballimaran. She says, “He will apply leeches and remove the angry blood that courses through your Majesty’s frame.” (543) The next day the Hakeem comes and tells him to control his temper, lest the same temper would control him. His words were bitterer than his medicine. It was through him that Nadir
Shah comes to know about what havoc had taken place in the city. Nadir tries to justify his doings, but the hakeem exclaims, “Retaliate against women and children! Kill innocent people! Is that the kind of justice that prevails in your country?” (543)

Later Mohammed Shah whose skull was stuffed with cunningness instead of common sense asks Nadir Shah to link the two households by a marriage alliance thinking that he need not give the amount that was to be given to Nadir Shah for bringing his troops to Delhi. Hence Prince Nasrulla Mirza, the second son is married to the daughter of Yezdan Baksh, son of Kam Baksh, son of Emperor Aurangzeb. Nadir Shah plans a trick and takes away the Peacock throne and the Koh-i-Noor diamond from Mohammed Shah.

By the end of May 1739 Nadir Shah and his troops leave Delhi exploiting the wealth of India but leaving their heart with Noor Bai and the sharp-tongued Hakeem Alavi Khan.

In this episode entitled *Meer Taqi Meer* Singh deals with the life of a poet named Meer Taqi Meer. The poet who had come from a poor family attains fame and wealth due to his creative talent in poetry writing. He is being admired by many and by Nawab Rais Mian. He is invited by Begum Sahiba, the wife of Nawab Rais. She attracts him and leads him to the world of sex. As a result of which Meer Taqi falls madly in love with her which leads him to destruction.

Khushwant Singh in this episode focuses his attention on men who fall into the net of love spread by bogus women and also who cheat their husbands by pretending to be very chaste and humble, while they indulge in many illicit affairs. Singh also brings to light the atrocities of the rulers due to which thousands of innocent people suffered. He comments on men who forget their families and go behind lusty coquettes.
In the very initial stage Singh brings out the philosophy of life in a sarcastic manner, where Taqi, the poet confesses: “I do not know which I was more, a lover or a poet. Both love and poetry consumed me. . . . What neither love nor poetry brought me was money.” (549)

Being born as the eldest son of the second wife of Meer Mohammed Ali, Meer Taqi had to shoulder the responsibilities of the family after his father’s death. The father had nothing other than three hundred books and three hundred rupees as debt.

Meer Taqi, a poet who should have had in him a love for all the living creatures, but he acts contrarily. “As news of his death reached Agra, people began to collect at our hospice to pay their last homage to him. Among them were some Hindu shopkeepers who offered me money. I declined to take it from them but when one of my father’s Muslim disciples put a bag with five hundred rupees in my lap, I accepted it.” (551)

The author very clearly presents the religious bias present in the Muslims in the character of Taqi.

Taqi inspite of being good in French and Urdu and in the techniques of composing poetry was envious of Masood, who was equally good in writing poetry. Soon he earns fame and wealth. This fame draws him to a woman named Begum Sahiba who had already had an affair with Masood. Becoming very close to Taqi she confesses everything to him as a lover does, and thus wins him.

Taqi’s mother having had some knowledge of the earlier life of Sahiba and the illicit affair with the Parwana and having a son, tells Taqi to get married soon. As she takes the idea of her son’s marriage to Sahiba, the latter offers to look for a bride for her son Taqi at the earliest. She finds a girl from her distant relative named Saleema,
daughter of a man employed as a caretaker in one of the orchards of the Nawab. Knowing about Begum’s design, Taqi describes thus: “My wife was indeed no houri: she was as thin as bamboo rod; I could grasp her . . . . She had no choice except to be chaste as white marble; but her being my wife tempted me to take the path of infidelity.” (556)

She knows the art of seducing. And after having seduced she knew how to give a man of her choice the illusion that no one else in the world mattered to her. She willingly surrenders her soul as she surrendered her body. She soon became, “at once my mother, mistress, nurse and companion.” (556) She makes Taqi her children’s tutor. He being very young is let to move freely in the Zenana. She says: “You are only a little boy; you don’t even have hair on your upper lip.” (554) This becomes an additional advantage to both in their love making.

Khushwant Singh here criticizes the ones who initiate the young minds to sex. It is sure that these type of absurd activities took place earlier and is taking place even now.

When Sahiba comes to know that Taqi was a willing victim she turns to her husband and weaves a web so as to make her husband not suspect the connection between her and Taqi. “She then turned her wiles on her husband. She persuaded him that for his future he should visit Delhi and find out what truth there was in the rumours that the Persian Nadir Shah was planning to invade India. At the same time she asked him to persuade Nawab Samsamuddaulah, the royal paymaster, who was the most powerful man in Delhi, to present me to the emperor.” (557) As a result of this her husband not only agreed to her proposal but also compelled Taqi to stay in his haveli.

Through this Khushwant Singh highlights the bogus chastity and pretence of women like Sahiba. Singh not only laughs at the behavior of such women but also the
foolishness of men. Even Taqi, though a small boy, and is married with a responsibility to look after his family members indulges in illicit affairs with the Begum. He says, “Instead of feeling guilty of having betrayed her husband’s trust or of having been unfaithful to my wife, I felt that Allah had blessed this union of minds and bodies; it was not profane but divine love.” (558-559)

After a month the Nawab returns from Delhi. By then Taqi feels that the Nawab meant nothing to Sahiba and would send him away on some other mission. But things are presented differently. “I was taken aback by the show of affection she put up to welcome him and the formality with which she addressed me in his presence. . . . showed great eagerness to be left alone with him. . . . She followed her old man into their private apartment. I was left alone, holding my pen.” (560) Through this the author exposes the duplicity of women.

Neither Taqi nor Sahiba are faithful to their counterparts. When Taqi asked her timidly whether she extended her favour to her husband, she says, “I knew it upset you to see me so solicitous about the old man. But one has to keep up appearances with the world, doesn’t one? Were you unfaithful to me with your wife? I lied by putting the question back to her, You think that is possible?” (563)

It is when their affair becomes a scandal that the Nawab sends a letter to Sahiba stating that Taqi should go to Delhi where he has arranged for Taqi’s presentation at the exalted Fort Palace and a patron as well. Hence Taqi goes to Delhi and becomes famous.

The happy days of fame did not last long for it was informed that the Persian, Nadir Shah had occupied Afganistan and was proceeding towards Delhi. Apart from this threat, news starts disturbing Taqi’s mind. He comes to know from the men who came
from Agra that Sahiba Begum had now another man in his place and that he was like one of the members of their family. He tries to consider her dead. "But the more I tried to her from her mind, the more painfully she kept coming back to me. . . . And the betrayal by a woman whom my words had made divine and with whom I had exchanged my body and my soul soured me against humanity." (572)

In the spring of AD 1738 the Persians win the battle at Karnal and many lose their lives including Nawab Samsamuddualah who was the patron and protector of Taqi. Being not able to stay in Delhi he returns to his family in Agra with bare hands. The next day he visits Sahiba’s Zenana. "The scene was exactly as I had left it except that instead of me there was this other teacher teaching the boys with the Begum Sahiba sitting on her moorah watching them." (574) Not able to withstand the psychological tortures Taqi returns back to Delhi. He had become more or less insane. He says to himself: “Friend Meer, do everything your heart desires but never let it fall in love; love spares neither lover nor beloved.” (575) He finds no one to help him. At last he seeks the company of Sirajuddin Ali Khan ‘Aarzoo’ one of Delhi’s most celebrated poet. He helps Taqi in finding a patron. This brings him more popularity. This makes Aarzoo curious and he too begins to find ways to overthrow Taqi.

Rulers, in turn, made Delhi their headquarters and exploited the whole of it. "Delhi was never the same after the Iranians had slain its soul. King’s noblemen and their hirelings came like flocks of vultures to peck at its corpse." (579) Not a day passed without someone murdering someone else.

Taqi is still in search of noble patrons for his survival. He says, “In my constant search for patrons, I turned from the Muslim nawabs who no longer helped me to the
Hindu nobility.” (580) Here Khushwant Singh laughs at men like Taqi who change colours when in need. The same Taqi had refused to take money given by a Hindu when his father had died, but accepts from a Muslim. Ultimately Taqi had to depend on Hindus also.

As it is said usually that God and time are the best judges, all the rulers had never a blissful life in the end. Even Meer Taqi who had enjoyed his life earns certain punishment. He loses his family – wife and children. Dies pathetically when someone passes him a goblet of wine that is poisoned.

The next part of the novel entitled *Alice Aldwell* starts from the year 1857. Through this brief episode Khushwant Singh aims his satirical weapon on issues like the sexual life of the English women, attraction towards posh life, flattery, back-biting, nasty behaviour of the Indians, discrimination, superstitious beliefs, and the beast in man.

Alice Aldwell and Alexander Aldwell are married life partners who live in Calcutta because Alec was working in the Post and Telegraph Services. Alice was eighteen years old and Alex in his fifties. Alice always wanted to move to Delhi. Though she was a Eurasian she didn’t want to mingle with them because if one “didn’t cut yourself off completely from them, English gentry began to suspect you were one of them.” (590) This very clearly brings out the hypocrisy and selfish nature in Alice. It is not only Alice that Khushwant Singh strikes at but many of the Indians (particularly the lower-class people) who try to hide their community and pretend to be among the accepted ones.

Alec fathers two girl children and retires having reached his fifty-fifth year. Alice thinks that after his retirement Alec would take her to Ole Blighty, their home town, but Alec doesn’t approve of it. He starts drinking with the Eurasians. He neither stops
drinking nor goes to Delhi as desired by Alice. Depressed with the activities of Alec, she goes to meet Mr. George Atkins, a forty years old bachelor who had been the boss of Alec. He flatters her by saying, “he was mighty proud to be seen with any one as pretty as yours sincerely.” (591) And invites her for a dinner in the Calcutta Club. Both knew what the other wanted and served each other well. She asks Atkins to help Alec in getting a job in some place up country.

Alec gets a job within a week in Delhi. They get a beautiful big house at Daryaganj. By the end of November she has her third child. “I chose the name for her: Georgina (I sent Mr. Atkins a card announcing the birth and the name of our girl).” (593)

It is here that Khushwant Singh excels in the play of words. Here the word ‘our’ could signify either the child of Alec or of Atkins. But it is for certain that it is the child of Atkins since it is said in the very beginning that Alec loses his appetite for sex.

Singh also mocks at the change of behaviour in men when their income goes high. The not so rich Alec family now celebrates the fifteenth day of the arrival of Georgina in a splendid manner inviting the creamy layer of the society. In one of the celebrations Alec gets drunk while many men flirt with Alice. ‘Just a lot of Christmassy kissin and cuddlin.’ (594) Once she says: “The real fun began after Mr Metcalfe left. Alec passed out and had to be put to bed. One of the subalterns almost raped me within a yard of where Alec was lying drunk. That stupid, besotted husband of mine kept egging him on, ‘Take the bloody bitch . . go on . . .’ Such was life in Delhi.” (594)

Here Khushwant Singh presents the true life of men and women of Delhi in a realistic manner. It is of no doubt that incidents like these are very common in
metropolitan cities. People indulge in sexual activities very openly and are least bothered about their reputation. They even think that this sort of relationship improved their social status. Though Singh loves western culture, as an Indian he condemns such behaviour.

Through another incident Singh tries to expose the flattering and back-biting nature of the Indians. When Alice sends letters to the wives of the natives, they protest that "such letters were unnecessary between members of the same family. . . . I was 'sister' to everyone. Their children called me *mausi*. Fawning and flattering you to your face but always ready with a dagger to plunge in your back." (594)

Though this shows the nature of the Indians, at the same time it also exposes the superiority complex of the non-natives who stay in high positions in Delhi. It is at this kind of discrimination that Singh mocks at for he is candid in voicing his opinion.

The author also describes the nasty habits of Indian men who lack manners and behave indecently in the presence of others. This is presented through the son of Zeenat Mahal who invited Alice to have a get-together in her Zenana. "The boy had not been taught how to behave in the company of ladies. He kept chewing betel-leaf and spitting the horrible, bloody phlegm into a silver spittoon which a eunuch carried everywhere he went. And like common natives he kept scratching his privates." (596) In another incident Alec and Alice watches: 'a Bania come with his brass jug and squat down near the wall: these natives can never resist a wall.' (599)

The episode ends with the yelling of horsemen coming towards Daryaganj, shouting 'kill the bloody foreigners.' (600)

This episode entitled *Alice Aldwell alais Ayesha Bano Begum* describes the pathetic situation of an English family that faces the ugliest phase of their life in India.
Khushwant Singh though attracted towards the English is yet sympathetic towards natives. However as a humanist he very strongly opposes the maltreatment of some of the Indians who treated the English in a brutal manner. Through this episode he is able to expose the cowardice act of the Indians.

The horsemen who came yelling, "Marr dalo saley firagi ko – kill the bloody foreigners." (600) create havoc in the city. Many of the foreigners were brutally killed, women raped and innocent children killed. As the gang approaches Alec’s house, Alice asks Alec to go separately to save his life and that she and her children (three girls) would escape by somehow going to the house of Mirza Abdullah, one of the grandsons of the king and who had also received many favours from Alec.

Sincerely hoping that they would give them safety and shelter Alice and her three children reach the house of Mirza. They are received well but it does not last long. When Mirza comes home and sees Alice dressed in a Mussalmani style he greets her in a boastful voice. He is a man of carefree nature. He advises Alice to go to another house of his that is in Nai Sarak. He sends a maulvi to escort them to the new house and also to teach them the creed of Islam and convert them to Islam. “He gave us Muslim names. From Alice I became Ayesha. The elder, Mary, became Maryam. The second, Fiona became Fatima. Georgina became Jahanara. The maulvi was very pleased at having made three converts.” (607) Alice informs the maulvi about her parentage. “I told him that my mother was a Kashmiri Mussalmani and that though I had been given away in marriage to a Sahib, I had remained a Muslim.” (607)

Here Singh not only laughs at the Muslims who are much concerned in converting many people to Islam but also at the hypocrisy and selfish nature of Alice, who once said
that moving with the Eurasians itself was abominable to her, but now to save herself she confesses the truth.

Khushwant Singh also conveys how the "rotten, villainous, treacherous, degraded and lecherous these Indians are!" (608) Mirza with two of his cronies comes to the place where Alice and her children were staying. The hijda who had received her, gets her ready for his master. The three turn beastly and spend the night taking Alice in turns. "I was like a piece of white meat fought over by two brown dogs: snarling, biting, clawing, shoving. So it went all through the long, long, sultry night." (610)

At last a tailor comes to her rescue and with the help of his cousin, a sepoy takes them to the fort and produces them before the king’s son, Mirza Mughal who had intercepted the letters written by Alice to the king and begum Zeenat Mahal. They were put in the same cell where Alec too was imprisoned.

Later, on a Saturday all the prisoners (foreigners and people of other religion) including Alec were taken away. “My girls ran to Alec and clung to his knees. The sepoys tore them away from their father and thrust them towards me.” (612) Then “I heard people shouting. Then a shot. Then children and women screaming. Then it became still. Absolutely still.” (612)

Finally after the death of Alec, being abused by many and due to the mental and physical tortures given by Mirza and his cronies she says: “I am ashamed to confess that my first thoughts were: ‘Now there is no one left to turn up their noses at me. Only Mirza Abdullah and his pals will talk about me. As soon as this is over, I will get Alec’s pension. I will take my girls to England and start life again with no one making nasty talk about where I came from and who I was!’ Then I cried a lot.” (612)
The episode entitled *The Last Emperor* deals with the transition period of the rule of Mughals to the British. Bahadur Shah Zafar is presented as the last ruler of the Mughals. Singh sarcastically presents the religious rituals the Muslims strictly follow but without a touch of humanism. He also gives a description of the Mughals leading an extravagant life resulting in a loss to the nation. “Then our slaves, the eunuch Basant Ali Khan and Vakil Ghulam Abbas, presented the accounts of the royal household. Our expenses were, as always, more than our income. We refused to look into them and waved the men away.” (602) Singh also brings to light the insignificance and inability of the kings to keep their subjects under their control. The Mughal rulers who were once strong were finding it difficult in the transition period. “Who calls us Emperor? . . . We have no strength in our arms; our feeble voice is not heard beyond the walls of this fort.” (604)

During the month of Ramadan, everything goes well, but all of a sudden a group of men in the uniform of the East India Company galloped towards the fort firing their carbines and yelling “Long live the dynasty of the Mughals!” (603) They say: “We have murdered the *firangis* in Meerut. The *nasara* (Christians) wants to destroy our faith. We will rid the country of these vile infidels.” (603)

Here Singh brings out the horrid nature of men who lacked humanism and fought in the name of religion. In spite of the emperor’s orders the men kill many Europeans and his friends as well. Singh also projects the disloyalty of men who in their religious frenzy disobey the rulers. “Some one opened the gates of the fort to let in the mutineers. We were surrounded by a mob of soldiers which included many of our palace guards.” (604)

Humanism takes its prevalence in this episode entitled *Bahadur Shah Zafar*. He is a benevolent and righteous man. One afternoon nearly forty foreigners are brought with
their hands tied to the presence of Bahadur Shah wanting him to punish them for setting fire to the powder magazine in which they really had nothing to do. Bahadur refuses to accede to their wish of punishing. Instead he helps them by sheltering them in the harem of the palace and treats them well. It is certain that the character of Shah is what Singh admires and preaches.

Singh here comments on the early marriage of girls to older men. He insinuates at the incompatibility at both physical and psychological levels. Ramadan is the month when all the Muslims are to strictly follow the ritual of Islam. Yet the old Shah attracted by his young wife Begum Zeenat Mahal, transgresses the rules of his religion.

Singh also laughs at people who justify their action when they transgress the rules and then ask for forgiveness to God. “She assured us that the shariat provided for dispensation in times of stress, and since we had launched on a holy war, a little indiscretion would be forgiven us.” (615) “we went to the mosque, performed our ablutions and said the isha prayer craving Allah’s forgiveness for transgressing the rules of Ramadan.” (617)

As it was the period of transition of rule from the Mughals to the British, the latter captures many of the kingdoms of Hindustan. Singh here brings to light the cunning nature of the British. “He spared neither friend nor foe. Only a few months ago the great house of Oudh which had befriended the firangi was by the firangi deprived of its dominion. And before Oudh there were Nagpur and Jhansi, Satara and Tanjore and Murshidabad and Karnatak.” (618-619) At the same time Singh also exposes the eccentric attitudes of the Muslims. When the Mughals like Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah, etc. captured India and exploited the wealth by oppressing the rich and the poor, it seemed to
the Muslims that what they did was right, but when it came to the British to capture the country they say: “The holy book says: God does not love the oppressors.” (619) Singh very beautifully portrays the enmity and hatredness that existed between the Muslim and the Hindu rulers. Both start complaining each other. “No one could oppress the poor as did the firangi because he even interfered with matters of faith. For him religion made no distinction between clean and unclean flesh. He was allowed to eat both cows and pigs.” (619) It is well known that there is a long rivalry between the Hindus and the Muslims. Religious bigotry is more found in Muslims. But for the first time that Bahadur Shah, a Muslim accepts Hindus. He says: “But what right had he to order our Hindu and Muslim soldiers to put cartridges smeared with the fat of cows and pigs in their mouths? Did we need more to prove that he meant to despoil both Islam and Hinduism and make everyone Christian?” (619) May be it is due to the interference of a third religion and his deteriorating power that he makes a compromise with the Hindus.

Later comes the problem of succession. Begum Zeenat Mahal was anxious to make Mirza Jawan Bakth the successor of the throne. Though an emperor, Shah is not able to decide effectively. His Governor-General instead votes for Mirza Fakhroo. But he is taken away by Allah and the rule of Mughal rule nears its end. Soon Shah summons a council to reorganize the administration and draw up plans to expel the foreigners from their domains. Then he calls Hassan Askari, a man of God who “possessed the eyes that could peer into the future.” (620)

The dervish says that though it was a critical period for the Mughal rulers, they could defeat their enemies. “It will drown the enemies of Your Majesty’s dynasty. Only the peacock throne will be borne above the floods.” (621) On the third day, Shah’s son
Mirza Mughal, in spite of Shah’s warning had usurped all the functions of a ruler and slit the throats of thirty-nine innocent people. “They dragged the prisoners out of the dungeon and slit the throats of thirty-nine of them including women and children as if they were sheep being sacrificed on Bakr – Id.” (622) The beastly nature of man who craves for power blindly is well brought out in the person of Mirza.

Later on the day of Id – ul – Fitr everyone is happy. “At midnight we were roused by the darogha who begged us to help him restrain one who had broken into the house of a rich Hindu merchant of Dariba. Another was picked up naked and drunk in the hijda quarters of Lal Kaun. A third was embroiled in a fracas in a house of ill-fame in Daryaganj run by a princess of royal blood. So low had the house of Taimur and Babar fallen.” (223-224) Since they were more interested in their own benefits and lacked the responsibilities of a ruler, the British defeated them in many places. The whole of Hindustan was in a tumult.

Two days later the cannon explosion killed thousands of people and destroyed many houses. The most astonishing message was that the trusted adviser of Shah, Hakeem Ahsanullah and Queen Zeenat Mahal had a hand in this explosion. So men set fire to the house of the hakeem and accuses Shah and his wife. Being cornered thus Shah felt that the dice had turned against him and so he sends a secret note to Wilson Sahib, the Commander of the enemy troops stating, “That if our life and those of Zeenat Mahal and our children were guaranteed and our pension restored to us, we would continue to have the city gates thrown open to his troops.” (642)

Even in such a situation Shah looked only to the welfare of himself and his family and not the country.
Seven days later, the foreigners and their allies attack Delhi. In spite of General Bakht Khan’s strenuous retaliation they capture Delhi. People begin to leave the city and so does Shah. As per the advice of Mirza Elahi Baksh (father-in-law of late heir Mirza Fakhroo) he seeks shelter in the mausoleum of Emperor Humayun with a heavy heart.

Shah, along with his family members, stayed there for two days. On the third day, an emissary named Rajab Ali, a one-eyed sycophant who had often prostrated himself before Shah and begged the privilege of kissing his feet, informs that Mirza Elahi Baksh had promised Wilson Sahib to have them arrested and that Major Hodson had been authorized to execute the warrant. It was also shocking to hear that Hakeem Ahsanullah had taken sides with the enemies and was making an inventory of his properties. Hence he says: “It is rightly said the smoother the skin of the serpent the more venom it has in its fangs.” (649)

Here Singh makes his mark on the betrayers and boot-lickers who takes sides for their personal benefits.

Later Bahadur Shah Zafar, his wife Zeenat and his son Jawan Bakht surrenders to Hodson Sahib and become the prisoners of the firangi (foreigners). A day later they reach Delhi and are imprisoned in the same place where they had kept the thirty-nine English men, women and the innocent children.

A messenger brings news of the death of Shah’s kinsmen and supporters. Two sons, Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khizr and the grandson Mirza Abu Bakr were shot dead and many of his relations and supporters were hanged. Shah loses his will to live. Hence he laments: “As a captive bird beats its wings against the bars of its cage, we banged our
head against the walls of our dungeon and lamented our fate. . . . Who despoiled this city? Where has he taken away the loot? This was Delhi, the Queen of all the cities of the world, now a ruined desolation.” (660-661)

These words though spoken by Bahadur Shah Zafar, is really the emotion of the author himself expressing his love for Delhi. Delhi had been a place of attraction and now that Eden was transformed into wretchedness. The lamentation of the author is evidently found.

Shah and his family members are taken to trial. All his former well-wishers lined up to say (against Shah) what they were asked to say by the British. Hence Shah along with his fourteen Begums and his son Jawan Bakht share the misfortune of their exile. On the way many of them deserted him by giving various reasons for their change of mind. The only one to accompany Shah was his loyal wife Begum Zeenat Mahal. The episode ends very pathetically with the words of the Holy Prophet which he had used for his wife Khadijah: “When I was poor she enriched me; when all the world abandoned me, she comforted me; when I was called a liar, she believed in me.” (662)

The episode entitled Nihal Singh is one which goes on par with the episodes ‘The Last Emperor’ and ‘Bahadur Shah Zafar’. Placed in between the two episodes of Bahadur Shah Zafar it links the incidents in a superficial manner. This episode too deals with human hatred, revenge and melodramatic events. It is full of life and death. It describes how the Mughal reign came to an end after the betrayal of their benefactors who went by the words of the British.

Though Khushwant Singh presents the pathetic condition of the Mughal rulers as a result of their beastly act, he does not hesitate to criticize the British too.
Nihal Singh, a Punjab Policeman is the protagonist who is fond of visiting Delhi. As per his wish to visit Delhi he gets a chance to join the Jan Company, a regiment of the British to fight against the Mughals. Right from his childhood he was made to develop a wrong notion about Aurangzeb, the king of Delhi, who had beheaded his Guru. “When I was a child Mai told me of Aurangzeb, king of Dilli, who had cut off the head of our Guru. She called him Auranga and spat whenever she used his name. I also learnt to Thoo on Auranga’s name. . . . Sardar Baghel Singh who built a gurudwara on the very spot where our Guru had been martyred.” (624-625) These incidents not only developed his urge to visit the city but also the hatred towards the Muslims. In the Jan Company an English man named Hudson, the Commander influences the Sikhs (Indians) by telling that if they helped in restoring the British rule in Delhi they would be getting all the things like gold, silver equally. He also tells, “we were to fight Mussalmans and that our Guru had told Auranga that the sahibs would come from the side of the rising sun and with the help of the Sikhs overthrow his dynasty.” (625-626)

Singh sarcastically criticizes the illiterate state of the Indians and the tricky nature of the British. In the following lines he also pictures the greedy and false nature of the Indians.

When Nihal Singh is selected by Hodson as his orderly, “The boys were burned up with jealousy. They slapped me on my back and said Sahabash! Vadhaaee! (congratulations!). But when my back was turned they called me the sahib’s chamcha (spoon).” (626) Nihal is surprised by the very sight of the city. He is more surprised to see the Punjabi Mussalmans who are called to fight Hindus in the rebel side and the Gorkas, who when asked to shoot their father or mother would not hesitate to do so.
Khushwant Singh sarcastically remarks: “It is wonderful how the sahibs keep us natives separated from each other. The Guru has given them great wisdom. Also courage.” (627, 628)

After the first attack the English troops capture thirty men and hold them as captives to get more information about the regiment of the enemies. Getting the needed information they slaughter all of them. “We march them naked down their ridge. We line them and tell them to kneel with their heads bent. They whine, urinate, and defecate. We hack off their heads with our kirpans. It is like slaughtering goats for the Guru’s kitchen. . . . Hodson Sahib gives us an extra ration of rum.” (629) Nihal Singh being more attracted by Hodson’s courage goes to his tent to meet him and say, “Sahib must be very tired. Shall I take off Sahib’s boots? . . . I sat on the ground, and strapped his putties and massaged his legs.” (629)

Here Singh criticizes the nature of the Indians who were ready to do anything to get the favours of the British. They don’t realize that they are digging a grave for themselves. They are ready to serve a foreigner but not an Indian (Mussalman).

When Nihal and his troop enter Delhi there is a heavy battle. They are very surprised to see a woman with a talwar (sword) in her hand in one the houses. They take her captive and shower abusive language and even talk on taking her the whole night in turns. As per her request the lady is allowed to say her prayers. She cries while praying and finishing her prayers she says that she was ready for them. This really makes Nihal feel for the lady and he helps her to get away from that place. “I put my carbine on the ground and touch her feet. ‘Forgive us for the way we treated you . . . forgive us for the hard words we used . . . you are like our mother.’” (638) She blesses him whole-heartedly and departs.
This is what Khushwant Singh wants from everyone. Through this incident it seems like Singh appeals more to the Mussalmans to be humanistic.

Later the British troops defeat the natives at Najafgarh and Rohtak. They kill nearly three hundred men. The next attack was on the Sabji Mandi. The British Commander promise a double ration of rum and six months additional wage if they took Delhi.

Singh laughs at such men who were ready to kill human life just for an extra ration of rum and money.

The one-eyed Rajab Ali, the namak haram joined hands with the British and acts as spy. The British troops enter Kashmiri gate by blasting it. The soldiers ransack houses and liquor shops and enjoy to the maximum extent. The battle continues. “The goras say the rebels killed their memsahibs and children, so they kill every woman or child that comes their way.” (648) When they enter the Red Fort there is no one except a blind woman and an old cripple. “Goras make sport of them with the bayonets; one plunges his weapon from the front, another from the behind to see if they can meet in the middle of their victim’s body. They have a good laugh.” (648)

Khushwant Singh in his autobiography gives incidents where he exposes betrayers. Having personally met such people, Singh strongly attacks them. The brutal act of the Goras attacking a blind woman is certainly a condemnable act.

After capturing the whole of Delhi the British flag is hoisted. The gorahs are made to stay in the palace and others including Nihal Singh who is the orderly is made to stay out. “The gorahs are housed in the palace. We are ordered to encamp in the open beyond the moat.” (648)
This shows the discriminating nature of the English. At least after experiencing this, the allies should have avoided joining the English. But for small and petty benefits they help the British to stay as slaves forever.

The next day they drive the rebels out of Chandini Chowk. "We get plenty of gold and silver, cows and buffaloes. We blow up many old palaces and set fire to many streets. Two days later they find people running away with their properties. They shoot the ones who tried to escape. "After the great ride and the grand shikar of humans we wash our lances in the mosque-cistern. The water becomes so red that even the horses refuse to come near it." (649) It is made clear that Delhi lost its wealth, beauty and fame not only because of the Mughals and other rulers but also of the greedy Indian soldiers.

It takes nearly seven days to flush out the rebels. The things that could be seen are empty houses and corpses strewn around for the dogs and cats to eat it. Days later the Hindus were let to open their shops. The Muslims who tried to slip off in the guise of Hindus were caught and hanged. "Mussalmans who tried to pass off as Hindus paid with their lives. We made them take off their clothes. We poked their cocks with our bayonets and asked: 'How did this fellow get his top chopped off? The blood would drain out of their faces and they would start urinating.'" (651) They would be brought to the kotwali and hanged at the same place where the Guru had been executed by Aurangzeb. "Kidmatgars would lay out chairs and sofas for them and abdars would fill their glasses with brandy and port and light their cheroots. And the tamasha would begin." (651)

Here Singh exposes the cruel nature of the British. "The Sahib's enjoyed themselves laughing and joking, drinking and gambling." (651) while the poor innocent men were hanging fighting for their lives. Hodson Sahib not interested in such tamasha
turns his focus on the king of Delhi. The traitors, the one-eyed Rajab Ali and Mirza Elahi Baksh help Hodson to capture the king. They reach the tomb of Humayun Badshah. The old king, his wife and son are captured. The description is very pathetic and makes the readers eyes fill with tears.

Next Hodson captures the other three – Mirza Mughal, Mirza Abu Bakr and Mirza Khizr Sultan. All the three are stripped naked before the public and shot to death. “We have three naked corpses sprawled in the dust; blood gushing from their wounds, saliva oozing from their gaping mouths, eyes turning to grey marbles.” (659)

When Nihal goes to congratulate Hodson for the success, he asks him whether he had cut off the head of all the three and presented to the old king, the Sahib cuts him short and says, “The sahibs are a civilized people; they are not like the natives of Hindustan. They do not cut off people’s head and present them on trays to their relatives. The company Bahadur is just – strong but just. Understand!” (660)

Here too Khushwant Singh criticizes the Englishmen who talk about culture and civilized people when they have killed thousands of innocent people and looted the poor.

In this episode entitled The Builders, Khushwant Singh gives a detailed description on how the capital was changed from Calcutta to Delhi and how the new city was built. The episode is replete with autobiographical elements since Singh himself had witnessed the rise of the city. Through this episode Singh strongly condemns the Indian politicians and men for their greedy, selfish and hypocritical nature. At the end of the episode the narrator is made to ask several striking questions favouring the British which cannot be answered by any of the Indians. It doesn’t mean that Singh is favouring the British. He also makes certain comments on the nature of the British men also.
In the very beginning the narrator says that they had two large portraits of their Guru and of Queen Victoria in their visiting room and the family members prayed both to the Guru as well as the Queen.

The narrator’s father being a building contractor moves closely with the English men and rulers to explore possibilities of getting building contracts. He forced the narrator’s (son) to give up studies at the age of fourteen and join in the building business. At seventeen marries a girl thirteen years of age and within a period of five years he fathers two sons and leaves the village to join his father’s business. The motto of his father was, ‘Education is for making money’ and for making money all one needs to know is how to add, subtract, multiply, calculate simple and compound interest.

The idea of the British to change the capital from Delhi and build a new city makes the father grease the palms of men from the highest to the lowest rank to get the contract by giving tips to the lowest and fruits to the higher rank officials. He often said, “This is not baksheesh but sound investment.” (670)

The corruptive nature of both the Indians and the Englishmen is brought to light by the author.

Business flourishes well and they make a lot of money. They brought people from their village and gave half a rupee a day for men and less to the women laborers.

All of a sudden a war breaks between England and Germany and all the construction work gets stagnated for the time being. This paves way to the Indian politicians who ask for self-government. “The longer the war dragged on he more restive Indian politicians became. They were Banias and lawyers who had not raised their little
fingers to help our fighting men but were the loudest in demanding more self-government which would give them greater privileges.” (679) As a result of this the Indians were given more place in the administration of the country.

The appearance of Gandhiji still aggravates the situation. He prepared anti-government agitations by bringing close the Hindus and Muslims. “But the trick worked. I saw Hindus and Muslims drinking water from the same water booths, marching through the bazaars arm in arm chanting Hindus-Muslims Bhai-bhai – Hindus and Muslims are brothers.” (680)

In spite of all these disturbances the building of the new city was getting along well. The narrator had built his own house at Janter Manter Road and was well off. His father, who had become old and had been staying with his brother, dies of old age. Returning to Delhi after his father’s death he buys a car which had been his life’s ambition. “I bought a secondhand car, an Oldsmobile, from an English engineer who was due to return to England in a few weeks. Since he had helped me secure contracts, I gave him the price of a new car for his old one. He more than compensated me by passing all my inflated bills.” (683) Here too Singh exposes the corruptive nature of the British as well as the Indians.

Earning a lot too has its own disadvantages. The author very realistically presents the same. He comments on the parents who are responsible for spoiling their children by giving them more money for their expense. “While others gave their sons to drive about in, I gave my two elder boys bicycles. As a result while my sons went through school and college, theirs went to the bottle and the prostitutes of Chawri Bazaar.” (686)
By the time the intensity of the struggle for freedom becomes strong, different leaders come to the front with different strategies. Singh's main targets are the Indian politicians. The narrator who is none other than Khushwant Singh himself says: “I was out of steps with the times. I believed British rules was good for India; we Indians never had nor ever would be able to run an administration which was just and fair to all communities.” (689) The cunning nature of the Indians makes the narrator utter with disgust: “I persisted in my belief that the English would stay in India as rulers in my life time. I had eaten their salt and was not going to betray them.” (689)

In spite of Lord Irwin's thought of accommodating the nationalists, they go on massive demonstrations, civil disobedience movement, Satyagraha and ahimsa. “They talked of satyagraha (truthfulness) ahimsa (nonviolence) but gloated over bombing and political murders.” (689) Once they also try to kill the Viceroy, Lord Irwin by planting a bomb in the railway station to blast the compartment in which the Viceroy came. Fortunately he escaped. In another incident two young men attack the legislature members in the Central Assembly.

Singh does not seem to approve of the terrorism and the fight for independence, since it is inhuman.

At the end of the episode the narrator vehemently satirizes the Indians who call him a boot-licker of the British. He says:

I am not a man of great Learning nor have I read many history books. What I say in reply comes from the heart based on what I have seen with my own eyes, experienced of my own countrymen and the few Englishmen I have known. I have seen the city I helped to build and which Lutyens designed for two centuries ruined in twenty years. . . .
We planted slow-growing, long-living trees which will give shade to our
great-grandchildren . . . As for licking British boots, I tell them that if
was given the choice of being born in any period of Indian history
I liked, I would not choose the Hindu or the Muslim – not even the short
period of Sikh dominance in the north – but the British. (691)

When the Indians ask whether he had no pride in being an Indian, praising the
aliens who had exploited and humiliated the Indians for over hundred years, forgiving
them for the massacre of innocents at Jallianwala Bagh and for imprisoning and torturing
thousands of people, he replies:

No, I have not forgotten any of this, . . . Ever seen the Quwwat-ul-Islam
next to the Qutub Minar? Twent-seven Jain and Hindu temples
demolished to build one large mosque! Faces and limbs of gods and
goddesses hacked off. Tell me one of the place of worship, Hindu, Muslim
or Sikh which the English destroyed? Remember Babar raising pyramids
of Rajput skulls, the general massacres of citizens ordered by Taimur,
Nadir Shah and Abdali! No one was spared, neither the aged nor the new
born, nor their mothers. . . . Not even after the massacre of their women
and children in Delhi, . . . after your so-called First War of Independence
did they touch your women or children. They hanged a few people,
leveled some bazaars to the ground. That was all. (691-692)

When they question about the discrimination that the British showed in regard
with the ‘Europeans only’ clubs and the ‘Europeans and Anglo-Indians only’
compartments and separate laws for the white and the blacks, he exclaims:
I shout back at them: There was no justice in India till the British came. There will be no justice in India after their impact has worn off. They gave you freedom to do your *buk buk* against them and only took action when you preached violence. . . . If they had been Germans, French, . . . they would have strung up your Congresswallas on the branches of the nearest trees. (692)

When they say that the freedom fighters would have given a suitable reply, the narrator angrily spits out words: “Freedom fighters my foot! I shout back. Hired yellers of slogans who spent more comfortable times in jails than in their own hovels. And now want to be compensated with life pensions. Don’t talk to me about freedom fighters. They make me sick.” (692)

Finally the people say that he (narrator) has been brainwashed and the great progress that India has made, did not make him feel a sense of pride, the narrator replies:

   Indeed I do. Also a sense of foreboding. We are amongst the poorest of the poor, the most ignorant of ignoramuses of the world. We breed like rabbits. . . .

We are also the corruptest of the corrupt. Everyone from the Prime minister down to the poorest-paid police constable has his price. . . . You will see much worse in the years to come. Hindus, Muslims, Christians Sikhs, Buddhists will go on killing each other in great numbers. Your Gandhi and his *ahimsa* are as dead as. . . . Whatever the dead bird is called. (693)

Thus ends the episode with a sarcastical and ironical statement made by the author: “India is a great nation, which is the truth. And you may or may not know that our national motto is truth will forever be triumphant - *Satyamev Jayate.*” (693)
The episode entitled *The Dispossessed* deals with the incidents that take place during the partition of India and Pakistan. The struggle of people due to partition created havoc in the history of India which has become a main event in the world’s history and the main subject of many writers like Khushwant Singh. The turmoil during the period till the death of Gandhiji paves way to this episode in this beautiful novel Delhi. Here too the autobiographical elements are in abundance. It can be very well said that the protagonist Ram Rakha’s narration of the events has a touch of Khushwant Singh’s personal ideas as well.

As usual Singh mocks the follies and foibles of human society. He, with his power of humour has unforgivingly made use of his satirical weapon on the ordinary men as well as the eminent personalities of India. He has not spared even the Father of our nation. His realistic presentation certainly makes us ponder over the things that he describes.

The factual history comes to the readers when Ram Rakha, the protagonist a sixteen year old boy recounts what brought him to Delhi. He was born in a small Hindu family consisting of his father, mother and his sister named Lachmi in a remote village named Hadali (now a place in Pakistan where Singh lived in his childhood days). The village housed about two hundred families, of which hundred and sixty were Mussalmans and the remaining Hindus and Sikhs. Ram Rakha is made to leave his homeland to Delhi due to the communal riots that broke during the period.

India though a country with superficial unity in diversity in regard with religion and language, the inner minds of the Indians are yoked with hatred and discrimination. This is very clearly brought to light in the very initial stage of the episode. “We Hindus
and Sikhs lived in brick-built houses and had buffaloes in our countryards. The Mussalmans lived in mud-huts. . . . We looked down upon them because they were poor. They looked down upon us because we were few and not as big built as they.” (696)

Ram Rakha’s sister, Lachmi, who had been betrothed to her second cousin since her birth, at the age of fifteen, elopes with a Mussalman stating that she had gone with him on her own will. All the authorities being Muslims make the case petty and take a lot of money from Ram’s father. Being unable to see his daughter being ravished a few doors away, the family moves to Delhi taking all that they could carry. “We passed long lines of people on foot and in bullock carts. Those going our way were Sikhs and Hindus. Those coming from the opposite direction were Mussalmans. We saw many Sikhs lying dead on the road with their long hair scattered about and their bearded face covered with flies. We crossed the Indo-Pakistan border.” (699)

However they reach Kurushetra. Finding no work to do, Ram Rakha’s father sends a postcard stating their pathetic condition to one of his Sikh friends whom he had known as a boy in Hadali. On the latter’s suggestion they come to his place. But the Sikh who had unexpectedly become rich makes them stay in a garage and makes his father a watchman, and his mother a maid servant. Though they (Sikh and Ram’s father) were close friends in their young age, the Sikh maintains a distance due to status. Friendship was lost in favour of wealth.

Due to lack of money Ram is made to go in search of jobs. Not getting any, he joins the RSS Sangh. The nature of the job was to go to the Birla House where Gandhiji was staying and inform the happenings to the head quarters of the Sangh. One day when he had gone to the Birla House to have a dharsan of Mahatma, he heard a group of young
men raising their voice at Gandhiji. “Shut up. . . . the Mussalmans have ravished our mothers and sisters. . . . we will not allow the Quran to be read in our country anymore. They jumped up and began yelling, Bharat Mata ki jai.” (703)

The police come and arrest all the young men including Ram only to drop them in a place not too far from the House. The policemen who were close to the RSS boys and against the doctrines of Gandhiji says: “Mahatma Buddhoo (stupid) ki jai!” (703) This clearly states that many of the Indians in the initial stage were against Gandhiji.

They gave Ram training on “how to fight with sticks. They told us we would soon have guns and be taught to shoot. In the afternoon we had lectures on Hindu dharma and history. . . . destroyed our temples and massacred millions of innocent Hindus, abducted and raped Hindu women; how thousands of these noble Hindu women had burnt themselves on funeral pyres rather than be dishonored by the Mussalmans. They exhorted us to fight for our dharma, cleanse Bharat of the unclean Maleechas, Mussalmans as well as Christians, who were also foreigners and ate our sacred cow – mother.” (704)

Here the author comments on how the innocent and young men are initiated into terrorism and misguided.

Ram one day at last kills a Muslim owner of a leather shop. That makes Ram a favourite of the group. Following the murder of the shop owner and five other Mussalmans, riots break in different parts of the country and thousands of Muslims are found fleeing to Pakistan. The RSS boys considered Gandhi and Nehru as enemies. The way the author portrays Gandhiji and Nehru certainly makes people think that they had a hand in the partition.
Many incidents are given by Ram Rakha which asserts that Gandhiji and many other politicians were also corrupt. He even goes to the extent of calling Gandhiji a 420, which is the section of the Indian Penal Code defining fraud. “Gandhi is a double fraud.” (710)

It can also be said that there were reasons for the Indian patriots to have a grudge towards Gandhiji and his followers for it seems that though Gandhiji wanted peace and non-violence, he supported the Pakistanis more than the Indians. It seems a natural thought of the RSS chief to say that there would soon be a war between India and Pakistan and that “We must finish Pakistan once and for all and plant the saffron flag of Hindu dharma on the Khyber Pass.” (710) for Pakistanis invade Kashmir every day. “But Gandhi goes on croaking about peace and love. As if that is not bad enough he says India owes Pakistan a lot of money and must pay up at once.” (710)

The more Gandhiji stresses on truth and non-violence the more he is mistaken to be a supporter of the Muslims. The narrator says, “His son Dev Das, is also there and the two go at each other. The son calls the father impotent. The father calls the son’s thinking impotent and superficial, then tells him to mind his own business. You can see the father and son don’t like each other. Gandhi does not like any of his three sons.” (711)

It also seems like Gandhiji had an idea of becoming a martyr like Thomas Beckett in T.S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*. Later, Gandhiji announces his idea of fasting till death. “The Old man speaks into the micro phone. He tells the Muslims he is fasting for them. He tells the Kashmiris he is fasting for Kashmir. And he tells God he is fasting because God told him to fast. Even now he is on lime and orange – juice.” (712) In spite of the request made by many, Gandhiji continues his fast by taking orange and lime.
According to Singh, that was not a fast. This was mere hypocrisy. When Gandhiji comes to know that the RSS had joined the Peace Committee he gives up his fast. “The hypocrite! So the work we have done over the months, the blood we have spilled is undone by the old man in six days.” (715)

Gandhiji further earns the animosity of the Hindus, when he asks them to read the Quran. He himself goes to the tomb of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and recites the fateha: ‘In the name of Allah, The Beneficient, The Merciful.’ (717)

It was on the 30th of January 1948, when, as usual Sardar Patel comes to meet Gandhiji. ‘he has a scowl on his face.’ (718) They argue about something and Gandhiji who is never late, is ten minutes behind time. He comes out in the afternoon and greets the people around him. When everyone were shouting ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai.’ “A stout thah, thah.” (719) Ram shoots Mahatma and cries bitterly for having done so.

After describing the death of Mahatma Gandhiji, Singh goes on to relate the havoc created in the period of Indira Gandhi leading to her assassination. It is on this Golden Temple issue that Singh has strongly shown his condemnation. He had also returned the award “Padma Bushan” that was given to him to show his contempt. He openly shows his contempt and anger towards Indira Gandhi who, in spite, of knowing that invasion into the temple would turn into a bloody battlefield, permitted the Indian army to enter the Golden Temple to capture Bhindranwale and his gang. “The BBC says well over a thousand including Bhindranwale have been killed. The bullet-ridden corpses of women and infants-in-arms float in the sacred pool. What made Indira Gandhi do such a stupid thing?” (729)
Here Khushwant Singh not only criticizes the cowardly act but also the Sikhs who tempted their fellowmen to avenge the death of their men. “At the end of the service, the Bhai makes a short, fiery speech. We the Sikhs never forget or forgive. . . . Great boasters, these Sikhs! They live in the past and refuse to understand that in a civilized society you don’t desecrate mosques or cut off people’s heads.” (729)

One morning Budh Singh, the watchman brings the narrator the news happily that “Indira Gandhi shot dead! Long live Jarnail Singhji Bhindranwale!” (730) He is followed by the Bhai of the neighboring Gurudwara who gives the narrator some Pershad saying, “the desecration of the Golden Temple has been avenged. The Sikh Panth has won a victory. Indira Kutti (bitch) is dead.” (731)

Khushwant Singh brings to light that the assassination was justified by mad men like Budh Singh as well as the spiritually enlightened Bhai. He strongly condemns this act. “Celebrating the murder of a frail, little woman! What have the Sikhs come down to?” (731) Singh also gives a sort of suggestion:

If the only the stupid had owned up her mistake. . . . mistake, forgive me’, they would have forgiven her. But to get one demented monk and his gang of armed goons she let the army slay a thousand innocent pilgrims. . . . babies-in-arms. . . . Let the army loot cash, utensils and burn down the archives. In short, to kill a rat, she pulled down the house. One crime is followed by another. One lie by a bigger lie. The entire country pays the price for these blunders and lies. (731)

Singh also sends his weapon against the different medias which gives different status on the same issue. “AIR say she is dead . . . . The Evening News. . . . trying to save
her. Stale news. By then most foreign radio stations are saying she died on the operating table. What now?" (731)

While the narrator is totally dejected and exhausted and retires on a charpoy, the bell rings and Bhagmati enters. She says that she is going to take the narrator to Lal Kaun. "No body will bend a hair on a hijda’s head. Chalo." (731-732)

It is really a thing to be deeply pondered for men were fighting madly, a hijda has come to save the narrator’s life. When the narrator says that the police would by the time settle things right, She says, "Police? she asks contemptuously. Those bahincohds are with the mobs. "We give you thirty-six hours to finish every Sikh in the city." (732)

Shortly a mob comes near their house and attacks the Bhai of the Gurudwara.

They drag out the Bhai and beat him up with their fists and rods. . . . They bring out the Granth and sprinkle petrol on it. One put a match to it and the heap burst into flame. The Bhai pleads, 'Do what you like to me but don’t dishonour the holy book.’ . . . They pour petrol over his hair, splash it on his beard and push him on the flaming pile. He shrinks and crumples into a flaming corpse. They yell triumphantly: Indira Gandhi amar rahey (Indira Gandhi is immortal). (733)

The youngsters attack garages shops and houses of the Sikhs. The narrator receives many phone call messages which may be true or mere rumours that spread like a rapid fire. “The telephone rings: Is that you? It asks. ‘Yes.’ The caller proceeds to abuse me. ‘Bloody bastard you murdered your mother.’ I hit back. ‘Bloody . . . ’You murdered your Bapu Gandhi, who are you to buk buk?” (735)
There is bloodshed and ruthless havoc on the city. Men kill each other in the streets.

"Policemen armed with rifles stop by for a few minutes and then walk away." (735)

Some young men come near the house of the narrator and kill Budh Singh, which is really heart rending. "The young gangster play a cat and mouse game with him. . . . The old fellow is getting tired. He can’t fight so many men as he pauses for breath, an iron rod crashes over his shoulder and brings him down. . . . A boy gets a car tyre, fills its inside rim with petrol and lights it. It is a fiery garland. . . . Budh Singh screams in agony as he crumples down to the ground." (736)

Thus, Khushwant Singh has brilliantly presented incidents that not only stays in the mind, but also makes to realize the human attitude and develop humanism.