Chapter V

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In The Company of Women, Khushwant Singh, India’s most widely read author, has produced an uninhibited, erotic and endlessly entertaining celebration of love, sex and passion.

From Train to Pakistan (1956) to The Company of Women (1999) is a long journey that Khushwant Singh has taken in fiction-writing. Train to Pakistan was written in the aftermath of Partition whereas The Company of Women portrays perhaps his own experiences of women through the years.

As a man gets older, his sex-instincts travel from his middle to the head. What he wanted to do in his younger days but did not because of nervousness, lack of response or opportunity he does in his mind. (Author’s note)

His early novels portrayed the felt-experiences of his life, presenting in a detached manner the impact of Partition, the breaking up of families, the disillusionment of freedom fighters and the massacre of people during Partition days. What one finds in his latest novels is that lack of inner urgency and deeply felt experience of life.

The Company of Women relates the life-story of Mohan Kumar, the protagonist and his sexual exploits. The term that comes to mind in describing Mohan Kumar is Narcissus. He loves himself and his body so much that he has no time for other pursuits in life. His is the life of a man who disregards social norms and correctness and pursues the Epicurean philosophy but never get tied down by the bonds of marriage. Though not given to introspection, Mohan Kumar has his own philosophy about marriage and love:
Marriages, he concluded, are not made in heaven; they are made on earth by earthlings for earthy reasons. The first priority is money: it may be property, a profitable business or a well-paid job. . . . At the time they are asked to give their consent they are adolescents: their sex urges are of explosive dimensions and they are eagerly looking forward to explore each other’s bodies. (Company, 7)

He also believes that occasional adultery does not destroy a marriage, on the contrary it proves to be a cementing factor as in cases where the husband could not give his wife as much sex as she needed, or were the wife was frigid. “It was silly to condemn adultery as sinful; it often saved marriages from collapsing. It could have saved his.” (8)

His marriage is a failure. His wife Sonu is a daughter of a very rich business man and is arrogant. Mohan Kumar thinks that she is “bitter woman, incapable of happiness and determined to make him unhappy.” (6) He prefers divorce to loveless sex or no sex in his married life: “All said and done, a man or a woman had one life to live; neither should waste the best years of their lives with someone with whom they had little to share besides occasional loveless sex.” (7)

After thirteen years of marriage and two children, divorce comes as a relief. But Mohan Kumar feels “empty inside and shrouded in loneliness” (2). Reviewing his life he feels that his relationship with various women in the States before his marriage was great fun since they were not meant to be enduring, nor were there any strings of responsibility attached. He could enjoy those relationships with Americans or Europeans or even a Pakistani Muslim woman freely and fondly. That was heaven to him. Returning from the
States with degrees in Computers and Business Management from Princeton University, Mohan Kumar allows his middle-class father to arrange his marriage with large dowry offered by Rai Bahadur Lalla Achint Ram to his daughter Sonu.

His divorce starts a new chapter in his life. Separated from his nagging, ill-tempered wife of thirteen years, millionaire businessman Mohan Kumar decides to reinvent his life. Convinced that ‘lust is the true foundation of love’, he embarks on an audacious plan. He plans to advertise for paid lady companions to share his bed and his life. There is Sarojini Bharadwaj, the demure professor from small-town Haryana who surprises Mohan with her ardour and sexual energy; Molly Gomes, the free-spirited masseuse from Goa, mistress of the sensual impulse; and Susanthika Goonatilleke, the diminutive seductress from Sri Lanka. After each affair ends and before the next begins, Mohan finds solace in the practiced charms of his obliging maid, Dhanno, and in the memories of his first lovers - the American Jessica Browne, to whom he lost his virginity, and the Pakistani Yasmeen Wanchoo, who offered him the heady passion of an older woman.

Thus begins his easy, unbridled sexuality in the company of some remarkable women. If marriages could be arranged through advertisement in newspapers, Mohan Kumar decides to get a companion by inserting an advertisement in a newspaper. He seeks ‘a respectable companionship with sex thrown into it.’ (10) Khushwant Singh ironically ridicules the marriages arranged through advertisements in the newspaper as is shown through Mohan Kumar’s advertisement:

Forty-year-old product of an Ivy League College (U.S.A) living separately from his wife and two children. Divorce petition filed. Seeks a live-in companion for a mutually agreed time-duration. Willing to pay air fare to
Delhi and back and Rs. 10,000 per month for expenses. Free board and lodging in comfortable home with three servants and chauffeur-driven car. Religion no bar. Relationship to be without strings attached on either side.

If interested, enclose photograph and bio-data. (11)

So starts our hero’s long journey of sexual adventures. Instead of moving from place to place, taking outer journey to different woman, Mohan Kumar decides to have the women come to him, to his residence.

Khushwant Singh’s characters are earthly in nature. They are neither pretty women nor heroic knights. To emphasise this periodic aspect the novelist introduces the sweeper woman Dhanno, the first to share Mohan Kumar’s bed: ‘Dhanno’s body had a musky odour unlike his wife’s which always smelt of French Cologne.’ (23)

Mohan Kumar justifies his act of love-making to different women. ‘It was like exploring a new landscape. Women were much the same in their essentials but enchantingly different in details.’ (23) From Dhanno he moves on to Sarojini, the book-loving professor of English literature from Rewari, from the down caste illiterate to the high caste highly educated:

She was petite and reasonably attractive; skin the colour of old ivory, dark brown hair, broad forehead with a bindi, diamonds in her ear lobes, a diamond nosepin, soft sensuous lips with a dab of fresh lipstick, a pearl necklace which went well with her white sari. No great beauty but quite presentable. (32)
She is prudish but wants to take a chance with Mohan Kumar and find out whether she could have a future with him. For the present she agrees with Mohan Kumar though with apprehension.

She is typical professor who offers her prayers to Goddess Saraswathi and a little romantic, reading Omar Khayyam. But their relationship does not last long as she is noticed by her old student and feels that her job needs moral values to be practiced and not only to be preached, since Mohan Kumar does not promise permanent relationship.

In a flashback, through the device of Mohan Kumar’s diary the novelist justifies his hero’s behaviour as he tells us that all this had begun when the second child Ranjith was born and his wife did not permit him to have sex with her. Mohan Kumar gets his opportunity with Mary Joseph the Roman Catholic nurse from Tamil Nadu, a dark plumb woman who was looking after the child: “I had not had proper sex for over six months. Another six months of abstinence would be hard on a lustful man like me.” (176), Mohan Kumar writes in his diary which he had given to his friend Khushwant Singh. Admitting his weakness, he confesses:

Did I suffer pangs of guilt? I did not. I justified what I did with Mary Joseph the same way Mary Joseph justified her adultery: only one life to live. Sex is important. When denied it becomes more important. The body’s needs come above religious taboos and notions of morality. (177)

This relationship does not last long as his wife suspects it and dismisses Mary. The novelist introduces another character, not of literary mind that Sarojini was. He opts for Molly Golmes, a masseuse of Goa. She is short, stocky and dark but is of cheerful
disposition. Mohan Kumar's top priority is sex and is not easily satisfied. "I wanted it to be lustful, give and take - and in open; in sunlight, moonlight, starlight, what more? The person had to be of a cheerful disposition; not sulking, no nagging." (213)

From Goanese Molly the novelist takes us to Sri Lankan Susanthika, the second Secretary in the High Commission of Sri Lanka at Delhi. She is a young, darkish, slightly built woman in her late twenties. Though Buddhist, she is interested in Ganga-worship and Haridwar. Khushwant Singh describes the Ganga-worship at sunset with lively details especially with all types of people – rich and poor, high caste and low caste crowding on the bank of the river in the evening. He also mentions Hindu belief of taking a dip into the river and of being purified of all sins committed in life. The novelist cannot restrain himself about his knowledge of different religions remarking that Mohan Kumar had studied comparative religions at the University.

Khushwant Singh describes all these relationships of Mohan Kumar with many women, from Jessica Brown the Afro – American, Yasmeen, the Pakistani Muslim to a nameless Bhai in Mumbai and their love – making. His women belong to different religions, different colours and different places. Their sole point of existence in this sort of background turns them into post-card picture-beings, with no depth, nor any dimensions. They play-act the roles they are assigned and disappear as easily as they had appeared. At times one feels how prudish the Indians are when it comes to sex-life. Khushwant Singh laughs at these pretensions of both men and women. He ironically presents how even the Indian women come rushing to Mohan Kumar and how they admire his physique.

Mohan Kumar's last encounter with the lady in Mumbai makes him ill and he suffers from AIDS. He feels that his adventures with women brought him punishment
ultimately. Adultery – sexual relationship without any intention of getting married is a sin and must receive punishment. The novelist moralizes but he does not show in Mohan Kumar any inner censor, a sense of guilt, a feeling of wrong-doing. In fact Mohan Kumar is a victim of his own passions. The novelist presents the common belief of the average person but then this is a novel about an average common man who has no finer pursuits in life. His is bodily existence only. His needs are simple: a good comfortable bungalow with a cook and servants and at the end of the day a woman to warm his bed and satisfy lust.

The first section of the novel deals with the estrangement from his wife and then describes Mohan Kumar's lusty efforts to set up a more flexible arrangement for his physical needs. This search for a suitable live-in partner is an audacious plan as he advertises for a paid companion to share his bed. The protagonist realizes the audacity of his venture and how it would shock middle class sensibilities and hurt his estranged wife, in-laws and their family. He is also worried that "it might be turned down by the advertisement departments." (11) His choice of the two all India dailies in which to inserts the advertisements and the rejection of The Hindustan Times and The Hindu being too conservative, reflect Khushwant Singh's awareness of the newspaper industry. After much contemplation the advertisement is carefully worded. Sexual desires are camouflaged. He is in search of respectable companionship, the concept of 'living together', an increasingly common feature amongst men and women in Europe and USA.

Whilst in search of a suitable partner, Khushwant Singh makes his protagonist parody several institutions of arranged marriages in India, such as matrimonial advertisements in newspapers: “The matrimonial were caste-obsessed, fair-skin obsessed, money obsessed and, with the exception of widows and divorcees virginity-obsessed.” (10)
So Mohan Kumar decides to cock a snook at such attitudes and inserts an advertisement clarifying the need for a live-in companion for a mutually agreed time-duration. He realizes that such advertisements in a tradition bound country would scandalize and shock friends and relatives. However in his search for suitable women companions, Mohan Kumar is an iconoclast and defies conventional norms. Before there is a response to the advertisement, Mohan Kumar has an amorous relationship with his female sweeper or jamadarni. The relationship with Dhanno is very clandestine. The other servants are sent on long errands. This relationship is amply described in the chapter entitled 'Dhanno'. This is a trend that Khushwant Singh follows in this novel, naming the chapters after the women he has made love to. The book becomes a catalogue of the nine women he beds. Nine of the chapters are named after these various women, as a tribute to their diversity.

Is the novel The Company of Women autobiographical or is it a work of a fantasy and adultery? Is the book an uninhibited, erotic and endlessly entertaining celebration of love, sex and passion or is it a parody of the hedonistic upper middle class urban society of Delhi? Viewed in the context of public and critical relations and acclaim, Khushwant Singh’s novel is a grand success. It has aroused extreme reactions, contrasting critical view points, high visibility and subsequently successful sales. From the first lustful glance to the last grunt, this novel has elements of fantasy, erotica and seduction. The narrative is racy, though the prose admittedly lacks the fluency and subtlety of his earlier novels Train to Pakistan and Delhi. It also lacks the seriousness of tone and theme of his earlier novels and his scholarly work on the history of the Sikhs. But maybe this is what Khushwant Singh wants to achieve. At one level the novel lives up to Khushwant
Singh’s deliberately cultivated image of a man obsessed with sex and scotch. The novel is an apt outpouring of the public persona of India’s most successful syndicated columnist. Dubbed as the ‘Original Dirty Old Man,’ Khushwant Singh is often a victim of his public image. In an interview with Suchitra Behal, Khushwant Singh has admitted that such labels have stuck to him because of his journalistic writings. He says, “Since I laughed loudly, praised good looking women and the wine I drunk, people chose to call me – It hurts.” (xiv) Talking to Samita Bhatia, Khushwant Singh has admitted that he is multi-dimensional, “certainly not one-track.”

Now in the twilight of his career, Khushwant Singh tries to rationalize about the difference between his public image and his private self. Typically, Khushwant Singh is not hesitant to ruffle a few features in offering his analysis to Samita Bhatia. He says flatly, “Being an iconoclast I write very openly about things. And Indian’s being constipated with humbug picks up with what suits them. They enjoy running people down more than praising them. It is not entertaining enough to call a person a serious scholar. But to call him a drunkard and debauch is far more interesting.” (Bhatia, 7) Similar sentiments are expressed in an interview with Pavan K. Verma in the series, “Writers in Dialogue.” Khushwant Singh admits, “this is a country which has so many sanctimonious humbugs that if you write or speak only about drinks or about women, they think you are a drunkard or a womanizer.” (Company, 6) Later in the same interview, Khushwant Singh explains his outlook on life: “They must know that a man of my age with so much output in writing doesn’t have time. He can’t afford to get drunk. He can’t afford to waste time on women. I work from 4.30 in the morning till 7 p.m.” (6) In the introduction to this interview, Pavan Verma upholds a similar view that is a lot of
difference between the public image of Khushwant Singh and the actual man himself. Verma writes, "For all his cultivated image of a debauch, I know with long association that I am meeting a disciplined workaholic...." (6)

In the chapter *A New Beginning*, which is the first chapter of the first part of the novel, Khushwant Singh presents the present state of Mohan Kumar's life and then goes on to a flash back to bring out the reason for the divorce between Mohan Kumar and Sonu.

The very first line tells about the character of Mohan Kumar "it should have been a day of rejoicing. It was not." (3) He has been waiting for twelve years to get the consent of his wife for divorce. Besides giving her his children he is ready to give any thing that she asks for as compensation to get his divorce. But she needed nothing and "seemed as eager to get rid of him as he was to get rid of her." (3)

Instead of celebrating his newly won freedom from his nagging, ill-tempered wife he felt "empty and shrouded in loneliness. There was an all-pervading silence. . . . Their squabbles had often irritated him. Now he missed them. The house suddenly had far too many rooms, and the nights too many hours. He was weary." (3-4)

Khushwant Singh is certainly known for his high spirit, jovial nature and his fun and frolic ways of life. But belies another fact; Khushwant Singh is also a man of sentiments. Though in many of the novels of Khushwant Singh one can find in his writing that his writings are to some extent a satire on women, he is certainly a man who has a soft corner for them. He is never against women but is against their approach and their attitude. Since he presents things realistically without any exaggeration people develop an idea that he is a male chauvinist. He presents Mohan Kumar as a responsible father and a lovable husband who in turn is not loved. He is also a man of sentiments.
Sonu is presented as a ‘nagging, ill-tempered wife’ (3) who after having twelve years of married life did not even ‘bothered to say good bye’ when she left the house of Mohan Kumar. This doesn’t mean that Khushwant Singh means to say that all women belong to the same category. There are exceptions in every thing. Khushwant Singh also brings out the positive attitude of women through many of his characters. “Sonu was quick-tempered, possessive and wanted attention all the time. She was jealous, though she herself had no love to give him.” (5) As a fact, Sonu like many other women lives within a small circle showering her love and affection to herself and her family members disliking the presence of anyone related to her husband. It is for sure that Sonu lacks humanism. The literal sense of ‘SELF’ is found more in her. She didn’t like Mohan’s father staying with them in her house and hence “she began to resent his father’s presence in their home – her home, for it was, after all, a gift from her father. ‘Will your old man live with us all his life?’ she once asked in disgust.” (5) Even after Mohan Kumar purchasing a new bungalow his father finds no peace of mind due to Sonu’s behaviour and ultimately one day “his father, sad and diminished, finally moved to Haridwar.” (5)

In a period of two years time Mohan adds semi-precious stones and leather goods to his list of business which gives him a lot of profit only to become a part of the charmed circle of Delhi’s super rich. Even this did not develop a good relationship between Mohan and Sonu. Mohan realizes “with some horror, a bitter woman, incapable of happiness and determined to make him unhappy. She made up her mind to condemn him in everything he did. If he paid the slightest attention to another woman, she would call him a randy bastard.” (6) The seventh year of their marriage they have a daughter.
Even this child does not bring them closer. Very often there would be quarrel and then the bodily compulsion would resolve the dispute. "They would have sex, usually loveless sex, and resume talking to each other. Only for a few days." (6)

It is true that women are more possessive than men. But as the proverb says: 'Too much of anything is good for nothing.' It is good that Sonu is possessive, but over possessive certainly will have its own effect. The more possessive Sonu is, the more she keeps distancing from Mohan Kumar. One evening she overhears Mohan talking to one of his women friends on the phone. She accuses him of having a liaison with 'that whore'. She even calls him a lecher. As a result Mohan slaps her across her face and then is taken to the police station like a criminal and had to spend five thousand rupees to settle the issue.

Many more unpleasant incidents occur in Mohan's life. All these make Mohan an "amateur philosopher of marriage and love. Marriages, he concluded, are not made in heaven; they are made on earth by earthlings for earthly reasons." (7)

It is no doubt that Khushwant Singh is an excellent craftsman in giving a realistic picture of the Indian society. Though being an Indian and born in an orthodox family, he sometimes is attracted by the western life style. It may be since he had his collegiate education in London. Though we find in many of his work satirizing the Englishmen and their lifestyle in some aspects we see him completely attracted and literally recommending to follow them. One such aspect is the marriage. He seems to have no good opinion of Indian marriages. He stresses in many of his novels that men and women should have no bondage between them. He wants to exercise liberty and freedom in both sexes. In the novel Burial at Sea, Victor Jai Bhagwan is of the same opinion. Even Mohan Kumar develops an idea of the same kind.
This very clearly shows that Khushwant Singh is frustrated with the Indian marriages and the conjugal love that exist between a husband and wife. He is also against the practise that is carried on before the marriage. Mohan Kumar returns from the states after completing his degree. Mohan’s father, a retired middle-level government servant and a middle-class man dreams of a rich life for his son. Which though is an earnest wish of a parent is also in a way being selfish. Mohan Kumar and his father “were invited to tea, introduced to nubile girls, tempted with large dowries and offers of partnerships in business.” (4) This clearly exposes the fact that Khushwant Singh is totally against dowry system. “Even after all these years Mohan was amazed at how easily he had allowed himself to be offered for sale, finally agreeing to marry Sonu.” (4) The fact that one should always be content with what he has and has to live accordingly is what Khushwant Singh tries to emphasize. He is also not satisfied with the ones opting for an arranged marriage. In one of his joke books he confesses that he prefers love marriage to arranged. ‘A known devil is better than an unknown devil.’ The marriage of Mohan Kumar was an arranged one. He finds no happiness at all. “It was what people described as a love-cum-arranged marriage. But of course it was nothing of the sort.” (4)

As far as Khushwant Singh is concerned, he gives more importance to sex. It is of course a part of life. He views Indian life not as an Indian, but as an outsider bringing all his needy comments.

Mohan has had relationship with various women before he married Sonu. “They were not meant to be enduring; no strings attached. Great fun while they lasted.” (7) He feels ‘They were better than being caught in the vice of one demanding woman who deprived him of the company of others.’ (7) Khushwant Singh also stresses on having occasional
adultery. Every individual are likely to commit adultery if they get a fastidious chance. “No matter how close and intimately involved a married couple may be, the possibility of a pleasant diversion in an adulterous relationship is never far from their minds. When an opportunity guaranteeing secrecy present itself, they succumb to it.” (8) All that which develops in the mind of Mohan is the verdict of Khushwant Singh. As to Mohan occasional adultery “did not destroy a marriage; quite often it proved to be a cementing factor, as in case where the husband could not give his wife as much sex as she needed, or where the wife was frigid. It was silly to condemn adultery as sinful; it often saved marriages from collapsing. It could have saved his.” (8)

Khushwant Singh brings out the fact that no one is really satisfied in their marriage. He (Mohan) “knew that not one of his circle was really happy in his or her marriage. They just got along. And grumbled. Not one of them had the courage to call it off. To hell with the bloody lot! He could feel his temples throb with anger.” (8) He also brings to light the hypocrisy of man that professes to be happy with marriage and yet seeks. People always are more interested in peeping into others personal affairs. Mohan experiences this in his large circle of friends. “He had often suffered snide remarks at the club bar when he had gone there alone. ‘How’s Sonu? Is she not in town?’ the bitch Usha Malhotra had said, a little too loud, barely surprising a leer. He knew what she was driving at, and hit back savagely: ‘And how are your husband and your boyfriend getting along?’ that would silence her.” (8)

Knowing that “he could not do without a woman companion for too long” (10) he comes to a conclusion that he would have the company of women on certain terms and conditions. “Having affairs with friends’ wives was not what he was looking for. Nor unmarried
girls, because they would expect matrimony to follow – which ruled out young widows as well. What he hoped to find was a woman about his own age, early forties or a little younger, sophisticated and willing to stay with him for a few weeks or months. He could afford to provide for her: a chauffeur driven car, money for shopping, the comforts of his home, clubs, cinemas, and restaurants. What more could any woman want? It was not whoring, it was not concubinage; it was respectable companionship with sex thrown in.” (10) Hence he gives an advertisement in two national dailies, *The Times of India* and *The Indian Express*.

The second chapter of the first part is *Dhanno*. Though this chapter deals with the sexual encounter of Mohan Kumar, it concentrates on the theme ‘lust is also an aspect of love – perhaps its most important constituent.’ And also focuses on main themes like racial discrimination, adultery, greed, gossip mongering, poverty, etc., This episode brings forth the sexual advancement of Mohan Kumar with a sweeper women Dhanno. It is certain that Khushwant Singh is always rational and practical in his approach. Above all he is a humanist. He is not a bigot and is totally against racial discrimination.

Dhanno is a sweeper woman who works in the house of Mohan Kumar. She has three children and a husband working in the municipality who is a drunkard. Her routine work is to mop the floor everyday. She is an untouchable. There are two other male servants who ‘never let her enter the kitchen. They avoided physical contact with her, and when she came to get the leftovers, they dropped dal-roti or whatever had not been eaten by their master into utensils she brought with her.’ (21)

Here Khushwant Singh brings to light the upper-class people treatment of the lower-class. Even the servants think themselves to be more superior to Dhanno. This sort of inhumanistic attitude is what Khushwant Singh is against.
As said in the beginning, Singh spares no one. It is not only the blunder of the upper-class to ill-treat the downtrodden but also the fault of the lower-class to consider themselves low and remain thus. They stoop before the rich and get whatever they are in need of. This attitude is elaborated with significance in this chapter.

When Mohan Kumar asks Dhanno about her name and family, she answers giving a lot of information about her poor financial status. “One thousand rupees per month. We have three children. Even with what I earn we barely manage to feed and clothe ourselves. My husband is a sharabi, sahib, waste a lot of money on liquor.” (17) Though this seems to be the answer for the question asked by Mohan Kumar, there is an implied meaning for want of money.

It is also another fact that the underprivileged spoil their own image or reputation and make the upper-class look at them with contempt since the poor are ready to do anything for the sake of money. “Such master-servant liaisons were not uncommon. Poorly paid menials welcome a second income and their spouses were nor very particular about infidelity provided it brought in some money.” (16) Dhanno succumbs and yields to the desire of Mohan Kumar not only for money, but also to have sexual satisfaction since her husband is a drunkard.

Mohan Kumar after placing advertisement in the news papers waits for its result. Once while having his post-breakfast Havana cigar notices Dhanno sitting and mopping the floor. Not being with a woman for a long time makes him admire the physical charm of Dhanno. “Mohan decided to keep the sweeper woman in mind in the event of failure other fronts. She would provide no companionship but would at least solve his most important problem.” (16)
He remembers the words of his college mate that “sweeper women made the best lovers; they were uninhibited, wild and hot.” (16) “Mohan had noticed that as a class the so-called untouchable women were in fact the most touchable.” (16) He also assumes that poorly paid menials would always look for a second income and their spouse would not care about infidelity if it brought money.

Mohan Kumar gives money to Dhanno and buys some balloons and sweets for her children and makes it very clear to her that he was looking to have sex with her. Days pass by, but not too long before both get a chance to make love to each other to quench their thirst.

Not only does Khushwant Singh make a dig at sex and racism but also comments on the gossip mongers. He says that the first few days, weeks and months are very difficult for people whose marriage is broken or whose long-term relationship is broken. One will have to answer all his relatives and friends on “What went wrong? Was your sex life happy? Did she want more than you could give? Was a third party involved? What about those women your wife hated because you made passes at them? And what about that fellow who was always looking lecherously at your wife... You could ignore such people, ... Then they lost interest in your personal life.” (17-18) These types of people can also be called as sadists who find happiness in other’s sorrow. Khushwant Singh being a person of high spirit and jovial nature condemns these vehemently.

Letter from Rewari is the third chapter of the first part. It is the continuation of the first chapter where Mohan Kumar had given advertisements inviting women for temporary companionship. Here too Khushwant Singh satirizes on the illicit affairs that
exists between men and women. That too in a country (India) where marriage is regarded ‘as a sacrosanct bonding for life.’ (26) Singh beautifully has pictured the broken marriage that is on the increase today.

Mohan Kumar waiting for a few weeks time after having had given an advertisement to have temporary companionship scans through the two news papers in which he had advertised. He finds people belonging to various religions who had given advertisements in the matrimonial columns were only concerned about the community, caste particularly the sub-caste, wealth (money) and ‘preferably virgins.’

Both had four to six pages with headlines to indicate castes and callings. Hindus were the most numerous with different columns for Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The emphasis won on sub-castes. There were Jains, . . . Christians . . . Muslims as well. . . . The smaller the community, the more sub-castes it had. . . . They too sought girls of their own community and caste. Preferably virgins. (26)

And at the end of the columns he finds his advertisement in a separate boxed item entitled ‘Miscellaneous’ and is surprised that “in a tradition-bound country such advertisements were accepted and published.” (26)

Khushwant Singh here satirizes not only the one who rely much on caste and money, but also the media which instead of being used for constructive purpose is used as a tool to degrade morality merely for money.

Mohan Kumar receives the first response from an unexpected quarter. “It was not through the PO box number indicated in the newspaper advertisement but bore his name and home address. It was a one-word message: ‘BASTARD’ – all seven letters in
capitals.” (27) It is certain that the letter would have come from his wife who would have suspected ‘that it was her in no doubt that it was her ‘goonda’ ex-husband shopping for sex.’ (28) Gloating over the matrimonial columns is one of Sonu’s pastime. Glancing through it she would giggle with delight. “Do you know what “Good at HH affairs” means? she would ask, and reply, ‘Household affairs……. And “C&D no bar”? – Caste and Dowry no bar……. All men want fair-skinned brides. And virgins. All virgins are maidens; not all maidens are virgins,’ she would explain. ‘No girl seeking a husband asks for a boy who has never slept with a woman.” (27)

Here Khushwant Singh satirizes the attitude of men who want their wives to be good at household affairs, fair-skinned and virgins.

Four days later Mohan Kumar receives a genuine response. It is a two page letter with a colour photograph depicting the face of the lady who had dropped the letter. It is from Sarojini Bharadwaj, Professor of English from Rewari (Hariyana). The letter runs like:

Dear Sir,

This is in response to your ad in the Sunday edition of The Times of India. . . . I too am looking for a male companion on a trial basis. . . . had an arranged marriage with a NRI from Canada. . . . Instead of facing charges of fraud and bigamy in India, he simply disappeared. I have a doctorate in English literature and am teaching undergraduates in a local college. . . . help in getting him a better education. As required, I am enclosing my photograph. . . . Although I have no religious prejudices. . . . I am a Brahmin by birth and practice Hindu rituals. . . . I look forward to hearing
from you. Please mark your letter confidential and address it to me at Lady Professors' Hostel, Flat No. 2, Government College for women, Rewari (Harayana).

Yours,

Sarojini Bharadwaj. (28, 29)

Mohan Kumar replies her letter mentioning his phone number. The very next day she calls him and fixes an appointment for the evening of the following Saturday. Mohan is seen anxiously waiting for her arrival and as she comes on the appointed day, “She touched both his feet before shaking his hand. The gesture was so incongruous for the occasion and so completely unexpected.” (31)

They come to know about each other. A little later after their meeting the lady professor, “her gaze fixed on her feet, asked, ‘I expect you will want to have sex with me?’” (35) Mohan is taken aback by her bluntness. “Less than half an hour ago, when she came in, this woman had touched his feet.” (35) As Mohan says it is a part of the deal, she says, “In that case I should first see a doctor. I don’t want to take the risk of getting pregnant again. Children must be born in wedlock, not of a temporary relationship.” (35)

At this point Khushwant Singh exposes the nature of the Indian parents who are most concerned about their status and money. Sarojini’s father gives her in marriage to a man who said that he lived in Canada and never returns after making her pregnant. This is how many of the unfortunate women are abandoned from their marriage life not only by their husbands but also by their parents. Khushwant Singh being a humanist is strongly against in this concern.
Though the sexual urge is there in every woman, some try to suppress it due to nervousness and counting the consequences that would arise if they indulged in it. And the rest of them get involved in adultery due to either for want of money or for sex. Sarojini is one such type. Being discarded by her husband - having a son and for want of sex she enters into such a relationship.

It seems like Khushwant Singh is defending and arguing for women’s liberty and freedom. When a man like Sarojini’s husband could cheat her and make her married life miserable, why can’t she do this in return? Mohan Kumar, after the departure of Sarojini senses the consequences that he would have to face if she came to him and stayed for a few weeks or months. Though he could have a good time with Sarojini, he is a bit concerned about his men-servants and more apprehensive of Dhanno more. He thinks Dhanno would be more difficult to convince. He knew that women: “had an uncanny sixth sense which warned them of the presence of rivals claiming the attention of their. . . Married men were so absorbed in themselves that their wives could cuckold them for years without being suspected of infidelity.” (36)

One can never take Khushwant Singh for granted. On one hand it seems that Singh is for women and on the other against women. This is because Khushwant Singh is never a man of reservations. He tells what is what and is never frightened to say what is right.

Dhanno, who once had been a black beauty and dearer to Mohan, now having lost her novelty, finds her to be of less importance. His main concern was how and what would be the reaction of Dhanno. Later he thinks, “Dhanno had no moral right, really, to sulk or quibble; she was cheating on her husband. Mohan could be as unfaithful to her as
he liked since she was neither his wife nor a concubine—just a pro term sharer of his bed, for which she was duly compensated.’ (36-37) Later, Mohan even comes to such an extent that he snubs Dhanno for bringing in the subject of his so-called cousin (Sarojini).

Khushwant Singh stresses the fact that sex is an integral part of life. Here he brings out the fact that it is also stained in various aspects. The crookedness of both the genders is clearly brought to light. Dhanno cheats her husband, who in turn, is cheated by Mohan Kumar. It is all like the universal fact that, ‘What you sow, so you reap.’

Three days later Mohan Kumar gets a letter from Professor Sarojini Bharadwaj wherein the development of intimacy is found. She addresses him as ‘Dear Mohan Ji’ and ends it as ‘with love, yours, Saroj.’ She intimates him that she would be free from mid-September and wanted him to confirm his date according to his convenience for which Mohan invites her in return on the first of October and ends his letter with ‘Love, ever yours, Mohan.’

Days pass by and Mohan receives more letters from women showing interest in his offer. They belong to different communities from various parts of India. All are well educated and attractive. He wrote them a standard reply that he was going abroad on business for a few months and would get in touch with them as soon as he returned. “Most of them were divorced or living separately from their husbands; one was a spinster... educated, working women; teachers, nurses, steno-typists.” (38)

Khushwant Singh stresses that it is not only the case of Sarojini, but also of many women who belonged to the same category. Inspite of having a good profession with a sound income, they are ready for such a deal because of their need for sex or money.
The chapter ends with an anxious Mohan expecting the arrival of Sarojini. Khushwant Singh satirizes people like Mohan who give primary importance to sex. "He checked all the items in his guest room: . . . The bathroom had fresh towels, new cakes of soap, tooth brush and paste, comb and brush and a bottle of cologne; everything that a five-star hotel would provide. . . . He put twenty five-hundred-rupees notes in a buff envelop with a slip of paper reading: . . . The cook has been told to serve you lunch . . . Just let me know all is okay." (40-41)

The fourth chapter of the first part of the novel entitled Sarojini is a realistic representation of life. Though the chapter superficially seems to be an episode on the sexual life between Mohan and Sarojini, an undercurrent holistic love-life is presented in a very realistic manner. Both Mohan Kumar and Sarojini are seen as characters shopping for sex. As per Indian culture it is something which cannot be justified. But sex is also one of the factors that lead to love. It is the urge for sex that brings love between Mohan and Sarojini. Though Khushwant Singh satirizes people like Mohan and Sarojini who go for a temporary companionship, he makes it very clear that it is the sex that develops love in both genders. Khushwant Singh here brings out the significance of true love by bringing out the fact that 'the word love had made lust profane.' (70)

The essence of true love is found only when it is lacking. Mohan has a lot of money, wealth and all in his life but does not have a companion to share his love and bed. He is the one to whom love is totally restricted. After thirteen long years of fretful life he gets separated from his ill-tempered, nagging wife. On the other hand, Sarojini had faced much sorrow in her life. Her husband who was supposed to be in Canada disappears never to return. But she has a son. The marriage is said to have broken within a short span of time and nearly twelve long years had passed for Sarojini to come back to normalcy.
Loneliness breeds a longing for companionship through sex. It is this longing for love that leads both Mohan and Sarojini to enter into a deal of temporary companionship. It seems like Khushwant Singh argues in favour of Mohan and Sarojini whose lives were totally isolated, cheated and lacked love. When the so-called better-halves have cheated them there is no harm in indulging in such a relationship. Here Khushwant Singh views Indian life not as an Indian but as an outsider. One who looks into this issue as an Indian would certainly not entertain this viewpoint, and yet would approve of the same in secrecy.

Sarojini arrives at the house of Mohan and leads a blissful life making herself and Mohan happy. As per the deal, Mohan offers her all that he had promised to give as in the advertisement but maintains a distance when she comes too close. He becomes cautious and intimidated with the idea that she may establish certain rights over him. Mohan did not like her taking over the household. He administrated a slight snub. “The cook knows what I like and from where to get it. I give him money every morning to by provisions. He renders accounts to me. You don’t have to worry about the servants or my food. Just order whatever you like for yourself.” (49, 50) In spite of this he becomes emotionally tied-up to her at the end of the episode.

Things go on smoothly till Mohan comes to know through the newspaper that his father-in-law had died. He attends the funeral where he is insulted by one of his brother-in-laws. He comes to know that his companionship with Sarojini has reached the ears of Sonu and her family members. He suspects his servants, but never tries to interrogate them. Instead he feels a heavy burden in his mind. At the same time his sexual fondness towards Sarojini lessens. As a result of these, in spite of his emotional tie-ups with her, he
throws hint that alerts Sarojini and she prepares to move out of his life. The climax is so touching and pathetic. “Tears dwelled up in Sarojini’s eyes. Mohan held her face in his hands and wiped the tears with his thumbs. . . . That was the last Mohan saw of Sarojini. She did not call up or write. It took a few days for it to sink in that the Sarojini chapter of his life was over.” (74)

By birth a Brahmin, and well educated, it is hard to conceive that Sarojini hailing from an orthodox family, would enter into a promiscuous alliance with a total stranger. While the novelist considers such a relationship as questionable, he also satirizes with all good intentions but with a warning to all men and women not to fall prey to such practices.

Dhanno, the jamadhami is another such to share the bed with Mohan Kumar. She is possessive and considers Sarojini as her rival:

The two women sized each other up. Sarojini noticed that the untouchable woman was a lot more desirable than herself: . . . She was dark, poorly clad, but sexy. Dhanno saw the college teacher as a rival: sexless but brainy. . . . Men were not discriminating, they took whatever was available. . . . Men set little store by fidelity. They soon tired of having one woman and went looking for another. (51)

Women think themselves to be superior and demanded respect. “Take me to Khan Market, she ordered curtly, irritated with the chauffeur’s indifferent manners. . . . She was determined to have them all respect her.” (52)

_After Sarojini_ is the final chapter of the first part of the novel. Singh brings to light the upper-class Indian’s life style, hypocrisy and attitude towards sex.
The first few days after Sarojini had left him, Mohan feels disturbed and a little confused in his feelings. He finds emptiness all over his house. But ironically he likes this emptiness and leads an enjoyable life in this loneliness. He remembers his college years in the States and the women he went to bed with. Sometimes he even took out the letters and photographs of the women who had responded to his advertisement. “But he was not ready to take on any one for some weeks or perhaps months. He put the correspondence back in his drawer lest he change his mind.” (76-77) Here Khushwant Singh brings out the hypocrisy of men who are really after pleasure but don’t go after it looking into the consequence to be faced from the society. He also brings to light that the sexual instinct is more in women than men and that when “given the opportunity they were as willing to try out different men as men were to try out different women.” (76)

Dhanno, who had been abandoned for the time being, approaches Mohan to ask forgiveness for gossiping against Mohan and Sarojini. This is done certainly not only to satisfy her maalik but also to satisfy her sexual urge and make an income. She says, “Maalik, if I have erred, please forgive me; otherwise I will kill myself.” (77) Later Mohan Kumar having no intention of dismissing her, accepts her to be his part-time partner to satisfy his lust.

Singh being a humanist basically presents the hypocrisy of the upper-class who spends a lot of money on luxury and how in the name of clubs they entertain themselves and others and the criteria to become a member of those clubs.

You had to have a bungalow in one of New Delhi’s posh residential localities and . . . Three cars were a must: a Mercedes Benz or a Toyato
for the boss; a Maruti, or a Fiat for the memsahib; and a third one as a spare. Keeping dogs of high pedigree... Chihuahua for the memsahib gave you class. (79-80)

Likewise he has a dig at ladies who give much importance to their physical beauty and the amount they spend to attain them. "She never missed her weekly visit to a five-star hotel beauty parlour for a hair wash, hair dressing, facial, waxing of legs and arms, removing hair growth on the upper lip and the chin. The total came to paltry Rs. 1000 a visit. She gave him no peace, not even good sex, but made the most of his money." (80)

It is a practise among the members to invite their friends to their houses and treat them with the costliest food and drinks. Once Mohan takes some of his friends and as "they knew that he had parted company from his wife. So there would be no tension on that score. As they came up he shook hands with the men and kissed their wives on both cheeks. Kissing wives was de rigueur: cheeks if the husbands were looking, lips when they were not." (81) This is something which is against the Indian culture. "They went on to affairs of their other friends and how their business were doing. They bitched and gossiped. They drank and ate." (82) Intentionally the novel throws light on the illegal and amorous links between the two sexes, especially of those who belong to the higher strata of society, affluent, educated and self-sufficient by all means.

_I, Mohan Kumar_, is the first chapter of the second part (_The Memoirs of Mohan Kumar_) of the novel. From this chapter, the narration is in first person singular where Mohan Kumar himself addresses the readers by way of introduction. He gives a brief description of his childhood days and parents. As a motherless child he was brought up
by his mother’s unmarried sister for two years who later gets married. Later he is put into school and due to his academic excellence he is able to get a scholarship in an American University and joins the Princeton.

Jessica Browne is the second chapter of the second part of the novel where Singh turns his satirical weapon towards the Americans. Though he is much attracted towards the western culture, he also find things inhumanistic in America. Through his depiction of the relation between Mohan Kumar and Jessica Khushwant Singh hints at reforming the needful.

As Mohan Kumar reaches Princeton, he is welcomed by his senior students and is exposed to everything in the university. He enjoys and feels very happy. Later while playing tennis he gets introduced to Jessica Browne, one of his seniors at Princeton, who is good at playing tennis. It is she who initiates Mohan Kumar to sex. She takes him to his room where he loses his chastity. Next few months they get along with each other very intimately as if it was a permanent relationship. But that doesn’t last long. He finds Jessica getting irritated with him over small things. They begin to drift apart. Then one day he sees her going out with another boy, hand-in-hand. He feels jealous. But ‘jealousy is something American disdain as a medieval emotion. You break up with one, you take up with another.’ (95) This initiation into sex and jealousy makes Mohan go “on the rampage like a stud bull in a herd of cows on heat.” (96)

Thus young boys are initiated into sex and ultimately go to the extent of becoming womanizers. This also reflects the lifestyle of the Americans contrary to that of the Indians.

Yasmeen is the third chapter of the second part of the novel. Here Singh’s excellent craftsmanship in harmoniously blending facts is noticeable. Superficially the
episode seems to deal with Mohan's friendship with (Yasmeen) but underlying it is really a satire on religion and men who fight in the name of the religion. Not that Singh condemns religions, but that he comments on certain drawbacks of a religion. Be it Hindu, Islam, Jew or Christianity, he candidly draws out the defects of a religion. Generally satirists have the tendency to probe into the follies and foibles of human society and magnify them. But Khushwant Singh has a different perspective. He also brings to light enlightening aspects worth mentioning.

Mohan Kumar, apart from attending his major classes on Management and Computers, also attended classes on international affairs and Comparative Religion as an additional subject. It is in this class of Dr Ashby's that he meets Yasmeen, wife of a minister in the Azad Kashmir Government. She is the mother of two children and also active in politics and a member of the Assembly. Her forefathers were Brahmin Pandits who later got converted to Islam.

Singh has made use of Yasmeen, Mohan Kumar and another Jew student as the tool for his satirical purpose. Each defend their religion and bring out the demerits of the other religions. All their arguments are really very interesting to the readers.

In one of the classes Dr Ashby, the Professor of Comparative Religion deals with the world's major religions. He lectures on the four Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. About this Mohan Kumar exclaims that, "They made more sense to me than the other religious texts he had dealt with." (97)

After the lecture of Dr Ashby, Yasmeen rises and says:

What you said about Hindu philosophy is all very well. But tell us, why do the Hindus of today worship a monkey as a god, an elephant as a god; they
worship trees, snakes and rivers. . . . Their most popular god Krishna, started out as a heir and lied when caught thieving; he stole girls' clothes while they were bathing so he could watch them naked; he had over one thousand mistresses; his lifelong companion was not his wife but his aunt Radha. . . . Hindus . . . worship living humans as godmen and godwomen . . . . They believe a dip in the Ganges washes away all their sins, so they can start sinning again! . . . Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita! Should we not examine these aspects of Hinduism as it is practiced today? (98-99)

As Yasmeen stops her argument Dr Ashby restores the atmosphere to an academic level and says, "This sort of thing could be said about all religious, he said gently. What their founders taught and what their scriptures stand for are far removed from how they are interpreted and practiced today. Our concern is with theory and not practice. Muslim condemn the worship of idols, yet they kiss the meteorite stone in the Kaaba and millions worship the graves of their saints." (99) This argument aims at attacking the Muslim form of worship.

Yasmeen like others of her own community is projected as one who is concerned about her religion and prejudiced towards other religions. Again on another occasion Professor Ashby delivered a lecture on Islam, Yasmeen rose up excitedly to deliver an impassioned harangue:

What you have told us about Islam is historically accurate, Dr. Ashby. What you haven’t told us is why it is to day the most vibrant of religions. This is because it is the most perfect of all religious systems with precise rules of do’s and don’ts which everyone can follow. . . . Within few years
of His death, Islam spread like wildfire from the Pacific Coast to the Atlantic Coast of Europe; it spread all over Asia and the African continent. It overcame the opposition of five worshippers, Jews, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus. Why does Islam gain more converts than any other religions? These are some of the questions that I would like the class to discuss. (103)

A young mild-mannered Jew retaliaiates:

Can she deny that Islam borrowed most of its ideas from Judaism? Their greeting, salam valaikum, is derived from the Hebrew shalon alech; the names of their five daily prayers are taken from Judaism. We turn to Jerusalem to pray; they borrowed the ideas from us but instead turn to Makka. Following the Jewish practice they circumcise their male children. They have taken the concept of haraam (unlawful) and Halaal (legitimate), what to eat and what not to eat, from the Jewish kosher. We Jews forbid eating pig’s meat because we regard it unclean. Muslim do the same. We bleed animals to death before we eat them. Following us, so do they . . . . Why are they forever calling for jehad – holy war with infidels and fighting against each other? (104-105)

Dr Ashby puts an end to the pointless wrangle. Yasmeen’s face flushes with anger. And to this Mohan Kumar makes a point that probably is the belief of Singh: “why are so kattar (bigoted)? Muslims are the most bigoted religious community in the world. Their Prophet was the greatest, their religion is the best, Muslims are the most
enlightened community, the most God-fearing and righteous of all mankind. If the Jews think they are God's chosen people, Muslims think they are the choicest of the chosen. How can you be so narrow-minded?” (105)

Based on the attitude of people like Yasmeen who criticizes the Hindu practices, Singh puts forth his own idea through Mohan. After the lecture of Dr Ashby on Hinduism Yasmeen asks certain question to lessen the reputation of Hinduism. This aggravates the wrath of Mohan and when asked by Yasmeen, “Are you a Hindu from Bharat?” (100), he replies: “I am,' I replied as tersely as I could, ‘and proud of being both. And I don’t worship monkeys, elephants, snakes, phalluses or yonis. My religion is enshrine in one word, ahimsa – don’t hurt anyone.” (100) In another context when Yasmeen says that the Muslim is the best community, Mohan asks her not to be narrowed minded. In turn she replies that she was not bigoted and that she wanted to tell something about her religion for which Mohan says, “I don’t have much patience with any religion. All I say try not to injure anyone’s feelings. . . . Gods, Prophets, scriptures, rituals, pilgrimages mean very little to me.” (105-106)

Harping on the patriotic zeal of the Muslim he makes it very clear that the Pakistani's are very much concerned about it. The following lines very clearly show how much hatred both Hindus and Muslims have towards each other and how much love they have for their country. It may be because Khushwant Singh previously lived in Hadali, a place now in Pakistan and Mohan Kumar probably echoes his creator’s beliefs.

Though Mohan and Yasmeen strongly argue and defend their country, they come close to such an extent that Mohan is invited by Yasmeen to her apartment and takes him
to the lusty world. When their sexual thirst is quenched Mohan asks her as to how she firmly could she stand by Islamic values with what she and he had been doing, she is not able to justify the sinful act that she had committed.

At last as her university grant is over she leaves America and returns to Pakistan. Later Mohan says, “Whenever anyone said anything against Muslims, my hackles rose because I had been made love to by a Muslim woman. Whenever anyone said anything against Pakistan, I strongly defended that country because I had been made love to by a Pakistani woman. It was not love but lust that proved to be a great healer.” (113) Khushwant Singh brings out the fact that whatever the religion and however orthodoxical the men might be, when it comes to bodily compulsion, lust is stronger than love.

*Home Coming* is the fourth episode of the second part of the novel. It is a brief episode filled in with the details of Mohan Kumar’s return from America to Delhi. After getting the highest academic distinction from the American university (Princeton) he returns to Delhi to be with his father. Furthermore it is that patriotic zeal and a quest for identity that brings him back to India. He had enjoyed life very much in America. Though he had bedded scores of women, offered highly paid jobs by multinational corporations, saved enough money by coaching students, offered lecturer jobs in the department of Mathematics and even a Green Card to settle in America, he says, “I liked living in the free and easy atmosphere that prevailed in the States, with all the creature comforts it provided, and despite finding Americans the easiest people to befriend, I did not have a sense of belonging to the country or its people. I was Indian, belong to India, wanted to make my mark in India and nowhere else.” (114) Unlike the disloyal modern counterparts, Mohan Kumar deserves the reader’s admiration in his decision to settle down in his native soil and serve his mother land.
It is certainly an undeniable fact that everyone has the idea to earn more and therefore prefer to go abroad. Mohan Kumar finds many Indians in America like “doctors, engineers, teachers, hoteliers – all doing much better money-wise then they could ever have in India. Even the latest arrivals – mostly factory workers and cab drivers – earned enough in dollar; to be able to send decent money back home to ensure that their children went to public schools and their wives lived in comfort in their villages, while the men themselves had women – American, European immigrants and latinos – to cook, keep house and warm their beds. With everything going for them, they talk of their watan, ate Indian food, listened to Indian film music and often cried in their sleep. Their common theme was, ‘Once I have made enough dollars, I will go back to my village.’ Hardly any did.” (115)

Khushwant Singh is both surprised and ashamed to see people going to foreign countries even to work as scavengers just for money. When Mohan Kumar returns from America the plane touches London airport he is “surprised to see a number of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis working as waiters and barmen; women in salwar-kameez scrubbing floors and cleaning toilets. What had they left their countries for? To wash white men’s dishes and mop up their urine splattered around urinals?” (117-118)

When Mohan glances through the Indian newspapers they appeared uniformly dull and had just reports of politicians abusing each other. Not in a single novel has Khushwant Singh spared the politicians. To him politicians are the symbols or signs of evil and silliness. Even the higher officials in India who always try to make money by some means are attacked by Singh in this episode.
When Mohan lands in India and had to get through the customs, the customs officer tries to get hold of Mohan in order to get something for him but Mohan “had denied him an opportunity to appropriate some little gadget or trinket, at least to throw his weight around and feel important. I was back in India – there was no doubt about that.” (118-119)

*Getting Married* is the fifth episode of the second part of the novel that narrates the following events. Mohan Kumar’s father is happy over happiness over his son’s return from the States. He invites his friends to show off his son’s achievements. He gives advertisements in the news papers in the matrimonial columns inviting brides. It is then that he comes into contact with Lala Achint Ram and Sonu and finally Mohan and Sonu get married to each other.

Through these incidents Khushwant Singh has a laugh at the attitude of the Indian parents, superstitious beliefs, chauvinism, dowry system, money mindedness, love, gossip mongers, self-esteem, corruption (bribery) and so on.

One day Mohan and his father go to Haridwar. Mohan’s father takes him to river Ganga and asks Mohan to take a dip in the water to wash off his sins. He gives Mohan a lot of details about the place and the purity of Ganga and the faith people had in its purity. “These pots must never touch the ground, if they do the holy water loses its purity. Ganga Jal is sacred. Drops are put into the mouths of new born babies as well as the dying. Idols are bathed in it before they are worshipped.” (132) The Hindus mainly believe that Ganga is a goddess. To Khushwant Singh and many of the rationalists, this is certainly considered to be superstitious. It is a fact that rivers play a vital role in the development of a country and it is also one of the important water resources for human
necessities. Hence it should be kept clean. But people in the name of religion pollute and contaminate the water and make it unclean. To show his disgust over this issue Singh speaks through Mohan:

    Pitaji, this is bharam (superstition). . . . Now most of the rivers in the west are polluted with industrial effluents as ours are with garbage, human excreta and half-burnt corpses. At Haridwar the Ganga is clean because it descends from the snow-clad mountains. But see it after it has run past Allahabad, Varanasi and Patna and you will hesitate to put your foot in it. By the time it becomes the Hoogly in Bengal, it stinks like a sewer. (132)

Khushwant Singh in the very same episode sarcastically comments on superstitious beliefs when Mohan’s father tells Achint Ram to consult his astrologer to fix a suitable time and date for the marriage. Mohan says, “I was suddenly transported from a world in which men and women bedded each other if they so desired into another where they sought the guidance of palmists, astrologers and soothsayers before taking off their clothes.” (140)

Being a humanist, Khushwant Singh in many of his novels has spoken in favour of women. He is a man who is more concerned about women’s liberation. Singh satirizes people who treat women as inferior and deny their rights. When Mohan Kumar and his father visits Achint Ram’ house for the first time, the family members are introduced. The wives of all the three sons of Achint Ram “folded their hands, said namaste and sat down on the sofa furthest from us. They were not expected to open their mouths. They did not.” (134) Even Sonu the only daughter says, “I did my BA in English literature from Miranda House. Papa would not let me do an MA.” (134-135) This very clearly shows the male domination prevailing in the society.
Once while returning after visiting Achint Ram's house Mohan's father is seen in an expansive mood. He says to Mohan that, "The Rai Bahadur told me that his daughter will get an equal share of his property with her brothers. That could be several crores. He's more than willing to make you a business partner." (135)

Khushwant Singh also comments on the hypocrisy of man. Usually people, particularly the Indians are very much concerned about their status in the society. For this they show their acquaintance with VIPs and never develop any relationship below their status. Here Achint Ram's house has the 'silver framed photographs of powerful politicians, but no Gandhi, no Nehru' (136) It is not only the attitude of Achint Ram, but also of Mohan's father. "Father was obviously looking forward to a matrimonial alliance that would raise his status in society. Lala Achint Ram was keen to have an 'America-returned,' highly educated boy as his son-in-law to add respectability and sophistication to all the benefits of wealth that he already had." (138-139) Even on the day of the marriage of Mohan Kumar and Sonu, Mohan says: “For Rai Bahadur it was an occasion to display his wealth and high connections; ministers, governors, judges, senior bureaucrats and over a thousand others of the elite of the city accepted his invitation.” (147)

Khushwant Singh attacks the elite who believe in exhibiting their status through wealth. When Mohan in the initial stage of his business he says, “I was quick to learn the tricks of the trade, the most important being: when you run into an unsolvable problem, use grease liberally; it opens all doors.” (144) Through this it is very obvious that things can be done easily by money. In another context Singh brings out the same idea.
When the marriage invitation is printed and issued Mohan says, "My father did not have many friends but the news that his son was to marry Bahadur Achint Ram’s only daughter revived many old friendships and relations." (146)

_Honeymoon in the Shivaliks_ is the sixth episode of the second part of the novel. Though being a long episode, the satirical elements found in this chapter are comparatively less. The only idea Khushwant Singh likes to stress is on the individuality that everyone should possess. Once it is lost, certainly one has to be under the domination of others. Being greedy will certainly have its own effects. Mohan Kumar marries Sonu only because of the insistence of his father.

After the marriage Mohan and Sonu go to the Shivaliks for their honeymoon and spend nearly five days. Due to the latter’s ill-health they return before schedule. The reactions of her parents to Mohan seem odd and different. They saw him ‘as if he had committed a crime.’ (162) Later they come to know that Sonu is pregnant. Difference in opinion starts developing. Mohan feels that he is being neglected by his wife and her family members. He decides to leave the house given by Achint Ram and purchases a new double storey building and names it ‘Ranjith Villa’ to which he later takes Sonu and his son along with two nurses to look after the baby.

If Mohan had married a girl according to his status certainly he would not have faced such problems in his life is what Khushwant Singh tries to suggest here. This disparity in status is another hurdle in Mohan’s life.

This episode, _Mary Joseph_ deals with the illicit affair that Mohan has with Mary Joseph, a nurse from Tamil Nadu. She was the nurse appointed to look after the child. Mohan seduces her though she never resists. She is a Christian and Roman Catholic, in
particular, where there is no divorce and a strict outlaw to illicit affairs. She complains of her husband’s drunkenness and that she had to look after the family. Though being a Christian she has her own reasons to entertain Mohan Kumar.

She even confesses that she had sex with her husband’s younger brother and another time with a padre of her village church. “Once his younger brother had me. Also very small and very quick quick. The padre of our village church was much better. But he was sorry for doing it. After he finished he asked me to pardon him and made me pray with him to Jesus to ask his forgiveness. Imagine, no, still naked and sweating and kneeling on the floor and praying to God! He made me feel worse than a prostitute who did it without asking for money.” (181)

It is very apparent that Singh has a dig at Christians rather than Christianity. Finally Mary is sent away by Sonu who senses a relationship between her husband and Mary. But the relationship continues outside the house. Mohan once even takes Mary to a five star hotel ‘Ashoka’ to quench his sexual thirst.

Khushwant Singh, through Mohan, brings out the fact that, “Sex is important. When denied it becomes more important. The body’s need comes above religious taboos and notions of morality.” (177) Singh makes it very clear that it is not only Mohan who indulges in such affairs, but also many men. “Room waiters on the third floor knew what businessmen from Bombay, Calcutta and Madras wanted in the way of relaxation when they came to Delhi.” (179)

This is the eight episode of the second part of the novel is *How the Marriage Died*. The novelist presents in detail how the marriage of Mohan with Sonu comes to an end. The ill-temper, jealousy and possessive nature of Sonu turn her quarrelsome to the
extent of driving her husband from her. Though there is no happiness in the family, the children come as a cementing factor between the husband and wife. Mohan’s father and the young Ranjith are very close to each other much to the chagrin of Sonu. “Pitaji, you are spoiling him,” she would say. ‘He gets too excited when you are around and refuses to go to bed.’” (186) Mohan’s father senses that Sonu did not like him living in the house and leaves for Haridwar. Once in a while in long intervals, he used to visit his son and grand children.

Five years later he dies at Haridwar, where his body was cremated without the knowledge of Mohan. Only two days later Mohan receives the message that his father is no more, goes to Haridwar, does all the post-funeral rituals. Khushwant Singh describing the beliefs and rituals satirizes the religious taboos. When Mohan takes the sacred ash of his father to dissolve it in the river Ganga, one of the pandas takes him to the river and begins to “chant mantras in Sanskrit. Half-way through he stretched out his palm and demanded dakshina.” (200, 201) With his hand he emptied the contents in the urn into the river when Mohan grabs it firmly stating, “This I will do myself,” I said in a firm voice. ‘No one else will touch my father’s remains.’” (201) This he does because:

Besides pandas who recite the appropriate mantras, two other trades have been established in the place. One is the sifting the gold or silver fillings of the teeth of the dead persons from their ashes. This is done by urchins who stand waist deep in the river, shining mirrors into the water to catch the glint of precious metal. They then feel the ashes with their toes and dive down to pick any bit of metal they find. They work in partnership with the paandas who make it a point to empty the urns as close to the bank as possible to make the retrieval of gold and silver easier. (202)
Here Singh attacks the priests and pandas of the temples and ghats who are materialistic in attitude.

Later Mohan returns to the ashram to settle his father’s accounts and finds that it ‘was no place for sentiments’ (201) Here Khushwant Singh talks about the lack of humanism in today’s society. The director of the ashram handed over the bill to be settled to Mohan without any emotion and Mohan is remembered of the “post card he had sent me about father’s death. He could have sent a telegram – but why would he waste any money on a man who was merely a tenant?” (201) Singh is surprised that even in such a holy place much importance is given to money and not man.

Mohan and returns home with a heavy heart. After performing all the rituals Mohan returns home to once again experience the verbal torture of Sonu. She keeps nagging Mohan continuously until and their conjugal relation snaps. “We can’t go on like this for much longer, she said angrily once. ‘We make each other unhappy; it would be better if we lived apart.” (194) This repeated torment given by Sonu makes Mohan think, “All trapped in the meaningless quest for money, creature comforts and hankering for social respectability.” (195)

He reacts in a different manner and blames her for driving his father away from the house. This difference in opinion later develops into heated argument and paves the way for their permanent separation.

Molly Gomes is the ninth episode of the second part of the novel where Mohan after a brief period of loneliness and perplexed mind decides to advertise for paid lady companions. “It was an extraordinary decision. But I am glad I made it because it brought me many moments of joy.” (210) In this brief period Mohan takes Dhanno as his mistress
till she steps out of his life in a most unexpected way. Through the character Dhanno, Singh satirizes the lower class people who lack morality and loyalty. Some people like Dhanno don’t show their loyalty to their masters even if they are benevolent and kind to them. Though Mohan Kumar needed only physical pleasure he gives Dhanno a lot of money and sex to her satisfaction besides other privileges. But one day it is surprising to find Dhanno arrested by the police for thieving and prostituting. The Sub-inspector and policewomen ask Mohan if he knew her and displays the item found in Dhanno’s house. “French perfume and nail polish, a pair of gold earrings, two pairs of ladies’ shoes, a couple of saris, two pair of silk salwar-kameez and a Cartier gold pen.” (211) These belonged to Mohan and Sonu.

Yet Mohan protects Dhanno by declaring, “I don’t think any of these items belonged to this house. The little I know of this woman is that she is clean and honest and does her work well. I have no complaints against her.” (211) And when Dhanno regrets her mistake he assures her saying, “Your children will be fed by my servants – don’t worry about them. If you want a lawyer to defend you, tell your husband to see me. I will arrange for one. If the magistrate wants anyone to testify to your good character, you can name me.” (212)

In this context the corrupt and crooked nature of the police is sarcastically brought out. After Dhanno is taken away by the police, Mohan does not know her whereabouts. He says: “I missed my gold pen, which I was sure the sub-inspector had kept for himself. Sonu’s things were no doubt taken by the women constables. I had to buy another pen for Rs.15,000.” (213)

Mohan selects the application of Molly Gomes from Goa and writes back inviting her to stay with him as a paid companion. She arrives on the first of February and both
Mohan and Gomes have a very good time together. In his new found fascination he takes her to many places, buys lot of things for her and satisfies her in all aspects. Apart from sex they discuss various things that Khushwant Singh uses as a weapon to satirise society. Molly Gomes though Christian, a religion which condemns adultery, is a woman carefree by nature. ‘I was married once to a foreigner. He was no good at anything; all he wanted was a massage every day. So I chucked him up after a few days. Life is too short to be wasted on a fellow who is good at nothing. Don’t you agree?’ (214) Being a masseuse by profession she says, “And although they paid me, I did not feel that I was whoring because there was no talk of money beforehand, no bargaining. Everyone gave me a tip after a massage. If I gave them more than a massage, the tips were not a few hundred rupees but a few thousand – you can’t let that kind of easy money go. But my motto is: Have fun with the whites, marry only a Goan.” (237)

All these make no difference between Dhanno and Gomes except that Dhanno is a jamdharni whereas Gomes is a masseuse. This episode also satirizes the attitude of women.

Moly Gomes’ debut into an illicit life began as she narrates, “It was my own uncle, my mother’s younger brother, a good twenty years older than me.” (229) Singh accuses the old for being the cause to initiate the young minds into the sexual world.

Gomes criticizes the Hindus and their practices: “We enjoy life: drink, dance, sing and eat well. They just make money, worship the tulsi plant and visit the Mangesh temple on holidays. Though they outnumber us we have many more cathedrals than they have temples. Christians attend mass more regularly than Hindus do puja in their temples. We look down on Hindus and don’t intermarry with them.” (227) It is ironic to note that
she has come to share the bed with Mohan, a Hindu. Though this episode deals with the relationship of Mohan Kumar and Gomes, it does not give any significant reason for the departure of Gomes. Probably it is a warning signal wherein Singh intends to state that such extramarital ties don’t last.

*Susanthika* is the tenth episode of the second part of the novel. Like the previous episode this also has the elements of satire in a minimum level. It deals with the relationship between Mohan and Susanthika Goonatilleke from the High Commission of Sri Lanka. Mohan, after the exit of Gomes, gradually reconciles to the idea that he would never see Molly Gomes any more. Lonely and desperate, he once again starts visiting his clubs. “I could sense a charge in the attitude of my friends and their wives towards me. They stared at me as if they were seeing me for the first time. The men made snide remarks calculated to hurt or irritate me.” (250-251) He was well aware that it was the work of his ex-wife Sonu. “My sour ex-wife would not miss any opportunity to make my life public. She must have worked overtime to get the Delhi gossip mills working furiously.” (251) As a result of such remarks he gradually starts losing interest in sex since it affects his reputation. Now he realizes that the relationship he sought with women made him a social outcast. The thought is distasteful and to regain respectability. He tells his friends at cocktail parties about the experience of living Hinduism. Hinduism was not in the sacred texts but in the temples, at Haridwar and in the worship of the Ganga at sunset.

Once while talking about Haridwar to his friends he comes into contact with a woman in her late twenties. She introduces herself as Susanthika Goonatilleke from the High Commission of Sri Lanka. She shows great interest in knowing about Haridwar and finally Mohan agrees to take her to Haridwar. On the way to Haridwar their intimacy
develops culminating in sexual bliss. Their intimacy is noticeable when Mohan calls her ‘Sue’. She too reciprocates in a like manner. In her opinion, “As for liberated, yes I have no hang-ups about sex. If I like a chap and he likes me we get into bed. Nothing wrong in that, is there?” (266)

Through these Khushwant Singh is able to present the sexual instinct present in women. Like Gomes, Sue too has a flashback on how she was deflowered. “My own uncle, my father’s younger brother. . . . on the floor and tore into me.” (266) In return Sue seduces his fourteen-year-old son. This reflects the lack of morality in contemporary society.

So life goes on for three long years till Sue remain in her posting for third year in Delhi. She receives orders of transfer to the Sri Lanka Consulate in New York. She was given a month more in Delhi, after which she had to return to Colombo and stay there for a month for briefing before proceeding to her new posting. Both Mohan and Sue make full use of the interim period to make love until departure. “I dropped her at the Shanti Niketan turning after our last meeting, her parting words were: ‘Operation Colombo, Complete success.’” (274)

Khushwant Singh also satirises the falsehood prevailing in the society. As far as the society was concerned Mohan was previously considered to be a ‘sex maniac – who paid all kinds of women for their services to a man.’ But now the secret and clandestine relationship between Mohan and Sue is not known to anyone and he is considered to be a man of high quality. “Most in my circle of friends came to the conclusion that at long last I was going straight. It was a simple formula: if you . . . and were found out you were debauched, a goonda, unacceptable to society; if nobody got to know about it, you were a respectable citizens.” (273)
After the departure of Susanthika Mohan Kumar, if not devastated, was deeply saddened and “reconciled myself to losing her: losing a woman is not the end of all there is. While there is life, there is hope. I was not yet fifty and had much to look forward to.” (275) This expresses the spirit of optimism in Khushwant Singh. Yet he satirizes people like Mohan who live with the conviction that ‘sex is life’.

Mohan becomes lethargic and loses interest in business. He loses all desire to go to Haridwar. He yearned to see his children more often “who were not receptive to my advances.” (275) The idea of inviting another woman to be his paid companion no longer appealed to him. He became like a “rudderless boat in an endless ocean.” (276)

*A Bai in Bombay* is the first episode of the third and final part of the novel entitled *The Last Days of Mohan Kumar*. It records in detail Mohan’s temporary impotency; his despair; his meeting with the Bai culminating in a sexual encounter with her. Here Khushwant Singh satirizes the kind of people to whom the passing of years is not a warning signal and they continue to indulge in illegal sex encounters.

To Mohan the most difficult thing “to deal with in his adult life was the loss of sex drive.” (279) Since he had led a life only of sex, he is unable to accept his impotence. He goes on a business trip to Bombay and stays at Taj Mahal Hotel where the bearer brings in a prostitute on request. Mohan makes love to her on the first day and invites her for the next day too. On questioning, she refuses to reveal her identity: “No name. I am a married woman with children. I do this *dhanda* because my husband does not earn enough.” (282) This is exactly what Mohan was looking for. He recovers his jest for living and that still he could get along with his routine job. He becomes very happy.
After six months of his return from Bombay, Mohan’s health starts to deteriorate. He had never suffered any kind of illness before. It started with a bad stomach that led to loss of weight. He recovered after a fortnight but there was a relapse that was followed by dry racking cough. The next day, Vimal Sharma, his secretary, called a doctor to attend to Mohan.

The doctor comes to examine Mohan. At the clinic he undergoes many tests and scanning, is temporarily treated with aspirins and sponging with ice cool water to keep the fever under control. After three days the doctor comes to his house and enquires about his sexual life. Mohan relates everything including the encounter he had with Bai at Bombay. The doctor informs Mohan Kumar that his blood test shows an HIV positive result which makes Mohan totally gloomy. There was no one he could turn to for comfort. He worries a lot on how he could face the world. The doctor assures him: “I’m under oath not to divulge the ailments of my patients.” (291) With the advice of Dr. Malhotra, Mohan makes his last will and testament after consulting his lawyer. He gives rupees fifty thousand in cash to all who had served him faithfully. He shares the house, money and jewels among his children. It is only after that he feels lighter but very much concerned that if ‘Dr. Malhotra could rid him of the dreadful disease he could die an honorable death and spare his children the stigma of having a parent succumbed to a sexual related disease.’ (293) Mohan, in his last days, regrets all that he had done. He had lost his health, family, love and affection, in fact, all the finer values of life.

Herein has the message that the novelist intended to convey to the present generation.

The Death of Mohan Kumar is the final episode of the third and final part of the novel. Here Khushwant Singh brings to light that man goes in search of God only when
he is in trouble. Mohan Kumar, though a frequent visitor to the Haridwar, was not a dedicated God-fearing man. But in his last days “he recited the Gayathri mantra from sunrise to sunset. He started reading the Bhagavad Gita. He had his father’s copy, which he had found at the ashram in Haridwar. Much of what he read in it made sense to him, but the passages on death confused him. ‘There is no death,’ Lord Krishna said.” (294)

After two years of Dr. Malhotra’s pronouncing the dreaded verdict, Mohan led a healthy and normal life. He was very careful about his diet and medication. But in the month of October, he caught a chill and was informed by the doctor that he detected symptoms of TB in his lungs. This totally destroys the equilibirium of his mind and he gulps the thirty Calmose (tablets) one by one reciting each of the thirty Gayathtri Mantras to enter into a sleep that knows no awakening.

Sympathetic though we may feel for Mohan Kumar, it is a universal truth that all who indulge in such activities will have to face dire consequences.