Chapter VI

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Burial at Sea is again a satirical piece of fiction, lashing out at the bogus religion, politics, hypocrisy and the social taboos prevalent in the Indian minds. The novel begins with the embalmed body of Victor Jai Bhagwan, a brilliant young man with the temperament of a leader, and fiercely committed to his country. He returns from the university, in England, determined to bring the benefits of modern industry to the subcontinent. Within a few years of India's independence, he becomes the country's biggest tycoon and finds a place in the Darbar Hall of the Governors palatial residence, overlooking the Arabian Sea. Though few people knew him personally, he had become a legend - the queue of homage-payers bearing wreaths and flowers stretched over a mile beyond the entrance gate.

He had bequeathed all his property to his only child, Bharati, and also instructed her to have him buried at sea, close to the spot where his yatch Jal Bharati was usually anchored between the Gateway of India and the Elephanta Island. He had also specifically mentioned that no religious rites were to be performed. Nobody other than Bharati's aunts, their husbands, children, Ma Durgeshwari, the tantric woman, and her pet tiger Sheroo, and the yoga teacher Swami Dhananjay Maharaj were permitted to enter the yatch to perform the last rites of Victor.

People were totally confused on seeing the yoga teacher and the tantric woman on board because Victor was an agnostic. Just minutes before lowering the body of Victor into the sea, Bharati and Durgeshwari were allowed a private moment with the corpse of Victor Jai Bhagwan. She bent down and kissed the dead man full on his lips.
The novelist uses the flashback technique to take the readers into the living world of Victor Jai Bhagwan.

Krishan Lal Mattoo, wanted to bring up his only son Victor as an English aristocrat. He had made a tidy fortune as a practising lawyer in Delhi as well as the other High Courts of India. Many a time he had confronted English barristers and got the better of them because of his grasp of the law and oratory. Indian prince, zamindars and industrialists engaged him as their counsel and paid him whatever he asked for, as fees. Early in his career, Mattoo had built himself a double-storey mansion in Delhi's Civil Lines with an annexe for his office, a two-bedroom villa for his guest and a spacious garden growing exotica.

Khushwant Singh brings out the hypocrisy of Indians who lose their individuality and merge themselves into the westernized life. They cling on to the belief that they could raise their prestige and be one among the elite of the society. Money is no barrier to them. “Jai Bhagwan’s father, Krishan Lal Mattoo, wanted to bring up his only son as an English aristocrat.... And children that in order to deal with the British, one had to speak English like them, mix with them socially as an equal, learn to eat their kind of food on expensive China using silver forks and knives, and serve them premium Scotch and vintage French wines of better quality than they could afford.” (Burial, 8)

Ironically Singh points out to Gandhiji’s principles to bring such Indians to their senses. “Gandhiji is totally against these kinds of ideas and thoughts. Mattoo though was praised by Gandhiji for bringing honour and self-respect to India by worsting the British in their own law.” (10)
To the suggestion of children could be given the chance to learn English Gandhiji replies: “We have to have some Indians who can tell the English when to get out in a language they can understand. But don’t take it so far that they are ashamed of being Indian. Their roots must remain firmly embedded in Indian soil.” (11)

But this doesn’t mean that Khushwant Singh is totally against westernization. He himself accepts that he loves English language and that he finds it easy and comfortable for him to express his views in English than in any other language including his mother tongue. All that he wants is, like other Indians, to have an independent India, rich and prosperous.

Yet the novelist clearly brings out the merits and demerits in the doctrines proposed by Gandhiji. Of course Khushwant Singh admired Gandhiji for his ideas like non-violence, truth, and opposing caste system but as far as the development of India was concerned, he strongly opposed the views of Gandhiji reflected through the character Victor. Victor was asked by Valerie to write an essay on ‘The India of My Dreams’, that was to be sent to Gandhiji in Bombay whose doctrines he was not familiar with. So when he approached his father he replied: “Don’t be influenced by what Gandhi or anyone else has to say. Try and make up your own mind.” (20) This is what Khushwant Singh really wanted every Indian citizens to do – to think for themselves and not to be led away by others.

Victor went about the task with a zeal no one expected from a boy of thirteen. He contradicted everything Gandhiji stood for: handspun cloth, self-sufficient villages, very basic education. Victor wanted to see an India which had modern textile mills, steel plants, automobile factories, huge dams and thousands of miles of canals, every village
connected by road, more schools, colleges and hospitals, in short, the most prosperous country in the world, free of religious and caste prejudices, etc., etc. He ended his essay with the Latin phrase ‘Novus Ordo Seclorum’ – ‘new order for the ages’. (21-22)

When Victor joins Eton, an English boy who had been there for a longer period orders Victor: “You will press my cloths, polish my shoes and do as I tell you.” (44) In retaliation Victor gives him a snubbing reply: “Not at all, sir; the English have got us accustomed to that practice as well. They are also getting used to being buggered by Indians.” (45)

While in London, one day Victor was taken by Valerie to the “Speaker’s Corner where they heard speakers extolling the greatness of God as well as Communist spewing lava against the church and British Imperialism.” (43) Valerie, speaking high of her country, says that it was a great institution where “You let off steam on any subject you like and nobody gives a damn. It is a free country, with freedom to say what you like or dislike.” (43) For which Victor gives a sarcastic reply that, “We don’t see this freedom in India” (43)

The Indians are exhibited as uncultured men lacking in table manners. She comments on how conventionally Mrs. Mattoo behaves while the family imitates the western style. “She refused to eat with fork and knife and continued using her fingers. She refused to rinse them in a finger bowl and went to the wash basin to wash her hands, gargle and spit water out of her mouth. Her husband told her that she was becoming an embarrassment, so after some time she decided to eat her meals alone.” (13)

Later, once when Victor goes to a big Indian restaurant ‘Koh-i-Noor’, he sees a few diners: “two Indian families gobbling food with their fingers, and a couple of Englishmen still drinking their Scotch and soda and nibbling ‘pappadams’.” (49)
Singh also picturises the hospitality of the Indians when they meet other Indians of their native town. Usually when people from other states meet people from their home town, they express their joy and extend hospitality. But the Indians are of not such kind. Even if they come to know that the other is from his own land, they show no response. Even the waiter who attended on Victor didn’t show much recognition and ‘took his order without a smile’. (49) Khushwant Singh, through the attitude of the waiter in the Indian restaurant, in England tells that when Indians identify their own countrymen in a foreign land, they fail to acknowledge and express no friendliness.

On surface level Khushwant Singh may appear to be a man of high spirits leading a carefree and luxurious life, in reality he is a humanist who shows great concern for his nation and the people. When Victor returns to India after completion of his studies at Eton and gets admitted at Balliol College, he comes home, to spend the summer with his family members. In the course of his journey from Bombay to Delhi he observes that the whole country was in a pitiable condition. He describes thus:

The vast countryside and the seething towns seemed full of tired, dispirited people whom their gods had abandoned. They had all the world’s natural resources around them and yet they were paupers beaten down by long years of colonial rule. And thought that his destiny lay among them and that the British wouldn’t change India, Indians themselves would. They only needed the tools of industrial growth and some initiative. That was his mission. (61)

Khushwant Singh always has a soft corner for women as discerned from his characterisation. Like the character Sabhrai in the novel I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale,
even Victor's mother is very much concerned about her son's life. She is a doting mother who lives for the family. "In all his years he had never known her to be truly happy, but now there was something final about her sadness. When she talked to him, her apprehensions were about his health: whether he had milk every day, what he ate, making quite sure that as a Brahmin he never touched beef or alcohol." (63)

She warned her son thus: "Beta, don't ever marry a white woman; she will never fit into our family." (63)

It is really a typical quality of Khushwant Singh that he is able to bring out both, the positive and negative aspects of women. On one side, he pictures the innocent, frail and feeble qualities of a woman as Victor's mother and on the other side, he brings out the shrewd, strong and stringent qualities of a woman like Valerie. Valerie who steps into the Mattoo family as a governess becomes more or less the master of the house, whereas Victor's mother who had once been a proud woman was now pushed aside like antique furniture in the corner of the sprawling house.

Khushwant Singh was more a rationalist than a sentimentalist. Victor "confirmed what he suspected – that Valerie was now effectively mistress of the house. But he could feel no ill-will or resentment towards his father or Valerie." (64) This is because he views life as such and not as a sentimentalist. Though Victor is very much in love and affectionate towards his mother, he is sympathetic towards his father. Even then Khushwant Singh is not ready to spare the ones who abandoned their wives and get along with a new one. Hence he puts it with a simile: "like antique furniture in a corner of the sprawling house." (64)
Usually the Indians, especially the men folk, have a special kind of attraction towards the foreign women. They give more priority to the foreigners than the Indians. It is on this account that Khushwant Singh uses satire in almost all his novels. At Oxford, Victor came into contacts with Indians of his own age and tried to make friends with them but he could not. "They took more interest in sports and dating English girls than in studies. Victor found them too arrogant for his liking. The others were from well-to-do middle-class families - sons of senior civil servants. Their one ambition was to get into the Indian Civil Service, failing which they decided, to get a lucrative job in British-owned companies in India that promised handsome salaries. They too seemed to have screwing English girls on top of their agenda; Mem ki phuddi was the one thing they wanted most from England, everything else was of little importance." (68) Even in the Indian Majlis meeting when Victor propounded his views of developing Indians, "they listened to him in bored silence." (69)

To oppose the view of the role of Indian princes in the future of India, Khushwant Singh through Nair makes a satirical attack on the people who rely on this type of administration. When the princely types mentioned that with the experience of administering large states, some larger than provinces directly administered by the British, they had a major role to play, Nair shouts: "You princes will be in garbage cans! Leeches fattened on the blood of poor peasants, you are the scum of the earth! The sooner you are wiped off the face of the earth, the better it will be for India." (70)

Nair suggests to Victor to put forth all his ideas in a paper and get it published in a form of a book. This is a mild satire on human nature, wherein every individual aspires to become famous by some means, and when it comes through the right way, he earns
recognition. This attitude prevails even among the richest of the rich. This opinion is vividly stated in the following lines: "The idea germinated in Victor's mind. How wonderful it would be to have a book with his name printed on the cover. See it displayed in windows of bookstores across the globe. Have people coming to ask him to autograph copies for them. It was like a fever." (73) Even after getting his BA degree from Oxford, and his Barrister's certificate, "he had visiting cards printed: V. Jai Bhagwan B.A. (Oxon) Barrister-at-Law. A couple of hundred cards had his Albion Mews address, another 200 his father's." (74)

It is indeed demoralizing to learn that the Indians very easily yielded to the needs of the British but it was not so in the Britishers treatment of the natives. This is very clearly illustrated with a pinch of sarcasm, when Victor as anticipated, called on the general manager of the largest textile mill in England and asked him if he would be interested in a partnership to set up a modern textile mill in India, the manager refuses. "The response was negative. Why should they break their legs with their own hands by encouraging and abetting Indian products?" (74-75)

When the business of Victor flourishes, there is a drastic development that they become India's richest family which meant little to Victor's mother. She told them one day that 'You've all got caught in the web of Maya' (84) and that either Mattoo or Victor did not take care in getting the three daughters in marriage for which her husband replies:

I have been approached by many well-to-do families including those of rulers of states but I put them off. On one thing I am quite certain: I will not give any of my daughters to the son of a raja. I know many of them; they are drunkards and debauches, they have no family life. I told them we
are Brahmins, you are Rajputs; there can’t be matrimonial alliances between us. It is forbidden by our dharma. They had a hearty laugh. All except his wife, who had her views on Mattoo’s own integrity as a family man. What about others. (84-85)

Khushwant Singh makes a mild satire on people who though lack in morality speak about the same when it comes for their own deed. Mattoo who abandons his wife and takes Valerie as his concubine tells that his daughters’ husbands should be good and possess morale and ethical values.

Even Victor has the same attitude. He didn’t want any type of emotional relationship with any girl. He considered marriage as an emotional baggage. He also “sensed that sexual relationship was a kind of temporary marriage which conferred emotional rights on both partners. He much preferred consorting with prostitutes whenever he could. He got the sex he wanted; she got the money she wanted. No hassles, no emotional baggage.” (89)

He marries Jaishree Raina only for three reasons. The first is due to his love and affection that he had for his mother. The second reason is that he had no sex with an Indian woman, and thirdly that he had no sex with a virgin. He thinks that Jaishree would be the perfect woman he was looking for. “There was little likelihood of her claiming equality with him. She would be like his mother who bore her husband children and returned to the par of the house allotted to her.” (89)

Khushwant Singh is totally against flatterers and does not spare anyone who indulges in this type of flattery. Nair, a friend of Victor is one such character. In many of Singh’s novels one can find such flatterers holding a key position. In Train to Pakistan,
the sub-inspector flatters Hukumchand; and in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, the father of Buta Singh flatters the Taylor family.

After the death of Jaishree, there is utter confusion in Victor's household and he has to shoulder many responsibilities. He had appointed his so-called good friend Nair as the general manager of Jai Bhagwan Shipping Company. Inspite of giving the latter all benefits, Victor receives many complaints against Nair. Victor "had implicit trust in Nair's integrity and refused to hear anything said against him." (93) Whenever Victor went to Bombay, "Nair fawned over him: his flattery was subtle and hence more acceptable to Victor than the blatant praises others showered on him." (93)

Khushwant Singh pictures Nair's character not only as a flatterer, but also one filled with jealousy and greed. Previously when Victor and Nair were students in London, Nair had made no secret of the fact that he considered himself intellectually superior to Victor. But now, it was Nair who claimed Victor as a star. "He agreed with everything Victor said and rarely voiced his own opinion on any matter. Had Victor been observant, he would have noticed that Nair's fist clenched whenever he spoke to Victor and he rarely looked him in the eye. The truth was that Victor's great success had changed the equation between them and this had made Nair bitter." (94)

Of society which inhabited eccentric and self-centred people Khushwant Singh presents Bombay to signify this particular trait. "Victor could not come to terms with Bombay's upper-class society. Most of them had businesses of different kinds with single-track minds: how to make more money and cheat their workers and the income tax authorities. Their transactions were largely in unaccounted cash. The future of their country was of little concern to them. They lived in opulent splendour without any refinement." (95)
It can be said that Khushwant Singh not only deals with the physical world but also has a very good knowledge of philosophy. He clearly brings out the fact that all that a man needs in life is mental peace and good health. He presents people who have everything in life but not peace and happiness and so they go out of bounds to achieve peace and happiness.

Victor, after earning a lot, finds it difficult to be among the self-centred people and wants to be alone in a place where he could be happy. Once when he was abroad looking for ships to add to his fleet, he heard about a yacht on sale, owned by a lately deceased Greek millionaire. He bought the same and named it ‘Jal Bharati’. He made use of this yacht to conduct his business, and live in peace.

Victor once even goes without informing anyone from the penthouse to seek peace and being undisturbed. “He told the captain to take the boat out into the open sea till land was out of sight and weigh anchor there. He wanted to be by himself, undisturbed.” (102)

When he wrote to Gandhiji about his new acquisition, as usual he got a prompt reply on the postcard which contained a sarcastic mild snub: “Always keep your poor countrymen in mind. Don’t let your new acquisition become a rich man’s toy.” (97) Being snubbed by the lines of Gandhiji Victor: ‘however different our perceptions about the future of our country may be, . . . But I do not mean to play with it; I mean to conduct my business on it board far away from the maddening crowd.’ (98) It can be said that through the remark of Gandhiji, Khushwant Singh satirizes both the rich upper class and Gandhiji’s pessimistic attitude towards the development of the nation. In one aspect, it is true that the rich people always utilize their wealth on luxuries and are not concerned with the nation’s welfare. And in another aspect what Gandhiji said shows how concerned he was about the present state of affairs and not the bright future of India.
Khushwant Singh’s main target is the politicians. He, in one of his writings, confesses that he felt ashamed to see his people suffering and yet he couldn’t do anything to save them. Even now he has the guilty feeling that he behaved like a coward when he should have stood brave and done something to save his people. This attitude of regret can be easily experienced in many of his novels like *Train to Pakistan*, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, etc.,

When the British gave freedom to India, the whole country was split into two, and a fratricidal war took place in which millions and millions of people were fleeing from India to Pakistan and vice versa. Though Khushwant Singh does not directly mention the cause of this turmoil in the country he makes it very apparent that the reason behind this partition is purely politics and nothing else. This was not the India that either Khushwant Singh or Victor dreamt of. Thus he exclaims:

The British had finally decided to hand India over to Indians but the country was to be split in two. Fratricidal war erupted on the subcontinent between Hindus and Sikhs on the one side and Muslim on the other. They were slitting each other’s throats from the banks of the Indus to be on the Hooghly. This was not the India Victor had dreamt of in his younger days. . . . The city was flooded with Hindu and Sikh refugees who had fled from Pakistan. They were driving Muslims out of their homes and shops. They were living in ancient monuments, on footpaths and roundabouts. His father had employed extra guards and shut the gates of his house to prevent them occupying his garden. He was in a high state of tension, blabbering nonsense: ‘Keep the British here, we are not fit to rule
this country . . . all this talk of freedom is buk buk . . . we are born to be slaves.’ It was no use talking to him. And Bapu Gandhi had vanished into remote villages of East Bengal, to tell people to behave like civilized human beings because they were all children of the same God known by different names. (100-101)

Usually human nature is to support what it likes. Hence many writers, in spite of being aware of the foibles in society, friends, customs, traditions, etc., support the same. But Khushwant Singh very strongly and vehemently fights for justice without fearing the consequences. Even the essence of partiality is never found in his writings.

India after getting its independence was not as Victor imagined. Victor had many ideas to make India a prosperous country: “The country he thought was his, for whose prosperous future he had been laying strong foundations, had been transformed into something completely unrecognizable by British, the Congress and the Muslim League. Politics had won after all.” (102)

Victor who had great faith and hope on his old friend Nair now started sensing that “Nair harboured other ambitions than being his number two and overall general manager of his companies. He persuaded Victor to give large donations to the Congress party and entertained editors of left-wing journals. It was evident that he wanted to build a career in politics with the support of Jai Bhagwan Enterprises.” (103) Khushwant Singh here very visibly brings out the greed of man for money and status in the society.

When Victor’s father ‘suffered a stroke and haemorrhage of the brain’ and dies, Victor arrives at Delhi’s Palam Airport where the press persons surround him to take interview. Victor brushes them away and enters into his car and reaches home where
there is another group of reporters waiting to interview Victor. Nair accuses them for being ghoulish. "Have you no shame? He's just heard of his father's death and you want to interview him! This is ghoulish. Move away!" (104) Thus Khushwant Singh brings out the insincerity of Nair and also throws light on the inconsiderate nature of the press persons who are always interested in collecting news and not worried about the emotive aspect of the persons concerned.

Khushwant Singh, in one way, can be compared to Francis Bacon who is well known for his worldly wisdom. Singh's philosophy is purely realistic and a universally accepted one. The idea that the proverb 'What You Sow, You Reap' conveys is made use of by Khushwant Singh. After the death of Jaishree, Mattoo's life style faced a tremendous change. He lost his enthusiasm, lost his spirit and his health as well. He is the one who abandoned his wife. His only companion was the doughty Valerie Bottomley. He had to struggle a lot. Victor's mother who is a typical Indian wife instead of serving Mattoo "seemed to enjoy her husband's growing helplessness. If he could show such callous indifference to her for all these years of her married life he had no right to expect her to look after him when he was stricken." (102) Khushwant Singh in one way seems to enjoy this state as it justifies the action of Mattoo's wife who had been alone for a long time without any sort of entertainment in life. He is strictly for the principle that one who commits a mistake should face its consequences.

As said before Khushwant Singh is totally against politicians, flatterers and people who long for fame. Singh has provided a very realistic presentation of such people in all his novels. Talking to the higher and very important personalities, taking photographs with them are what our Indians consider something great. People like these
really don’t come to console the family members of the dead but to pose for photographs, thereby satisfying their personal longings, seek the help of the rich and present themselves as a famous figure in society.

Press car followed his right to his home. The road outside and the lawns were full of mourners. Liveried Chaprasis were bringing in wreaths to be placed on Mattoo’s body, from the Governor General, Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, heads of industrial houses. No sooner had they heard that Victor had arrived than they would come to pay their condolence -- and be photographed doing so. Grief which was private to him and his family would be converted into an exercise in public relations. (104-105)

It is an undeniable fact that Khushwant Singh is a humanist. He is more concerned about humanism and always tries to advocate the same in order to bring peace and happiness in the society. One can always find in his works that he is totally against violence and tries to expose the beastly, inhumanistic attitude of man. In this way he is able to succeed at least to some extent in bringing about awareness on the consequences of such beastly nature of man. In this novel Burial at Sea Khushwant Singh brings in the incident of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhiji which is considered to be one of the most brutal acts of the Indians. Killing an old man with a strong will, who by means of non-violence brought freedom to Indians, is like killing one’s own father. Khushwant Singh strongly criticizes this cowardly act. After three months of losing his father, Victor becomes totally dejected towards life and goes in search of peace in the yatch. While he comes to know that, “He had lost his second father: Bapu had been assassinated. He was devastated. What kind of savage race did he belong to who killed its own saintly father?” (110)
Not knowing whom to approach to for solace, he goes to Delhi to be with his mother who was in a state of shock. She utters: “It is Kalyug (the dark age). People are killing their own fathers! Who knows when they will come for us. Look after yourself, beta. These are bad times.” (110) Khushwant Singh through Victor brings out the fact in a sarcastic manner that people kill only those who have done good to others and says, “Don’t worry about me, Ma. No one is going to kill me,’ he assured her. ‘I haven’t done enough good to people yet.” (110)

Getting entirely frustrated by the materialistic world Victor goes to the cremation site at Nigambodh Ghat that night and sits there till morning watching the dying embers in the funeral pyres. He could look death in the face, and as dawn broke, he felt less diminished and resumes his work for his nation. “He would go back and continue his efforts for India’s prosperity, whether India deserved it or not.” (110)

Years pass by and Victor’s daughter Bharati returns from Switzerland where she had gone for her studies four years before. A year later after her return from Switzerland, Victor and Bharati go to Bombay. Victor gets along with his company and “Nair was all over Bharati, loading her with bouquets of flowers and compliments about her look.” (114) But his intention was not visible to Bharati because “Bharati was not used to being paid attention to by a man, especially one almost the same age as her father, and happily responded to his show of affection.” (114)

A few days later, Victor tells Bharati that he is becoming old and is not able to look after his business as before and hence wanted Bharati to help him in his business administration to which she readily accepts. As a sign of initiating her into the business Victor sends her along with Nair to London to know about men and manners of various
places. Nair with his cunningness and vindictive nature seduces Bharati in the very place where “Many Christmases ago her father had lost his virginity on the same sofa-cum-bed to a London whore.” (124)

Not only as per the Indian culture, but also by means of humanism, having sex with a girl equal to the age of one’s daughter is certainly an act of sin. Khushwant Singh attacks people who initiate the young minds into sex. “Nair needed no further invitation. He wanted to settle scores with Victor for all the good he had done him. Seducing his teenage daughter would be the ultimate revenge against his benefactor.” (124)

While Bharati and Nair are in London, Victor suffers ill health while in Delhi. The doctor diagnoses it as angina and assures him that he is in no danger. Victor, being much shaken, makes a will and posts it to his lawyer in Bombay. Finding it difficult to concentrate on anything he decides to spend a few days alone in his newly acquired holiday home. It is in this place that Victor comes into contact with the tantric sadhvi and the yoga teacher.

From the tenth chapter Khushwant Singh turns his focus to the superstitious beliefs and bogus religion. It is true that even in our day-to-day practical life that we are able to see people with amoral character cheating in the name of God and religion. Even now when people come to know about men and women indulging in such malpractice, they fall a prey to such anti-social elements and lose their belongings and ultimately their life even. In the rest of the novel we find Khushwant Singh sharply criticizing and satirizing the bogus religion.

Victor spends the next two days exploring the countryside and taking long walks along the river bank. It is then that once he comes across the ashram near the holiday
home about which his daughter Bharati had mentioned in one of her letters. “On one side of the black metal gate was a crude statue of goddess Durga astride a lion. On the other, a notice in English reading - No trespassers allowed. Beware of tiger.” (128) When enquired the caretaker says: “That, Sir, is the ashram of Ma Durgeshwari. She is a powerful tantric, People say she was born in a cave in the high Himalayas. She owns a tiger called Sheroo who I’ve been told is a strict vegetarian.” (128)

The next morning Victor sees Ma Durgeshwari from his balcony. She and her tiger Sheroo go down hill to take their bath in the Ganga. Victor sees her taking bath and is filled with lustful temptations. After her bath, she notices Victor watching her with his lustful eyes and an angry scowl comes on her face. The same evening the caretaker announces the arrival of Ma Durgeshwari. She accuses Victor as: “Ganga mai kay kinaarey baith viskee peeta hai” (You sit by the bank of Mother Ganga and drink whiskey)!" (131)

“And you stand on top of your big bungalow and watch girls bathing in the nude, hain? Sharam nahin aati (Aren’t you ashamed of yourself)?” (132)

The reason for Ma Durgeshwari visiting Victor was not just to scold him but she “had other ideas. She put her trident against the wall and sat cross-legged on the sofa facing his chair. Her . . . exposed. Victor tried to avert his gaze, but it was no use; his mouth was already dry with longing.” (132) She had come well prepared. Knowing about the status of Victor she asks, “I am told you are the richest man in India and have great ahankaar about your wealth.” (132)

Usually men or women like Ma Durgeshwari take people into their handgrip and don’t let them go when they come to know that their victim is a well-to-do person. They also try to understand or know about the weakness of the person and get them
addicted to it, thus swindling the amount they want. Here Ma Durgeshwari attracts Victor by exposing her physical charm. And Victor, being very much attracted to her beauty, starts giving his hard-earned money to her in the name of charity. “Victor made out a cheque for one lakh twenty-five thousand in the name of the ashram. In the envelop he also put in a slip in Hindi which read ‘Guru dakshina from your latest bhakta’, and asked his secretary to put it in the hands of Ma Durgeshwari.” (138-139)

The next day also the lustful episode takes place and Victor starts longing for her presence. He is made to raise his lusty emotions within himself so that he is made to wait longing for her presence. ‘At the moment she could make him do absolutely anything she wanted.’ (139-140) Victor becomes very much addicted to her charms that he makes a confession of marrying her. “Okay. I am a tiger-man in love with you. Will you marry me?” (142)

Maybe here Khushwant Singh wants to emphasize the fact that all the temperament and character that men possess is also possessed by women also. Previously Victor was a person who didn’t want to have any emotional ties or baggage as he calls it and had sex especially with whores. It is the same idea that is being put by Ma Durgeshwari when Victor asks to marry him. “You must be half mad as well. For one you are a Brahmin, I a kshatriya. We can have sambandh but we cannot be man and wife. For another you must be almost twenty-five years old than me. . . . And most important of all, I am a sadhvi used to living in an ashram. . . . So put marriage out of your mind. It is not meant for me or even for you. I will come to you whenever and wherever you want me.” (142)

Even when once Victor asks her to accompany him to Delhi she says, “As long as you make neither a wife nor a mistress of me, she replied with a mischievous smile.
‘From now on you are our annadaata. You tell us to come to Delhi, we come to Delhi. You tell us Bumbai chalo, we go to Bombay. But you and I must both be free, our own persons, always.” (147-148)

She didn’t want to marry Victor because though the reason given by her is to some extent acceptable her notions were something different: “She was equally determined to hang on to him as long as he could cope with her.” (142) She had been married and ditched by her husband and by three others also for her adulterous nature of which we come to know later in the novel.

It can be said that according to Ma Durgeshwari, Victor is a hen that lays golden eggs. She is strong and firm not to let go of Victor. Victor who had come to the holiday home with the hope of returning after two days had now already spent four days. He tells Durgeshwari: “I must return to my business and my family. But now you mean more to me than anything else in the world. I don’t want to lose you.” (147) She very diplomatically makes money out of Victor. Her speech is coquettish and attractive which she uses to fulfill all her desires at the expense of Victor. “You should not even think of losing me; I’ll be with you whenever you want me. But I have my ashram, its inmates who rely on me . . . . You should come here more often. I can come to Delhi if you send a car to fetch me. I’ve never been to Bombay; I’ve never seen the sea. I hope you will show them to me.” (147) Victor who is trapped in her lusty world gives all that she wanted. “Of course! And don’t worry about your ashram. Whenever you are short of money, I’ll make a guru dakshina. You’ve taught me more about life than any guru could have done. I’ll take good care of you and your Sheroo. I’ll put Swamiji on my pay roll.” (147)
Khushwant Singh has created the character of Ma Durgeshwari to show how a woman should not be.

Victor after going to Delhi sends a large station wagon to fetch Durgeshwari, Sheroo and the Swamiji. Khushwant Singh is not only the best in satirizing but also succeeds in making us laugh by using humorous and sarcastic statements: “His mother was happy to learn that he had paid homage to Ganga Mai and become a bhakta of a sadhvi and was practicing yoga. Only his sister and her husband were somewhat cynical about his new-found enthusiasm for what he called real India.” (150)

When Victor’s family members and the ones working there are frightened at the sight of the tiger, Durgeshwari asks for a silver chain to get Sheroo chained. And she gets what she needed. This very clearly informs us that she is acquisitive in nature. Was it very necessary to have a silver chain to chain a tiger. A chain of steel would more than serve the purpose.

All the members of Victor’s family become close to Ma Durgeshwari, Sheroo and Swamiji and thus they become a part of the family. The only one who does not approve of the new entrants was Nair. It becomes very difficult for Nair to meet Victor because Victor is seen frequently busy with his new friends. Due to possessiveness and jealousy he exclaims: “Victor who are these weirdos you’ve got into the family? I am told there’s a naked lady who carries a spear and rides a tiger. And a bearded fellow who teaches people how to stand on their heads. Are you going nuts?” (154-155) and also scolds Bharati for being with the Swamiji in doing asanas. “He assumed he had established the right to reprimand her. What are you doing with this savage with long hair and black beard? I am told he is teaching you how to contort your body in weird postures. You’re being a bloody idiot, young lady.” (155)
It is a natural attitude of men to change themselves in all aspects when they grow financially and socially strong. They change their attitude forgetting their past life. And especially this sort of attitude is found more in the Indians which Khushwant Singh satirizes on, taking into consideration the character of Nair. His nature towards Victor had changed completely. Moreover even his principles underwent tremendous change. In the initial stage we see Nair as a character who gives much importance to India and its people and apposes the British. He even seems to be a person not much interested in self development though being an intellect and a man of wit. But later, after having been elected to Parliament as a Congress candidate, he becomes financially strong and tries to dominate Victor and Bharati. He becomes jealous, wants to become number one in the companies of Victor and switches over to a western style of life. Nair becomes annoyed seeing Victor busy with his new friends and rebukes him for being so, for which Victor replies: “The kind of education we had can be very limiting. You shouldn’t have a closed mind. You’re become a black Englishman.” (155) Not only that, when Nair scolds Bharati she says, “Watch your mouth, Nair,’ she snapped. Swamiji’s a wonderful yoga teacher and the most wonderful man I have met. You won’t understand him because he speaks only Hindi – India’s national language, I might remind you. You can’t say a single sentence in Hindi. But for the blind support our mill workers gave you, you would not have got into the lavatory of the Parliament House Annexe.” (155)

Khushwant Singh presents the character of Nair so not only expose the dishonest nature of man but also to bring to light the fickleness and self-centredness of man. A month later after the clash between Nair and Bharati, the workers of Jai Bhagwan Textiles in Bombay go on a one day strike with the threat that if their demands were not
conceded to they would close down the mill. And when Victor asks Nair to meet them and discuss their demands, “Nair expressed his inability to do as the mill workers were in his constituency and there would be clash of interests. He further suggested that since Bharati was to take over charge in due course of time, she should get experience of labour problems.” (156) Such a crisis reveal him to be vindictive. It is very clear that Nair is behind the screen and the cause for this upheaval. The novelist thereby depicts the deceptive nature of friendship through Nair.

Khushwant Singh also makes a satire on the trade unions. It is an undeniable fact that trade unions play a vital role in the welfare of the workers. But it should be for genuine reasons. If an organization does not meet the demands of the workers it can be accepted that the need for a trade union is a must. But to support workers by getting provoked by some external pressure (anti-social elements) and bringing in unnecessary demands, will certainly low down the reputation of the trade unions.

It is obvious that the trade union leader is certainly a man supports Nair. It is due to Nair’s insistence that the leader leads the workers on to a strike. The leader says: “I am not a mill worker, I am the leader of a trade union which represents workers of many mills in Bombay including yours.” (157) After a little commotion, Bharati is successful in throwing out the leader. She wins the first round hands down.

Singh also aim to throw light on how men for their personal benefits spoil the reputation of an organization or company. Three days after the confrontation between Bharati and the union leader, a weekly tabloid *Thunder* published the incident that took place. The headline ran thus: ‘Tycoon’s daughter insults Respected Trade Union Leader.’ (159) It also added, how the union leader, “had not been allowed to present the workers
case, had been threatened, abused and forced to leave the meeting. It also had pictures of Jai Bhagwan's home in Delhi, Jai Bhagwan Towers and his yacht, alongside pictures of workers' quarters. The Caption read: 'How the boss lives. And how his slaves live.' (159)

There was a boxed item showing salaries, benefits and board meeting fees drawn by the directors. Nair's name was not on the list.” (159) The editor of Thunder was a friend of Nair.

Later Nair finds it difficult to reach Victor and develops a feeling that he is being neglected. He tries to have a heart-to-heart talk with Victor. The result was not as Nair had anticipated. He is asked to quit his job which made him feel ‘wronged, betrayed and humiliated.’ (163)

Till Nair’s departure Bharati’s relationship with Swamiji were those of a disciple and teacher. But one day Bharati invites Swamiji to have sex with her. Being sworn to celibacy he should have discouraged the sexual advancements of Bharati. Instead, “Swamiji kissed them in turn – once, twice, twenty times. He could not believe his luck.” (166)

Khushwant Singh here brings out the deceitfulness of the bogus religion.

Over the next six months things start changing. Bharati, who was twenty-five years old, involved herself in several businesses of Victor. Nair becomes a laughing stock and is seen working hard to get back into the good books of the Congress leadership. Victor, Bharati and the senior staff work well together and efficiency improves. Around this time a man from Thunder comes to the office of Bharati and blackmauls her. “Madam-sir, we have information about the backgrounds of Ma Durgeshwari and Swami Dhananjay Brahmachari which will damage your company’s reputation. My editor is willing to withhold its publication if madam-sir will agree to place ads in our paper on a
permanent basis.” (168) As he is thrown out of the office, the next issue of Thunder comes out with the pictures of Victor with Ma Durgeshwari and Bharati with Swamiji and a lurid account of the background of the tantric and the yoga teacher. The news ran like:

Ma Durgeshwari’s real name was Shanti Devi; she had been thrown out by her husband in Jhansi who suspected adultery, and had lived with three other men who all ditched her before she became a sadhvi. She had now found a patron in India’s richest man. Swamiji also had an earlier incarnation as Durga Das, one of the many sons of an impoverished farmer, a school dropout who had twice been up before a juvenile court on charges of thieving and buggery. He had picked up yoga in a borstal and was now teaching yoga asanas to workers of Jai Bhagwan industries including Kumari Bharati Devi, the only heir to her father’s vast fortune. (169)

Obviously Nair was the person behind such a cowardly act. As a result of this Thunder had to pay a heavy price for launching the smear campaign against Jai Bhagwan Enterprises. Other newspapers like Times of India gave a good report on Jai Bhagwan Enterprises emphasizing its contribution to the development of the nation and many other credits. And also alluded to the growth of yellow journalism, rampant trade unionism which was killing many industries and responsible politicians who misled workers to go on wildcat strikes. The editorial concluded with the words: “those who spit at the sky have the same spit fall on their face.” (171)

With time the smear campaign dies out, only to be replaced by an alarming increase in anonymous letters, hate mail and demands for money and sometimes even threatening to abduct Bharati. Victor being more concerned about his daughter, thinks of
informing the police, but doesn’t do so because he is well aware that the “Bombay police was known to be in cahoots with the underworld!” (172) He deputes his most senior security guard to follow her and give security without her knowledge. This is a slight dig at the Bombay police for their insincerity and their delinquent behavior.

Later Victor’s mother, who is close to eighty, goes into a coma from which she never recovers and dies. After completing all the rituals in Haridwar Victor and his family members return to the holiday home to spend a few days. When all the stream of mourners go after the chautha (ceremony) Victor sends a car to fetch Durgeshwari. They are all alone in the big house and enjoy making love. As all good things must come to an end Victor receives a call from Bharati informing him that their textile mill had caught fire and three workers had lost their lives. Victor takes the next flight to Bombay accompanied by Durgeshwari. He comes to know that all his workers have no hard feelings against the management and that it was only the trade unions that were against Victor. The man who had already had a confrontation with Bharati had come once again. Victor announces rupees one lakh each to the bereaved families as compensation and also to give employment to their widows and sons in the mill. He also asks his workers whether they wanted to listen to what the demonstrators wished to say. There is a murmur of assent which makes Victor permit the union leader to address the workers.

As anticipated the leader tries to tempt the workers to go on a strike. He starts speaking about the personal life of Victor which raises his temper. The leader utters: “We have to stand united against capitalists who exploit us. You know the slums and hovels we have to live in. have you seen the palatial mansions these people live in with hordes of servants? Your proprietor even has a ship of his own where he spends his days and nights
so he does not have to see how the poor of Bombay live. It is there he entertains his friends, including the half-naked sadhvi lady you see sitting on the dais beside him.” (180) Victor gets annoyed to such an extent that when the leader speaks about Durgeshwari “He sprang up from his chair like a cheetah and planted a stinging slap on the union leader’s face that sent him reeling off the dais.” (180)

He was convinced that Nair was behind the union agitation and campaign that Thunder had launched against him. He recollects all that Nair had done him when they were in London at Oxford. He also feels that he has done everything that Nair deserved. He had given “Nair a career, made him the highest-paid executive in the country, helped him to get elected to Parliament from a constituency in which no one could speak Malayalam and few understood English. Why should Nair turn against him?” (182)

Khushwant Singh here brings out the universal truth and the undeniable fact that “You do good to anyone and you make an enemy for life.” (182) Though this idea may be a contrary one, it is a statement of fact and a practical one.

Being totally confused and frustrated Victor plans to spend a few days on his yacht. He was convinced that the best way of doing things for his country and his people was to maintain a respectable distance from both. He is of the opinion that, “Distance lent objectivity and a clearer perspective; closeness made you aware of warts and blemishes — there were far too many of those and they made everything look ugly and repulsive.” (184)

It is true that though India is said to be the democratic country where every citizen is given equal rights, but the dominance of the upper class prevails extraordinarily in this country. Whether good or bad, neither the union leader nor Nair nor the Thunder, is able to crumble down the reputation of Victor or the Jai Bhagwan Enterprises. As for the
union leader the "Police had refused to entertain his first information report (FIR) and told him to file a case through a lawyer if he wanted to do so." (184) As for Nair he is totally disowned by his party for attacking his own party colleague and for stabbing his benefactor on the back. He is also called ‘Namak Haraam!’ (186) In defending himself, Nair says, “These capitalists have not only subverted the free press of this country, they have also got some members of Parliament in their pockets.” (186)

Though Nair is projected as a negative character, even through him Khushwant Singh brings facts to light. At last Nair who had used the media to spoil the reputation of Victor is made to stoop by the same media which implicate: “Nair had betrayed the trust of a man to whom he owed all he had achieved in his life.” (187)

In the later stages of the novel Ma Durgeshwari tells Victor of her desire to return to the ashram. Once for all and that gives Victor a shock. She says, ‘I am pregnant, It is your child.’ (190) The reason for her returning to the ashram may be interpreted in two different ways. One is that right from her introduction in the novel and the information published by the Special correspondent and his research team in Thunder, much information was divulged as to how she was thrown by her husband, and had lived with three other men who all abandoned her before she became a sadhvi. She is a woman who is more concerned about her liberty and pleasure. Now since she had made herself a sadhvi, is sworn of celibacy, she did not further want to spoil her reputation. “It was you who overreacted at the mill. I told you in the beginning that we must both be free, **hamare tumhare beech sambandh hoga, bandhan nahin.** You have been behaving as a husband to a wife. . . . And we will always be in the public eye. There can be no freedom for us now. There will be no pleasure” (189)
The second reason for her returning to the ashram may be due to her real affection towards Victor and her child growing in her womb and not wanting to make Victor a victim to the scandal mongers. “There’s nothing to be done now. I cannot commit jeev hatya.” (192) “You have my word. Your father cannot afford scandal. You need not worry. I love him, you know.” (192)

These two reasons can be taken for consideration because Khushwant Singh being a realistic writer always brings out the positive as well as the negative sides of women in all his novels. Even his men do not escape this duality of nature. Victor is so much in love with Durgeshwari that he asks her to marry him. And after having two years of enjoyable life with Durgesh and coming to know that she is pregnant he is totally shocked. “She did not see the shock and confusion on Victor’s face.” (190) “He felt trapped.” (190) If he had really been a humanist he should have firmly come out of the idea of marrying Durgeshwari, have a child and lead a blissful life without caring for the society. Instead he is shocked and irritated to hear this. “So what do we do now? Victor asked, unable to keep the irritation out of his voice.” (190) In spite of all these “A great sadness came over Victor. He pulled Durgeshwari to him and held her close. ‘You will give me a few days, won’t you? (190)

Hence it is clearly implied that Khushwant Singh not only brings out the dual nature of man, but also stresses the fact that mostly men are for sexual desire and are not for as in the words of Singh ‘emotional baggage’.

It is really a pity to see that neither Durgesh nor Victor had an idea of bringing up the child. Even when Durgeshwari informs Bharati of her pregnancy she says, “All I want
is a guarantee that my father will never know where you leave the child. The press should never find out – absolutely no one must ever know. You must promise me that.” (192)

Bharati is yet another character to be analyzed before placing her in the negative or the positive section. She once ‘had been deflowered by Nair and she has a sexual episode with the Swamiji.’ Previously when Victor asks her to share his responsibilities she ‘kept nodding her head in agreement. And while he talked, she visualized the great new world she would be exploring all on her own without anyone keeping an eye on her. She was in for many surprises.’ (117)

Even later Bharati had a suspicion about the relationship between her father and Durgeshwari. “At first it had bothered her, for she was extremely possessive about her Papi. But she later came to terms with it as she realized that Durgeshwari made her father very happy.” (191) These issues imply that Bharati always wanted to be her own self and the only self.

When Durgesh informs Bharati of her pregnancy, Bharati insists on a guarantee that her father should never know where the child is left. It very evidently implies that in one way she is very possessive and calculative. She neither wanted her love nor her lovable wealth to be shared.

In the month of June when Durgesh was to return to her ashram Victor began to feel old again. Though he asks Durgesh to stay for a few weeks he doesn’t have sex with her and found himself less unhappy in her absence. “He announced his decision to his daughter, Ma Durgeshwari and Swamiji; he intended to be by himself for some time.” (197)
Victor starts losing interest in every thing and wants to be alone for some time, far away from the maddening and materialistic crowd. All that he wanted was peace of mind. That is what Khushwant Singh tries to stress in the end. He was just a few yards away from the gateway when a few gun shots are heard. “By the time the chauffeur was able to get to his master, he was lying dead, drenched in his own blood.” (198) He goes in search of peace to where he can find eternal peace.

Like all other novels, here too Singh has exposed all the follies and foibles of the human society and has even suggested implicit ideas to bring about reformation in society.