CHAPTER V

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A novel deals primarily with men and women living in society. These characters possess a personality of their own and act in and out of society. Characterization is thus an essential part of the novel. Nancy Hale rightly observes that "characters that seem to live are the most important single element in the novel".¹ A plot is a mere mechanical device unless it is enlivened by characters because they alone can breathe life into it. The more realistic the characters are, the more intimate does the reader feel with the narrative. This vitality in a large measure depends upon the power of the novelist to individualize his characters. The excellence of a novelist can well be discovered from the number of finished individual characters that he has created. A great novelist must know how to weave characters in the web of life and yet retain within their respective individual qualities universal patterns, for "characters that have a universal appeal, are, in fact, the life of a novel or a short story".²

². Ibid., p. 48.
Khushwant Singh's earlier novels — *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) — are essentially traditional novels, largely untouched by twentieth-century innovations in the art of characterization. The method of characterization used in them is based on a sequential development in time. There is also a touch of realism mingled with idealism which takes the two novels into the borderland between the romance and the novel. Northrop Frye says:

The characters of the romance are heroic and therefore inscrutable; the novelist is freer to enter his characters' minds, because he is more objective. ³

The central characters — Juggat Singh and Sabhrai — represent a fine combination of techniques which Khushwant Singh has used to emphasize the 'reality' of his characters. His characters are usually two-dimensional and are firmly interlinked with the situation or atmosphere.

Khushwant Singh has introduced his characters in their social contact with a specific purpose. He uses the principle of contrast which differentiates one character from another. Mostly the characterization is done through direct comments made by an all-knowing narrator. Khushwant Singh's characterisation in his novels can be studied to themes such as love, sex, religion, death and so on, which

are of great social significance in the Indian context. The behaviour of characters when placed in a critical situation, and their different points of view also differentiate them. The devices such as parallelism and contrast and use of non-verbal modes of communication such as gestures, 'manners' and typical dialogues also help the novelist present his character distinctly and establish them within a realistic socio-cultural framework.

On the basis of themes Singh's characters fall into three groups: those who respond positively and stand high on the scale of values (Juggat Singh in Train to Pakistan, Sabhrai and Taylors in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, and Jaita Rangreta and Nihal Singh in Delhi); those who respond negatively and are viewed critically (Iqbal in Train to Pakistan, Madan and Champak in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, and Taimur Lang and Nadir Shah in Delhi); and those who function between these two extremes (Hukum Chand in Train to Pakistan, Buta Singh in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, and Alice Aldwell in Delhi). Those belonging to the last group act in their own interest, but still are human enough to win the readers' sympathy by virtue of their sufferings.

The characterization in Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale is subservient to the dominant themes. Love and sex operate as powerful forces in these two novels. They are capable of bringing out the best in man. But sometimes they produce a degenerate behaviour.
In *Train to Pakistan*, love is present as a strong moral force. Juggat Singh, the protagonist, is a confirmed criminal, and has served several jail terms on various charges. He is, however, a rare combination of the criminal and the lover. This fact is acknowledged by the Sub-inspector:

Sir, what the police of the Punjab has failed to do, the magic eyes of a girl of sixteen has done. ... She [Nooran] is dark, but her eyes are darker. She certainly keeps Jugga in the village.  

Basically, Jugga's nature is split between earthy brutality and passionate love. He is inexorably divided between good and evil, noble and ignoble. Jugga's earthy nature is pointed out by Nooran herself when she says: "You are just a peasant. Always wanting to sow your seed. Even the world were going to hell you would want to do that".  

Although the novelist has presented the affair between Jugga and Nooran in only one scene in the entire novel (pp. 24-25), the passionate nature of his love actually forms the backbone of his final sacrifice. It is this intense love for Nooran which enables him to sacrifice his life while saving her from the planned carnage on the train to Pakistan. This act also redeems him in the eyes of the readers for he transcends his selfish nature. Amidst the universal madness and communal frenzy "the simple

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5. Ibid., p. 24.
uncalculating love of a man for a woman asserts itself" and averts the catastrophe. Thus the triumph of love and faith in the innate goodness of man marks the central significance of the novel. S.C. Harrex rightly observes:

Khushwant Singh proves in the climax of the novel that it is through love, not intellectual ideology, that salvation is possible. ... Juggat Singh dies saving the train-load of Muslim refugees; his sacrifice marks the transition whereby an act of love achieves concrete goodness.

Jugga's sacrifice, while saving Nooran from a sure death becomes believable only because his passionate nature has already demonstrated his intense love for her. This relationship is further important because it plays up the romantic image of Jugga as a rebel against the norms of society, and shows him to be the traditional villain, who is, nevertheless, lovable. As Elena J. Kalinnikova remarks, "... the bandit Juggat Singh, who tortures his Muslim mistress, is suddenly converted into a noble knight who is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of her safety". There is, as a matter of fact, no evidence in the novel to show that Jugga tortures Nooran, unless one takes his overbearing sexual behaviour with her as brutality, but

there can be no doubt that it is this very 'brutality' which finally makes him the noble knight.

Another character in the novel is Hukum Chand who does not sum to be very clear in his mind about love and sex. His involvement with the child prostitute, Haseena, is at first superficial and casual. But in due course of time, he becomes sentimentally attached to her. He is the typical lecher, but also the man with a conscience. His primary motive is to escape from the dull, humdrum office work and escape into the world of sheer sensation and physicality. He wants Haseena, but suffers from a sense of guilt as she reminds him of his daughter. It is clear that in his loneliness, Hukum Chand requires Haseena more for company than for sex. He needs her particularly when he is surrounded by the violence and death which are unleashed by the events of 1947:

He did not want to sleep with the girl, or make love to her, or even to kiss her on the lips and feel her body. He simply wanted her to sleep on his lap with her head resting on his chest. 9

This passage reveals his feelings for her. Later on, he becomes instrumental in saving the train on which Haseena was to travel to Pakistan.

It is significant to note that love and sex do not play any real role in the life of the Westernized pseudo-

intellectual Iqbal. He is in jail for the greater part of the novel. This is because the novelist wants him to be away from the scene of the holocaust, which he is very much anxious to avoid.

Thus we find that Jugga, the sexually fulfilled male, is capable of the noblest act of sacrificing his life in order to save the train; Hukum Chand, the partially fulfilled male, is an important factor in making the noble act possible; and Iqbal, the sexually indifferent man, is drunk and asleep when the time comes to do something to save the train-load of passengers. As S.C. Harrex puts it: "Thus, while Jugga acts, Iqbal drinks himself into a sleep, akin to moral paralysis, with whisky and logic". 10

In I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale the author's attitude towards sex changes for better. The sexual element is connected with the darker side of life. Love seems to have negative effect on characters like Champak and Madan. Although the Champak-Madan affair seems to be based on love, it is not so. The entire affair is sordid and a study in deceit and treachery. It is not inspired by any genuine feelings of love, and therefore neither of the two is able to stand up to the crisis in which Sher Singh is trapped. Madan and Champak are also breaking the norms of society; but theirs is not a rebellion, for their relationship depends on secrecy and double-dealing. Both of them are

established as profligates in their own right, with Madan trying to reduce even a simpleton like Beena, and Champak finding a sexual outlet in tantalizing the fourteen-year old Mundo, and in imaging that every man is eager to reduce her.

Khushwant Singh has explored Champak's personality more systematically, and has tried to show that her obsession with sex is due to the oppressive joint-family atmosphere she lives in, to her husband's inadequacy, and to her own over-active imagination. Her untiring attempts to provide novelty to both Sher Singh and Madan point towards an insatiable sexual appetite. But Champak and Madan cannot become the rejuvenating force that Jugga is, because they are not faithful even to each other. Again, the emphasis in their case is on not being found out. When Sabhrai reaches Simla, Champak is worried that their secret will be discovered, and she decides to put an end to the affair. But as soon as she has a handle with which she can blackmail Beena, and hence, Sabhrai, her conscience is conveniently quieted.

In depicting the character of Sabhrai, Singh was influenced by the character of his grandmother, whose simple though uneducated and unsophisticated heart possessed an eternal love that springs from selflessness and arcadian simplicity. Sabhrai is love incarnate, and the love inside her heart for every one is pure. She is certainly worried about the well-being of others. This heightens the quality of her character and after having saved her husband from
ignominy and her son from imprisonment, she passes away. She herself becomes immortalized. This presents Sabhrai's character as something celestial and immortal. Singh skillfully portrays Sabhrai's seeking of the path of love through self-denial and suffering and shows that love is the solver of all problems of life.

Sher Singh in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* alienates his wife by his sexual inadequacy. In his political life also he is a failure like Iqbal in *Train to Pakistan*. Although he evokes the admiration for his involvement in politics, he remains a non-doer. His failure to satisfy his wife Champak leads to his militant activities and gives impetus to his overwhelming desire for leadership and recognition. As Anthony storr puts it,

> Those unfortunates who ... cannot reach a stage of development in which they feel that, as man or women, they are both able to love and be loved, are deprived of so basic a source of self-esteem that they are bound to suffer. Some, by feverish competition in the world of power, achieve wealth and status.\(^\text{11}\)

Sher Singh, we learn, is a weak person, who derives his authority from his father:

> He did not realize that strength was not a natural development of his personality but nurtured behind the protection provided by his father's Position.\(^\text{12}\)

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12. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, p. 192.
The relationship between Sher Singh and his father, Buta Singh is also not that of love. Although Buta Singh is an understanding father, the relationship between the son and the father is marked by extreme uneasiness.

Champak has been presented as a tempestuous, abnormal and sex-hungry woman. The prime characteristic of her being is that she is excessively exhibitionistic. Her days are spent mostly in auto-erotic nakedness in the bath and before her bedroom mirror. On the New Year's Day, while Sabhrai, her mother-in-law, concentrates all her mind on religious prayers, Champak indulges herself in highly sexual activities; "She found her reflection in the mirror to her satisfaction". 13 These descriptions of her exhibitionism and clandestine flirtations make Champak a stock character. Singh, of course, justifies Champak's unusual behaviour saying that "absence of privacy" in Indian life causes sex to be brutal or brief or inhibited and that repressions seek violent outlets:

Unfulfilled sexual impulses result in an obsession with sex and in many perversions which result from frustration: sadism, masochism, and, most common of all exhibitionism. 14

But the explanation given by the novelist for her unusual behaviour is not satisfying as both Champak and Sher do have a separate room of their own and do enjoy the privacy of the bedroom. It seems that the novelist has not done

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13. Ibid., p. 45.
14. Ibid., p. 43.
justice to her (Champak) character. There was enough scope of refinement in her character. But may be Singh wanted to show the negative impact of British feminine behaviour on educated Indian women like Champak.

Vasant Shahane suggests that Champak and Madan redeem themselves in the end and expiate their sins:

Champak passed through a period of purification in the course of this unforeseen catastrophe [the arrest of Sher Singh for the murder of Jhimma Singh] ... Madan organised a fine reception for Sher Singh which was an act of atonement for his sins of the past. 15

However, we do not see any signs of repentance in them, except that Champak appears in a dishevelled condition when Sher Singh is arrested. But she knows how to keep up appearances in the presence of Buta Singh and her mother-in-law. Moreover, we cannot agree with Shahane's that the author views the entire Champak–Madan–Sher Singh relationship in a moralistic light. Nowhere in the novel does Singh show that Sher Singh is morally superior to the other two.

Religion forms the substratum of both the novels. As already stated, the author does not wear moral blinkers with which to view his characters, but he does establish a scale of values by which they are to be understood and judged. At the top of the scale of values is human integrity and the ability of the characters to measure up to the

situation in which they are trapped. Inevitably, this aspect links up with their attitude towards death and self-sacrifice, and religion in the sense of a practised morality forms an important consideration in evaluating the characters. Organised religion — Sikhism, to be more exact — is interwoven in the plots of Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale.

In Train to Pakistan, Jugga, the dacoit, who never stepped into the gurudwara before, steps inside it to seek the Guru's blessings before he jumps into his final mission. He meets Meet Singh, the priest of the gurudwara, and receives the words of God irrespective of the fact that he does not understand the meaning of the verse read out to him:

'What does it mean?'
'What have you to do with meaning? It is just the Guru's word. If you are going to do something good, the Guru will help you ...'  
'Yes, what will I do with the meaning? All right Bhaiji, Sat Sri Akal'.

This implies that Jugga at heart is God-fearing and has faith in God.

The basic rootlessness of Iqbal's personality is revealed by the religious ambivalence implied in his name. "He could be a Muslim, Iqbal Mohammed. He could be a Hindu, Iqbal Chand, or a Sikh Iqbal Singh". His is one of the few names common to the three communities. It is appropriate

16. Train to Pakistan, p. 199.
17. Ibid., p. 48.
that Iqbal, who has given up the outward symbols of his
religion, finds himself rootless and alien; even while
staying at the Gurudwara, its atmosphere has no effect on
him. From the characterization of Iqbal, it seems that the
author views education as an antithetical value to religion.

Meet Singh and Imam Baksh, the two religious heads
of the village, are the impressive characters in Train to
Pakistan. Towards the maintenance of good spirit of fellow-
feeling of their people of Mano Majra, both Meet Singh and
Imam Baksh contribute immensely. They lead a very unassuming
life, much to the admiration of villagers who develop a
profound reverence for them. Meet Singh retains the spirit
of religion by the simplicity and humbleness in his
behaviour. He emphasizes the noble and constructive aspects
of the teachings of Guru Govind Singh and aligns the Sikh
bravery more to protection and benevolence than to revenge.
But on the whole, these characters remain flat. Nooran,
Haseena, Sub-inspector, and Malli are all minor characters
who do not play any religious or special role in the novel.

Religion plays a very important role in the
personality of Sabhrai in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale.
Sabhrai has sincere faith in the Adi Granth and an abiding
selfless love for all. He does not have any hankering, any
lust. She has the "dignity of an ancient people behind
her".\textsuperscript{18} The author further observes: "She had infinite
faith in the Guru and was sure of his special interest in

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 220.
her husband and children. The novelist leaves no stone unturned to present her as an embodiment of morals and ideals. Sabhrai was also possessed of that sixth sense which often goes with people of deep religious convictions.

Except Sabhrai, other characters in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale—Sher Singh, Buta Singh, Champak, Beena, Madan Lal, Wazir Chand, Sita, Shunno, Munno and Jhimma Singh—find no meaning in the symbols of religion. Religion has merely been superimposed on them by Sabhrai. The author probably intends to convey that religion has a positive effect when it is ingrained and negative when it is superimposed. The Taylors are the sophisticated and cultured British couple who are Christians in the true sense. They keep their Christmas spirit by releasing Sher Singh for the sake of his mother, Sabhrai. For other characters in the novel, religion exists only at the superficial level.

Characters may also be evaluated on the basis of the way they react to death. Jugga is too full of life and vitality and therefore never thinks of death. When he has to choose between his own death and that of Nooran, he does not hesitate in taking his final decision. He goes to save the train though he is certain of his death. Vasant A. Shahane rightly summarizes Jugga's character in the following words:

19. Ibid., p. 52.
... Jugga, who is surely a different type of a hero-villain, rehabilitates himself in our eyes by his supreme self-sacrifice. He is neither Satanic nor Machiavellian in the Elizabethan sense; he is truly an uncouth Indian rustic, who, caught in the quicksands of evil, successfully struggles out of it and reaches the shores of spiritual reclamation.  

Jugga's will power is not weak, but his thinking is naive, and he suffers quietly and heroically. It is through suffering and sacrifice that his lost soul is reclaimed.

For Iqbal, death is the glorious martyrdom, the compensating factor for the sacrifice of one's life. He believes in a death appreciated by the audience or else he thinks that "the act is wasted". When the time comes for the final act of sacrifice and saving the train, Iqbal merely thinks that it is not worthwhile to get himself killed in a nameless heroic action. This reveals the shallowness of Iqbal's character who can only think of his own importance.

Hukum Chand, the magistrate, has to face the most horrifying and nauseating scenes of massacre. He is extremely disturbed at the sight of bloodshed everywhere. The sight of the ghost train completely shatters him. He reels under the impact of the killings. Most of the scenes of brutality are presented through Hukum Chand. The horror underlying the events is emphasized by the fact that even a

21. Train to Pakistan, p. 195.
man like Hukum Chand cannot withstand it, even though he has come to terms with his obsession with death in the past. Jhimma Singh, the village headman and police informer and blackmailer, in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, becomes the victim of his own sycophancy and is meaningfully murdered by Sher Singh. The violence of his death is in direct contrast to the serenity which surrounds Sabhraí during her last movements. Sabhraí's death is connected with religion and religiosity whereas Jhimma Singh's death is connected with blasphemy and sex.

In this type of characterization on the basis of themes the characters may develop into living human beings. Singh uses both flat and round characters, but the flat characters in his novels outnumber the round ones. In *Train to Pakistan* all characters except that of Juggat Singh and Hukum Chand are flat. In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, too, apart from Sabhraí and Mrs. Taylor, other characters remain flat.

In Khushwant Singh's novels, as in real life, the behaviour of a person when placed in a critical situation is of great significance. The real nature of a person gets revealed when he is face to face with a critical situation in life. His sense of value is revealed through his action when his ideology clashes with the society or when he has to face adverse circumstances in life. The clash may be as much personal as social. Singh's characters are affected primarily by social contradictions which are writ large even
in their own personal behaviour.

The massive destruction and holocaust caused by the partition and communal riots in *Train to Pakistan* has trapped all the characters. In the moment of crisis, when the whole country is beset with communal riots and the people are in a state of frenzy, Juggat Singh protects the virtue of love in him. Imam Baksh, the Muslim priest, Meet Singh, the religious head of the Gurudwara, Iqbal, the intellectual superficial rationalist—all three swim with the tide of the stream, but Juggat Singh remains unswayed by it. He does not drift with others and lays down his life to save the train-load of passengers.

Hukum Chand, the seasoned, experienced and balanced bureaucrat, does not lose his perception and maintains his characteristic balance and poise during the time of crisis. His character has been sketched with great authenticity showing the conflicts and clashes between the inherent psychology and the outside conflicts of the novel. He seems to be relaxed since peaceful atmosphere prevails in the Chundunnugger district. But soon the situation changes. There is bloodshed everywhere and he has to face the most horrifying and nauseating scenes of massacres. It is partly due to the timely action and ideas of Hukum Chand that the novel progresses and reaches its inevitable climax.

Iqbal's true character has effectively been brought out by the author. When the time comes for the final act, he simply gets drunk and muses to himself:
... your corpse would be found among thousands of others, looking just like them ... who would know that you were not a Muslim victim of a massacre?²²

He becomes incapable of controlling the adverse circumstances. Hukum Chand knows such people and says about Iqbal:

Some of the leftist social workers were known to be a daring lot. This one, however, was an intellectual, the sort people contemptuously describe as the arm chair variety. He would probably do nothing except criticise others for failing to do their duty.²³

Thus Iqbal himself does nothing but criticise others for not doing their duty.

In I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale it is Sabhrai who takes complete charge of the situation. Her final strength emerges from the inherent purity of her soul. Although her intuition, on which she prides herself, fails her sometimes, it is she who resolves the crisis at the critical juncture. After spending the long, cold winter night in the precincts of the Gurudwara reciting prayers, she finds peace in her soul and confidence to her anguished heart. The next day she visits the gravely agitated Sher Singh and gives him the most sound advice. But unable to bear the strain any more, she passes away.

²². Ibid., p. 194.
²³. Ibid., p. 200.
During the moments of crisis, Buta Singh realizes that the antagonistic attitude towards the British, that drove his son to join the terrorists, is natural and pardonable. Although Buta Singh and his father are found to have crouched in servility towards British Government, his grand-father displayed a stubborn rebellious spirit against the British rules. This makes him considerate towards his own son. Never does he openly and unambiguously prevent his son from getting involved in the terrorist activities.

Sher Singh, the incomplete man, is divided between the world of his father and that of his idealism. When the moment of crisis comes, he ends up in the meaningless murder of Jhimma Singh, the blackmailer. When the crisis is resolved and he is released from the jail, he exploits the generosity which the Taylors have shown by releasing him from jail and uses it as a platform for building up his own false image—of a hero who stood up to suffer from police torture and brutality.

The points of view used in the novels *Train to Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* are also helpful in placing the characters in their social milieu. All the characters in both the novels are portrayed by the author in such a way that the ends do not come as surprise to us, because the author has already made us familiar with the thought patterns and the behaviours of his characters. His is "God's eye view".  

death, Iqbal's inaction or Buta Singh's selfsatisfaction make us familiar with their natures and behaviours through direct comment made by the author. Naturally, the characters are not allowed to outgrow the author's fixed opinion about them. But the authorial comment, which is most often ironic, has given a new dimension to the novels.

In the Train to Pakistan, the author maintains a balanced view while pointing out the havoc and destruction caused by the partition. He makes it quite clear that on the score of massacres no side is less guilty than the other. The author, through characterization in Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, brings out the social and political conditions of India placing the important characters within a proper 'context' and the reader can actually see how characters act.

The reader knows more about the situation and characters than they themselves do. The most obvious drawback in this kind of portrayal is that motives become too explicit, contradictions are shown a bit too obviously, and the reader is expected to fall in with the author's judgement about his characters. Still, all flaws notwithstanding, Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale remain important Indian English novels, even after three decades, chiefly because of the power of suggestion used in characterization, results in masterly portraits of human beings as social beings.
In both these novels, Khushwant Singh is not interested in establishing the complexity of character for its own sake. His overall approach is characterized by satire and realism; that is why the characterization is, in a sense, restricted. The reader cannot identify totality with any of the characters, because he views them through the ironic vision of the novelist. There is also little originality used in the methods of characterization. There is hardly any sustained psychological approach to them, as in the novels of D.H. Lawrence, nor are they presented consistently from the standpoint of their own mental consciousness, as is to be found in the works of James Joyce and Virginia Wolf. Singh takes up any method of characterization which helps him to convey his thematic message effectively. The result is that there is hardly any consistency in the technique of characterization employed in these novels.

Khushwant Singh brings out in his last novel, Delhi, the character of Bhagmati. The novelist took twenty-five years to complete it. In the beginning of the novel, Khushwant Singh states:

What you have to do for things to appear different is to cultivate a sense of belonging to Delhi and an attachment to someone like Bhagmati.  

Obviously, this statement is related with the author's

personal as well as objectively historical sense of Delhi. The author's attitude is characterised by love-hate. He himself asserts this when he says: "As I have said before, I have two passions in my life, my city Delhi and Bhagmati". Singh's portrayal depends on parallelism between the city Delhi and Bhagmati. That Bhagmati symbolizes Delhi is confirmed by the author himself:

It [hijda] can never conceive and I thought this was a wonderful symbol for a city in which so much has happened like a sexual intercourse that repeats itself. With Delhi too, with all that has happened to it in the way of violence, in the way of change of dynasties, it has still not produced anything as great as one would have expected of it.

Bhagmati also projects contradictions in contemporary society and the history of Delhi.

Both the narrator and Bhagmati provide a modern canvas against which the history of Delhi is rewritten. Both Delhi and eunuch, according to the author, "have two things in common: they are lots of fun. And they are sterile". Both Delhi and Bhagmati have been raped and plundered and pillaged. Both have been tresspasses and temptresses ensnaring people by their charms. Regarding both of them the novelist writes:

Delhi and Bhagmati have a lot in common. Having been long misused by rough people they

have learnt to conceal their seductive charms under a mask of repulsive ugliness. It is only to their lovers, among whom I count myself, that they reveal their true selves. 29

Bhagmati's is a complex character and is presented as an interesting embodiment of certain basic characteristics of Indian society and politics. The novelist makes the parallelism clear:

It is the same with Bhagmati. Those who do not know her find her unattractive. She is dark and has pock-marks on her face. 30

Delhi and Bhagmati have many unattractive similarities. There is absolutely no chastity in the life of Bhagmati as well as the character of Delhi. Delhi is virtually interwoven with joys and sorrows like Bhagmati. Bhagmati has been roughly handled and influenced by its many customers, so has been Delhi. They have been raped and plundered, used and misused, by people belonging to different races, religions, castes, creeds, and from different countries, ranging from the lowest to the highest strate of society.

Bhagmati may, however, be said to stand for the best in the Indian tradition - its universal love and does not belong to any rigidly definable categorization of religion, faith or orthodoxy. Like Musaddi Lal, she is poised between two faiths - "neither one thing nor another but could be misused by everyone". 31 She has a resilience

29. Delhi, p. 1.
30. Ibid., p. 1.
31. Ibid., p. 55.
that makes her adopt herself to any circumstances and is an embodiment of contradiction, balances and ambivalences that characterise Indian society and politics—its unity and diversity, its patriotism and treachery, its bravery and cowardice, words and deeds, past and present, secularism and communalism, hopes and frustrations, joys and sorrows, its glorious past and depressing present.

Khushwant Singh has recreated the history of India through the depiction of the real conditions and situations of the people under different rulers belonging to different dynasties. The author witnesses persons, situations and events. The process of the historical trends, which the city of Delhi had to pass through, and the relative changes brought about over the city during various periods, have been projected through different characters who have been made to act as mouthpieces of Hindu, Sikh, Muslim communities. Hindu characters remain in the background. Yet they exhibit typical traits, that are brought into sharper focus in Singh's short stories—the superstitious Indians, the vociferous politicians, the political agitators. The unstable political situations are portrayed faithfully, though briefly, in Delhi. The author knows the reason behind the holocaust resulting from indifference, eclipsed India for more than nine centuries.

We find that the novelist has created in Delhi a number of characters which are neither outstanding nor for above average. He has introduced characters like Lady
J.H.T., Georgine, Mrs. Kamala Gupta and Fraulein Irma. But they are not without any significance. The study of these characters is a study in decoit and treachery. They are connected with the amoral activities in their life. They break the norms of the society as their love and sex affairs depend upon secrecy. The environment of the city of Delhi also breathes an air of vitiated amoral life. A certain unfaithfulness and inconstancy has been observed particularly in the upper strata of society. Singh as a realist is aware of presenting these characters with an eye for realism.

The portrayal of the famous poet Meer Taqi Meer suggests how love can bring out the best in man. The poet's extreme love for Begum Raiz Sahiba inspires him to compose some of the best poems. It is her love which makes him as well as destroys him. In the words of the poet himself,

For the time she was mistress she made me feel as if I was the only God she knew and every sentence I wrote was like a sura of the Quran. She became at once my mother, mistress, nurse and companion. ... This woman made me and destroyed me.32

But the poet's love for Begum Rais is again not true love but an affair based on decoit and is carried out when the Nawab is away in Delhi. The poet is so deeply involved with the Begum that he takes all his decisions through the heart and not through his head. The poet correctly understands

32. Ibid., pp. 202-203.
her character, for he sums up the character of Begum Rais in the following words:

Begum Sahiba was a designing masterful woman who had her way in everything. In old Nawab Rais she had the husband she wanted; with the singing rhymester who passed for a poet, she had a part-time lover she wanted. Her taste for poetry was determined by the applause a poet received and not its real worth. ... She [Begum Sahiba] knew how to seduce; having seduced, how to give the man of her choice the illusion that no one else in the world mattered to her. 33

This treacherous love and sex affair continues till Begum Rais drops Meer Taqi Meer in favour of a more suitable and young candidate, and the poet's career is completely ruined.

Alice Aldwell's love for her children shows that a mother can do anything to save her children from sure death. But her sense of love and loyalty towards her husband is quite baffling. She sleeps with Mr. George Atkins only to get a decent job for her husband in Delhi. She does not seem to have any scruples and could stoop to any level to get her ambition fulfilled. She always gives priority to her own domestic interests. Having been permitted to enter the King's Zenana, she even embarks on espionage activities to satisfy the English rulers by divulging the secrets of Bahadur Shah Zafar. This involvement in all sorts of immoral, unscrupulous and faithless activities makes her

unworthy of trust. The only redeeming feature of her character is that in all that she does, she acts up to the dictates of her motherly love to protect her helpless, immature and innocent children. When her husband is shot dead by the Muslims, her first thoughts are:

Now there is no one left to turn up their noses at me... As soon this is over, I will get Alec's pension. I will take my girls to England and start life again with no one making nasty talk about where I came from and who I was.34

Thus the character's attitude forms an important basis for their characterization in Delhi.

It may not be out of place to discuss briefly the devices used by Khushwant Singh for unfolding hidden recesses of his characters. He has used consistently the principles of comparison and contrast. His characters have different traits, both universal and individual. In a bid to make some of these traits more prominent the novelist presents almost identical characters and characters in contrast.

In Train to Pakistan both Jugga and Iqbal are arrested simultaneously on charge of dacoity. Whereas Iqbal shows eagerness to be jailed, Jugga has to be overpowered and arrested while he is asleep. Jugga's remark that: "They cannot escape from God. No one can escape from God"35

34. Ibid., p. 260.
35. Train to Pakistan, p. 83.
reveals what really is in the inward recesses of his soul. Iqbal's cynical remarks on the accident and death of a truck driver while saving a Pariah dog reveal his materialistic approach towards life. Jugga is extrovert whereas Iqbal is introvert. Towards the end of the novel, when both of them are released and informed about the Mano Majran Muslims being evacuated, Iqbal is incapable of taking any positive action. He believes that "self-preservation was the best policy in times of disorder". But Jugga does not hesitate to take his decision. He goes to save the train, though he is certain of his death.

Meet Singh is a simple religious man whose character has effectively been juxtaposed with that of Iqbal to heighten the latter's shallowness. He is uneducated but has great faith in the Guru. At the moment of crisis he tries his best to protect the village from the vicious air of pollution. On the other hand the pseudo-intellectual Iqbal, who has no faith in religion at all, does nothing but gets drunk and sleeps at the moment of crisis. Moreover, the affair of Hukum Chand-Haseena runs paralleled to the Jugga-Nooran affair. Jugga lays down his life for Nooran. Hukum Chand, too, manipulates the situation so as to save the lives of thousand of Muslims on the Pakistan-bound train. Thus, both Hukum Chand and Jugga are equally responsible for preventing the catastrophe.

Symbolism is used in the novels to unfold the development of characters and their interplay with situations. The gecko motif symbolizes Hukum Chand's fear and the fact that he is trapped in a situation that is too light for him, and his blind terror of them points to, in the larger context, his helplessness in the face of events which finally overpower him. But it is in the case of Iqbal that symbolism is used as a technique of characterization most suggestively and works most subtly. An analysis of the portraiture of Iqbal and the various symbols associated with his character show that he is by far the most complex character in the two novels. The very beginning of I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, deals with the killing of the Sarus crane by Sher Singh and his companions, which represents the whole novel in microcosm. The ironic tone is all-pervading here. But in the case of Jugga irony does not come to the forefront except in the fact that a dacoit becomes a saviour. The authorial supremacy, however, is maintained throughout the novel and it is what adds to the success of the novel.

In I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale the elements of parallelism are used in the portrayal of Sabhrai and Mrs. Taylor. Joyce Taylor is an effective parallel to Sabhrai. Like Sabhrai, Joyce remains untouched by the sordidness of the double-edged values of Buta Singh, the hollow, hypocritical and sham patriotism of Sher Singh and sexual corruption of Champak, Madan, Shunno, Peer Sahib and Beena. Even Mr.
Taylor, who is not at all a religious man, highly respects Sabhrai. He says: "She [Sabhrai] has the dignity of an ancient people behind her without knowing her I have respect for her". 37

Like Sabhrai, Mrs. Taylor is also religious. It is she who forces Mr. Taylor to release Sher Singh from jail as a token of Christian good-will. She has been depicted as a warm-hearted and understanding lady who is humane enough to understand the sikh family's problems. The underlined principle of parallelism in characterization as followed by Khushwant Singh brings out the affectionate heart of both Sabhrai and Mrs. Taylor, blending perfectly individual and universal qualities in their character.

The character of Buta Singh, the magistrate, has been paralleled with that of Wazir Chand. Both are magistrates and play their parts in the semi-feudal world of power and greed in the British-dominated Punjab. Buta Singh has an obsession for power and money and achieved his position by their subservience to the British. Their conscience only works as far as their own interest goes. Singh uses different type of contrast in his portrayal of the characters of Sabhrai and Buta Singh. Both Sabhrai and Buta Singh seek happiness. But Buta Singh attains it through his exaggerated respect for position and possession, whereas Sabhrai makes a very sincere attempt to achieve happiness and peace of mind through her sincere faith in the

Adi Granth and an abiding love for all.

Khushwant Singh has effectively contrasted the characters of Sabhrai and Champak. Sabhrai is a simple religious lady, and although uneducated, has a profound understanding of life. Champak, on the contrary, is a nymphomaniac who spends most of her time exhibiting herself. While Sabhrai concentrates all her mind on religious prayers on the Baisakhi Days, Champak indulges in highly sensuous, sensual and sexual activities. Sabhrai's love for her family and especially for Sher Singh is profound whereas Champak's relationship even with her husband is just superficial.

Shunno and Peer Sahib are ironic counterparts of the world of Champak and Madan. Madan and Peer Sahib are paralleled. Madan has been portrayed as an immature, immoral and lustful lad, completely devoid of grace and divinity. Peer Sahib embodies the unholliness of the holymen.

The devices of comparison and contrast have also been employed in Delhi. Its locale has witnessed both construction and destruction, richness and poverty. The character can also be divided into two groups - the oppressors and the oppressed. The rulers speak more or less the same language:

With the spear of Islam we had pierced the heart of the land of infidels and sent
thousands of idolaters to hell; we had served Allah and his prophet (Peace unto Him). 38

There is also a clear parallel between these oppressors.

The sufferers are the common people who represent a cross-section of life of a particular period of time. These characters also show a clear parallelism with each other—they have suffered a lot under the reginae of the than rulers and the detailed description of their experiences acquaint us with their ways of living and the treatment meted out to them. Their plight can well be understood from the words of Musaddi Lal:

I was disowned by the Hindus and Shunned by my own wife. I was exploited by the Muslims who distained my company. Indeed I was like a hijda who was neither one thing nor another but could be misused by everyone. 39

Meer Taqi Meer, the famous poet of Delhi, states that he is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. He says:

Like other Muslims I went to the Mosque every Friday. Like Hindus I had drawn castemarks on my forehead worshipped in temples of idolatry and ages ago abandoned Islam. 40

As a result of Nadir Shah's invasion, Meer Taqi Meer is compelled to seek his fortune elsewhere. Being financially and economically handicapped he turns from Muslim Nawab to

38. Delhi, p. 187.
39. Ibid., p. 55.
40.
Hindu nobility. He tries to adopt himself according to the changing circumstances.

Khushwant Singh has also used dialogues, gestures and manners for characterisation. In attempting to individualize character, the dialogues used by different characters of his novels are quite helpful. The dialogue ought to be realistic for the purpose of revealing a character effectively. It should be consistent with both the social status and personal qualities of the character in question. The dialogues of Juggat Singh, in Train to Pakistan, for example, are rustic, down-to-earth and racy. His rustic character is revealed through his outburst at the constables when they try to arrest him: "What seducer of his mother can throw banglas at me? What ... ."41 As against this, Iqbal's dialogues are neither clear nor concise. They give the impression of his thoughts flitting in and out of his mind, leaving him confused:

If you look at things as they are, he told himself, there does not seem to be a code either of man or of God on which one can pattern one's conduct. Wrong triumphs over right as much as right over wrong. Sometimes its triumphs are greater. What happens ultimately, you do not know. In such circumstances what can you do but cultivate an utter indifference to all values? Nothing matters. Nothing whatever... .42

41. Train to Pakistan, p. 72.
42. Ibid., p. 197.
These intellectual musings of Iqbal are mere excuses for not doing anything concrete. The shallowness of his nature and pretensions to be an intellectual are also exposed by the logic he puts forward.

The double-facedness of Buta Singh, in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, is well brought out through his conversation with his son. At one place he attempts to snub his son:

... The English have ruled us for over a hundred years, and I don't care what you say. I believe they have treated us better than our own kings did in the past; or the Germans, Italians, or Japanese will do if they win and take over India. We should stand by the English in their hour of trouble. 43

But at another, he warns his son in the following manner:

I do not mind your hobnobbing with these Nationalists — as a matter of fact, it is good to keep in with both sides — but one ought to be cautious. 44

Thus Buta Singh is presented as a very skillful magistrate in dealing the political situations during the pre-independence days. These dialogues enable us to have a peep into the characters of the persons concerned.

Khushwant Singh also reveals his characters by concentrating on their gestures, facial expressions and

43. Ibid., p. 23.
44. Ibid., p. 25.
naunces of behaviour. In this way his characters come alive in his portrayal. The description of Hukum Chand's actions and attitudes, for example, helps him place the character in his proper class and context and imparts individuality to his character:

Hukum Chand's style of smoking betrayed his lower-middle-class origin. He sucked noisily, his mouth glued to his clenched fist. He dropped cigarette ash by snapping his fingers with a flourish. The sub-inspector, who was a younger man, had a more sophisticated manner. 45

Thus the manners and gestures of Hukum Chand make his character move lively and true to life immediately.

Minute observations serve to underline the traits of even important characters such as Mr. John Taylor, the Deputy Commissioner:

He had a repertoire of little tricks by which he put subordinates, who tried to be familiar, in their places. He kept them waiting. He took a long time to answer simple questions; he sit a cigarette or casually knocked tobacco out of his pipe on the heels of his shoe while the other was on pins and needles waiting for a reply. At times he was just abrupt; sometimes even rude. 46

Similarly, the rustic behaviour of the shrewd Jhimma Singh, a minor character, has well been portrayed while depicting his gestures:

45. Train to Pakistan, p. 29.
46. I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, p. 62.
Sardarji, why do you put yourself to all this trouble of asked the headman, munching a thickly buttered toast. He wiped the butter off his mustache with the hem of his shirt and gave it a twirl .... He picked up the tumbler of buttermilk, cleared his lips of his billowing mustache, and drank it up in one long gulp. He emitted a long belch which tapered off into praise of the Great Guru, the True Emperor. He combed his beard with his fingers and placed a heavy hand on Sher Singh's Knee's. 'Tell me some news'.

The description of gestures and manners of these characters, however, insignificant they may appear to be, bring out the qualities of their personality.

Ram Rakha in Delhi, for example, achieves roundness. Though he has been individualized, he may be looked upon as the mouth-piece of Sikhs, who were hounded out of Pakistan and forced to live as refugees in India and start life afresh. Right from his entry, he shows sympathy for the R.S.S. and irreverence for the Congress and the Muslim League. He curses Gandhi, Nehru and even wants to make love to Sushila Nair. He calls Gandhi a humbug and hypocrite. According to him, Gandhi's attitude is something which "rub's more salts in our wounds", showing thereby that he is a confirmed Gandhi-hater. But when Gandhi is murdered, a sense of guilt and feeling of remorse comes over him :

"... he [Gandhi] wasn't ill at all, I killed him with my own

47. Ibid., p. 163-64.
48. Ibid., p. 370.
hands, I killed him ... Hai, hai, I murdered my bapu." Khushwant Singh's anti-extremist views are, thus, most effectively expressed in a Hindu fanatic's narrative of events leading to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. The gruesome murder of Indira Gandhi in October 1984 came in the wake of the aggrieved surging of the Sikh community who retaliated against the 'Operation Blue Star' launched by her.

Enshrined in the narrative framework itself are the humanistic narrator and his mistress, Bhagmati. They symbolically represent the history of their past as well as present. The past is often said to cast its shadow on the present, but in this novel it is the present that rebuilds and recreates certain fragments of the past with a view to highlighting certain attitudes and socio-cultural and political values which are of great relevance to-day. Delhi is thus an interesting story of diverse elements - social, cultural, and political. It is a novel of remembrance of things past and present, partly biographical and partly autobiographical. Singh's success as a novelist lies in the fact the historical and individual strands run side by side and are interwoven in such a way that they cannot be recognised separately. Although we can feel the presence of the omnipresent author-narrator everywhere, the book is quintessential Khushwant Singh. The many guises that he adopts to tell the story of Delhi do not make the work a

49. Ibid., p. 374.
homogeneous piece of literature. The strategy that he follows to give the novel its linear form is that every episode in the novel is presented through characters on the spot, the result of which is that the work turns into a character-oriented novel. It is left to the readers to draw their own conclusions about the future of their nation from the events that follow in quick succession in the last chapter.