Shaw had no patience with discussions concerning the niceties and secret subtleties of literary style. He insisted that in writing the one and only thing to aim at was effectiveness of assertion. (Ratcliffe, Shaw and Society 63)

For Khushwant Singh, like Shaw, meaning -- not form -- is important. Like Quintilian, Khushwant Singh does not believe that incomprehensibility is a sign of genius. Somerset Maugham, whom Khushwant Singh considers a great spinner of short-stories of all times, said at the time of writing Of Human Bondage: "I wanted to write without any frills of language, in as bare and unaffected a manner as I could" (qtd. in Laurence Brander 199).

A significant aspect of Khushwant Singh's achievement as a writer is his use of English language. His language is lucid and simple. His expressions are never obscure and his style is not ornate. Khushwant Singh expresses his preference for simplicity during the interview with the researcher:

I don't claim any quality in my writing.
I think I am able to communicate with my readers. I can write simple language. I think that is the only strength I have. (Appendix)

This should not lead one to mistake his simplicity for want of a rich vocabulary. Khushwant Singh is, perhaps, the only Indian English writer who could say with a sense of pride:

I call English my mother tongue because I am more familiar with it than any other language.... Most of what I read is in English. All my work is done in English. I write it better than my three Indian languages Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu. (We Indians 115)

This is possible because of his love of English, his long association with England as a student and his diplomatic assignments in various Western countries. After having read stories by men with academic distinctions and novels by Indian novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao he felt encouraged to attempt at creative writing in English. One reason for his hesitancy to choose writing as a career was his poor academic record. He confides this with his usual frankness:

... one did not have to be a good student to be a good story-teller. I also, said to myself,
'If these fellows can write and be published, so can I.' ("Compulsions to Write" 185)

One can see this kind of frankness which is characteristic of his style, in all his writings.

In India, the influence of mother tongue on authors who use English as a second language is considerable. The impact of ancient culture, religion and tradition on intelligentsia is also tremendous. And the structural and semantic peculiarities of each Indian language in one way or other affect the mode of speaking and writing English. So Indians continue to present a great diversity in their spoken and written forms of English. The language and style of Khushwant Singh who hails from Punjabi-Urdu-Hindi region, for instance, is different from that of Raja Rao who belongs to the South, more specifically to the Kannada speaking region. Thus, in tune with our national character even in the "Indianness" of Indian English, there is diversity.

A significant aspect of Khushwant Singh's use of language and style is his realistic, down-to-earth idiom transposed from Punjabi to English. Realism attempts to portray things as they are. It does not avoid the painful aspects of life such as slums, the horrible side of war, tragic racial problems and injustices, dirt, vermin, mental disorders, perversions and violently controversial political
problems. As Marjorie Boulton aptly remarks,

To be realistic in the true sense we must have a feeling for truth and a sense of proportion. A baby smiling in a perambulator in the Park, playing with his toes under the almond blossom, is just as real as a victim of atomic bombing with his skin sheeting off and his melted eyes running down his roasted cheeks; to pretend that either is not there is to be a comfortable or uncomfortable ostrich. (The Anatomy of Prose 112)

Among the Indian English writers only Khushwant Singh writes on any aspect of life -- be it prostitution or the bleeding Punjab problem. Writers like Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan never deal with the sordid aspects of life. In a way, Khushwant Singh unconsciously revolts against the deceptively soft and sweet style of the Romantics, which he considers its false exterior.

It was John Locke who pointed out the importance of the proper use of words and the correspondence of words to things. He noted the failings of the figurative language. This Lockean view of language exercised a profound influence on realism in literature. Because of its impact, writers like Richardson, Balzac, Hardy and Dostoevsky use language
which seems almost graceless and sometimes with downright vulgarity. In this context Shahane analyses:

The Lockean view of language is precisely the raison d'être of Singh's purposefully cultivated naturalistic and graceless style. Singh's style also seems to be part of the general trend in style that has been influenced by the belief that there is a close connection between serious intention and 'unvarnished' realism. (Khushwant Singh 154)

Train to Pakistan is a minor classic in the post-Independence Indian English fiction. With its bold, brutal and unrelenting realism, it tears asunder the mask of hypocrisy and exposes the sordidness and savagery of human life. The harrowing incidents at the time of partition in 1947 had shaken him to his roots. He could not do anything; he was helpless. So art came to his rescue; and the novel becomes a "substitute gratification" in the sense it implies Khushwant Singh's optimistic and affirmative view and his enduring faith in the values of love and humanity and the unconquerable spirit of man in the face of mighty forces of wickedness and savagery. Thus Khushwant Singh's experience as an artist seems to confirm D.H. Lawrence's view: "True art is a sort of subterfuge. But thank God for it, we can see
through the subterfuge if we choose" ("The Spirit of Place" 123).

Usually the writer finds some means of indicating to the reader where the truth of the narrative lies. But in Train to Pakistan the action and events of the novel are presented by a third person reporter who stands outside the action, as Fielding does in Tom Jones. Such a narrator -- commonly called "Omniscient" -- may comment freely on what he reports, offering evaluations of characters and events; Or he may describe the action without comment and then he is known as "Objective narrator." In Train to Pakistan the events are presented by the objective narrator; and the "point of view" which is the perspective from which a novel is narrated, is unknown to the readers. But Stephen Ignatitus Hemenway has something more to say on this aspect:

Singh's third person reporter in Train to Pakistan has the voice of the "sociologist and the journalist," "the mere observer of facts," and ultimately the historian chronicling in microscopic fashion the sad events attendant upon the births of one predominantly Hindu and the one predominantly Muslim nation. Objectivity is crucial in this kind of novel, and it is probably Singh's disgust with "both sides" religious and political excuses which
keeps him from treating one group with more favouritism than another. ("Popularizers of Indo-Anglian Novel: Khushwant Singh" The Novel of India 2: 48)

His characters, whether two dimensional or three dimensional, never become mouthpieces of the writer. They are independent, often offering contradictory viewpoints, as often happen in actual life. But the presentation is done in such a way that a careful reader can realise where the authorial sympathies lie. Ian Milligan fully endorses this view:

Even if there is no explicit narrator, the impersonal third-person narrative will have its own distinctive voice and manner: literary language is rarely neutral. (97)

The implicit way of presenting the authorial point of view without comments is a rare phenomenon among Indian English writers. This is a unique feature in Khushwant Singh, considering the fact that he is basically outspoken to the core.

Khushwant Singh juxtaposes events and situations and thereby characters as well. Character-interaction results in an action or development of an idea which reveals the idea behind the action. What is interesting is, the authorial
view point is effectively communicated without the reader feeling it as an intrusion. And through characterization, the author's wrath against religious groups and political opinions finds expression.

The tone of Train to Pakistan is sometimes reminiscent of E.M. Forster's A Passage to India which is profoundly pessimistic about the inability of man to communicate with his fellows. The tragedy of A Passage to India lies in the breakdown of communication, both between races and between individuals. Ronnie Heaslop does not understand his mother's bleak view of the world; Fielding is cut off from his own countrymen because of his humane view of Indians; and Professor Godbole, a Hindu mystic, refuses to aid Dr. Aziz, the Muslim rationalist. Everywhere Forster sees division between people as well as races and cultures. Man, Mrs. Moore realises, is alone in an uncaring universe. All he has for comfort is his fellow man. When Mrs. Moore realises that the divisions between people cannot be bridged, she dies. In Train to Pakistan, communication is possible among individuals. But between communities, there is breakdown of communication. Jugga, who pitches himself against the general trend of the community, has to sacrifice his life. In both the novels there is an ambivalent feeling towards Britain and towards Indian Independence.
The combination of violence, cruel events and torture lend *Train to Pakistan* a tinge of the "Picaresque" where Jugga is the anti-hero who plays the role of the creator and destroyer. The Spanish word Picaro or "good-for-nothing" gave the name "Picaresque" to novels about rogues and rascals who devote their energies to getting back at a world which they think has treated them harshly. They are realistic in the sense that they take a pessimistic view of the possibility of human goodness. But the last scene of *Train to Pakistan* which is undoubtedly the major tour-de-force of the novel gives a clever twist to the "Picaresque" character of the novel. Jugga's act of love and sacrifice gives a ray of hope to the world which is encircled by gloom and darkness. This affirmation in the goodness of humanity is the sub-text of the novel -- which Khushwant Singh makes the readers feel without ever mentioning it. The sub-text evolves naturally through the interaction of characters and the real art of Khushwant Singh lies in the fact that such a dominant writer like Khushwant Singh is silent and the authorial point of view is revealed only implicitly.

Khushwant Singh's characters have a touch of ambivalence which makes them real and convincing. Hukum Chand is a hardboiled magistrate and a rake, but he entertains an inexplicable and compulsive affection for Haseena, a Muslim dancing girl; Jugga is an outlaw but he
has an innate goodness in him. The realist in Khushwant Singh might have felt that a good character is more credible if he has some natural frailties as is a bad character if he has some glimmer of goodness.

In fact, this kind of characterization is a revolt against the writers of romance. Romance idealised human beings so that the behaviour of its readers might be improved; it depicted heroic encounters between the impossibly good and the incorrigibly evil. By parodying these exploits in his Don Quixote, Cervantes wishes to explore the feasibility of the realisation of virtue by imperfect human beings. Thereby, he did not mean to disparage the virtues praised by the writers of romance. But his purpose was to describe the endless conflict between what men aspire to and what they can perform. In Train to Pakistan, the virtue is realised by the not-so-good Jugga and throughout the novel the conflict goes on between what men are supposed to do and what they actually do. Thus the novel has outgrown the confines of a Romance.

In Train to Pakistan, there is growth in the character of Juggat Singh. From an outlaw — "Jugga-the budmash" — he grows to become a faithful lover and then ultimately he evolves into a hero who sacrifices his life. Basically, his
nature is marked by a split between earthly brutality and passionate love; and he is a divided being between good and evil, noble and ignoble, sacred and profane. This represents a significant aspect of Khushwant Singh's view of humanity. The conflict and the final resolution make Juggat a "round" character and to a certain degree Hukum Chand too can be included in this category. Shahane aptly remarks:

Hukum Chand is a type as well as an individual, a person as well as a bureaucrat, and, in various ways, an evolving character. (Khushwant Singh 82)

Khushwant Singh attempts to capture the physical reality of the human world in the portrayal of Hukum Chand who is a typical Indian representative of bureaucracy in British-governed India. Hukum Chand is a counterpart of Buta Singh, the seasoned civil servant in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale. Khushwant Singh depicts with insight the small apparently insignificant gestures, facial expressions, nuances of behaviour of his characters and makes them come alive.

The change in Hukum Chand's attitude to Haseena from considering her as a teen-aged prostitute to viewing her merely as an inexperienced child, who reminded him of his deceased daughter is tenderly portrayed. His tender feelings
for Haseena impelled him to manipulate a situation -- which resulted in the release of Malli, Jugga and Iqbal -- to make it possible for Mano Majra Muslims to migrate to Pakistan with honour and in peace. What Hukum Chand could not and would not do under the normal course of events, he was able to do for the tender feelings he had for Haseena.

But characters like Iqbal in Train to Pakistan and Sher Singh in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale emerge as the representatives of that class of educated Indians who are great dreamers; but their dreams remain unfulfilled because they are more concerned with social applause rather than with their convictions. Similarly, Meet Singh represents the priestly class of the Sikhs and Imam Baksh is the traditional religious man of the Muslim faith. Even Shunno -- a servant member of the Buta Singh household -- is the typical widow, given to gossip, hardwork and loyalty to the family she serves. These characters are basically two dimensional and serve the purpose of the novelist only to the extent he requires of them.

The physical setting, in writers like Poe, Hardy, and Faulkner, is an important element in generating the atmosphere of the work. The setting in Train to Pakistan is played by a characteristic Indian village Mano Majra. Mano Majra is a small rural world where Sikhs and Muslims have
lived together in peace for generations, but that small world has become invaded by the larger world of Indian -- Pakistan division or Sikh -- Muslim conflict.

"Setting" refers to the part which may be played by location or milieu or historical time in the design of the novel. Thomas Hardy in *The Return of the Native* makes Egdon Heath the setting, an immense and brooding presence which reduces to pettiness and futility the human struggle for happiness. In *Train to Pakistan*, the small world of Mano Majra's plays the role of Egdom Heath.

Just as Shakespeare establishes the tense and fearful atmosphere of *Hamlet* at the beginning, by the nervous dialogue of the sentinels as they anticipate a reappearance of the ghost, Khushwant Singh creates the tonality of his novels even in the opening lines. *Train to Pakistan* begins:

The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. It was hotter than usual, and drier and dustier. (9)

Similarly the tone of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is revealed in the opening lines:

There should be a baptism in blood. We have
had enough of target practice. (3)

The use of symbols is another dimension in Khushwant Singh's writings. "Train" has been used as a significant symbol in Train to Pakistan. The novel was originally entitled Mano Majra (1956). The change in the title seems to be the result of deep thought. Mano Majra, the name of a village, is a fixed point, whereas the train is a symbol of movement. Thus the change is from the static to the dynamic. The train signifies multitudes of people from either side of the boundary line moving towards various destinations in agony and uncertainty.

The train is also a symbol of machine age which has given a severe blow to the humanistic values. The observation of Shahane in this regard is worth quoting:

Man divorced from nature and God, feels rootless and alienated. This rootlessness of man -- his severance from the bonds of the earth which reared him is symbolized by the train in Train to Pakistan. (Khushwant Singh 69)

The irony of the situation is that the train which is a symbol of science, instead of annihilating distance, has distanced people of different religious faiths from one
another physically and psychologically. And the railroads which are supposed to link places and people have created two parallel communities which, it seems, would never come closer.

The trains have become part of the system of Mano Majra: the arrival and the departure of trains mark different activities of the villagers. So the breaking of punctuality of the train in the wake of Partition puts the village life out of gear and it symbolises the loss of smooth and quiet life of Mano Majra:

Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seems as though the alarm clock had been set for wrong hour. (Train to Pakistan 92)

The train has become extraordinary in the sense it has reversed its usual role. Instead of carrying live passengers, it has started carrying dead bodies; the train which symbolises life and action, has started symbolising death and disaster. Perhaps to suggest that, the train from Pakistan has no lights; it was a symbol of darkness and death:

There are no lights on the train. The engine
did not whistle. It is like a Ghost. (Train to Pakistan 163)

It is "the ghost train" from Pakistan carrying mangled dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs, sets in motion the dark forces of violence and vengeance. It leads to the wicked plan to massacre the Mano Majran Muslims leaving for Pakistan by a train -- from which the novel derives its title. It is to let this train carrying Nooran pass safely through to Pakistan that Jugga sacrifices his life.

It would be pertinent to compare the theme of Walt Whitman's exuberantly optimistic poem, "A Passage to India" with Train to Pakistan. Whitman wrote this poem shortly after three feats of engineering helped to join the people of the world more closely. A telephone cable was laid across the Atlantic ocean; rail lines were joined spanning the United States from coast to coast; and the Suez Canal was opened. Whitman sees these events as heralding a unification of all the lands and people of the world. Hailing the passage to India made possible by the building of the Suez Canal, Whitman had prophesized:

All affection shall be fully responded to...
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and link'd together.

("A Passage to India" 401)
Whitman calls the year 1869 "year of the marriage of continents, climates, oceans." But quite the opposite happened in the Indian subcontinent. In the year 1947, the Indian subcontinent witnessed the biggest divorce action in history. Whitman's expectation of "marriage" has been shattered to pieces because of the "divorce" that took place here at the time of Partition. In a sense, the novel Train to Pakistan can be read as a wry, ironic commentary on the American poet's hopeful vision of a world unified by technical progress.

Khushwant Singh's second novel I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale which begins with a "baptism in blood" in order to kill as many English people as possible ends with a sense of gratitude for Mrs.Taylors who represents the English community. This is the greatest irony which runs through the whole novel. The novel, though it has the Quit India Movement as its backdrop, does not, in any place, glorify the movement; nor does the portrayal of the so-called freedom fighters in the novel bring any esteem either to themselves or to the movement. In this context, "the nightingale" in the title of the novel becomes a powerful symbol.

At one level, the nightingale symbolises the coming of spring, which, in turn, symbolizes the events of India's independence in 1947. At another level, it is not merely the
dawn of freedom that the nightingale implies. As Keats experiences, the hearts of men ache, and a drowsy, numbness overtakes them as they listen to the "plaintive anthem" of the nightingale. And the event of independence was not a matter of "full throated" joy as it was marred by the tragedy of communal violence in the wake of the Partition. The nightingale's song may be the herald of spring, but it could also be an expression of intense agony, misery, and spiritual deprivation. The nightingale's song implies both happiness and sorrow as one finds in Milton's "Il Penseroso"

'Less Philomel will deign a song
In her sweetest, saddest plight
(56-57)

It is obvious that the nightingale symbolizes the novel's ambivalent attitude towards Indian freedom struggle.

Whatever be the symbolic meaning, "the nightingale," does not fit in well with the story. The title of the novel, as Khushwant Singh told the researcher during the interview, has been taken from the poem beginning "when I am dead, my dearest" by Christina Georgina Rossetti. Taking into consideration the sense of the poem, the title I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale does not imply anything significantly particular. It simply speaks of the aftermath of death in universal terms.
The appropriateness of the title and the linking of "the nightingale" with happiness or otherwise or both seems to be rather far fetched. This argument gains strength in the light of Sabhrai's illiteracy and total indifference to the Freedom struggle in the novel. Khushwant Singh, who is keen on giving catchy titles to his novels, seems to have failed to take note of the overall feel of the novel for giving this title. In spite of all the poetry about the title, it is, to say the least, less convincing and appropriate than *Train to Pakistan*.

Of all the characters in the novel, Sabhrai proves to be quite natural and individualistic. She has the instinctive understanding of life and the wisdom of the race. One cannot ignore the way in which she reveals her religious commitment. As a characteristic Indian woman, she is torn between her husband and son. Both are selfish, but claim to be idealistic. She plays the subtle role of being non-committal. But suddenly she grows and exposes the emptiness of Buta Singh and Sher Singh. When, at last, she is expected to advise her son, she does what is quite unexpected. Instead of advising her son to reveal the names and be safe, she requests him to be firm and true to his religion, whatever may be the consequences.
This subtle anti-climactic situation proves to be poetic in the whole novel. The sudden growth of Shabhrai in all her brightness eclipses the other characters and other factors like nationalism and Quit India Movement. The novel suddenly takes a turn towards anti-climax making the religious consciousness of Shabhrai distinct; and in an artless way the sub-text/the authorial point of view is revealed by the interaction of various characters.

The principle of contrast, which Khushwant Singh uses, is the essential feature of the character portrayal of Champak and Shabhrai, Champak and Seeta, Dyer, the Alsation dog and Jhimma Singh. The novel also has characters that have the element of parallelism. For instance, Sabhraj and Mrs.Taylor reveal parallelism in their tendencies. Shahane throws more light on this:

Joyce Taylor plays an important part in the humanistic chain of events, which suggests that she is the European counterpart of Shabhrai, the Indian embodiment of benevolence and moral good. (Khushwant Singh 122)

The elements of parallelism are also seen in Sher Singh and Madan Lal, and in Buta Singh and Wazir Chand. Buta Singh and Wazir Chand are creations representing self-interest and men
of practical affairs. Sher Singh is divided between the world of his father and the world of his ideal conception.

"The tearing off the padding of respectability" (*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* 141) is yet another significant aspect of the realist in Khushwant Singh. The affair between Shunno and Peer Sahib is presented as a counterpart to the illicit relationship between Madan and Champak. The two pairs represent two different classes of society. But irrespective of the status in the society, Khushwant Singh seems to convey that the physical urges are universal.

In moments of infatuation and passion, neither religion nor God commands reverence and unholy alliances are formed even in the temple of God. This naked and bitter fact of human existence is effectively and satirically exposed by Khushwant Singh. The Muslim godman Peer Sahib recommended a "cure" for the Hindu widow equally committed to religious life, Shunno for her ailment. Then he seduced her. The ironic tone in the sexual episode reaches its peak with the statement, "the cure was a complete success" (*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* 141), and the characteristic punch of Khushwant Singh lies in the statement.

Khushwant Singh, a committed writer is a satirist who is quite sensitive to the gap between what might be and what
is. Of all kinds of satire, there is none so entertaining and enlightening as that which is introduced in the course of an interesting story. Khushwant Singh, in the novel, satirises the selfishness and lust for power and position. Buta Singh, the Sikh magistrate stoops to any level to draw favour from the English. He is not committed to any camp; he is committed only to his self-interest. He is the opposite of Govindasamy, the collector of Bhowani in John Master's Bhowani Junction. Though an untouchable, Govindasamy is no sycophant and he never compromises his dignity with the British.

Sher Singh, too, like his father Buta Singh, uses the nationalist stance as an excuse to satisfy his ambitious nature. His real nature reflects itself in his attempt to make a political capital out of his release from the police lock-up. M.L.Mehta traces the reason for his bogus posture as a hero:

Militancy for him is a psychological defence-mechanism to hide his physical inadequacy. Sher's failure to satisfy his nymphomaniac wife Champak leads him to wear the posture of a militant nationalist.... (Colonial Consciousness in Black American African & Indian fiction in English 159)
The comment of the novelist in this regard is also pertinent:

The more his physical inadequacy gnawed his insides, the more daring he became in his political activities. (I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale 192)

The name Sher Singh -- which means twice a lion -- has ironic connotations in the sense that he lacks the real strength and stamina of Juggut Singh in Train to Pakistan. Sher Singh and his friend Madan serve to reveal the author's contempt for militancy in any form. In the characterization of Buta Singh and Sher Singh, Khushwant Singh's manner is satirical; his tone mock-serious. A great artist is of his age as well as all ages; he thinks ahead of his times. So does Khushwant Singh in I shall not hear the Nightingale. People like Buta Singh -- of whom Sabhrai says, "You are only concerned with yourself" (I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale 190), still continue to exist. And colonial consciousness still clouds our consciousness. Buta Singhs and Sher Singhs continue to be the bane of Indian politics. It is in this context that Khushwant Singh's lampooning of Buta Singh and his extremely unsympathetic version of a national hero in Sher Singh becomes significant.
The novel can, in a sense, be called a political satire. Just as George Orwell was concerned with the major political issues of the twentieth century and with the future of human civilization in *Animal Farm*, Khushwant Singh is concerned with the major political movement in India and with the future of India. The hypocrisy and the pretensions in politics mostly become the target of attack for both the satirists who as James Sutherland remarks,

By refusing to compromise with wrong-doing and wrong-thinking, with shoddy behaviour and shoddy art, by his very insistence on drawing attention to them whenever they occur, he keeps ethical and social and aesthetic values from being insensibly lowered or lost by default. (*English Satire* 159)

In this moral indignation, perhaps, Khushwant Singh is zealous to debunk the Indian pretensions. So he caricatures every Indian character in the novel with the exception of Sabhrai. She is Khushwant Singh's metaphor to explore the possibility of bringing the two peoples -- the colonizer and the colonized -- together on the strength of personal relationship. She happens to be a fictional realization of the glorious Sikh ideals.
Khushwant Singh's delineation of the colonizers is in marked contrast to that of Mulk Raj Anand whose characters such as colonel Hutchinson or Hercules Lang read as caricatures. While the Taylors "practise" Christianity through their actions of love, compassion and sympathetic understanding, Colonel Hutchinson "preaches" Christianity through his words which of course, is utterly boring to Bakha. Mrs. Hutchinson who does not like her husband's visit to the outcaste's colony shouts at him:

Oh, is that what you've been doing, going to these blackies again! (Untouchable 147)

But Joyce Taylors pleads and persuades her husband to release Sher Singh on compassionate grounds. And Sabhrai, with the sense of deep gratitude acknowledges the kindness shown to her by the Taylors:

The Guru will reward them for their kindness.
Those who are with you in your sorrow are your real friends. God bless them. (I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale 206)

In short, Khushwant Singh writes like a loyalist and endows his English characters with human credibility; Mulk Raj Anand writes like an angry "native" and lampoons them.
The Taylors are unlike the Turtons, the Callenders and the Mac Brydes of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. Forster has used them as a fictional device to suggest a tainted image of "the little Gods" -- the English bureaucrats and their wives who exemplify "the-more-catholic-than thou" image. But the Taylors' catholicity gets expressed in their conciliatory attitude towards the "natives" and the novelist remarks:

From the very start, they found themselves isolated from the English community. They found the snobbery of the senior English officials a little irksome. They did not share their views about the role of Englishmen in India. (*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* 61)

No doubt, Khushwant Singh, unlike Mulk Raj Anand, is an anglophile and his being so has adequate reasons. He has revealed in the interview that *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* has autobiographical elements; the English characters in the novel are real persons. It is interesting to note that Khushwant Singh and the Taylors are on the same wavelength as far as the love for humanity is concerned. Khushwant Singh, too, alienates himself from his own community in condemning the Sikh violence; and the Taylors unconsciously are symbols of Khushwant Singh's religious concept -- the Christ-in-action. Through his art, Khushwant
Singh has given a concrete shape to his idea -- the Taylors' "Christmas gift" to the Buta Singh family in the form of Sher Singh's release transcends all narrow abstractions of traditional religious belief.

In both the novels Khushwant Singh does not seem to have created completely good or completely bad characters. Both the Indian and the English have points of view. With a Hegelian perspective, Khushwant Singh allows a clash between points of view. The result is quite interesting. Each character is right from his or her own point of view and with a tolerance rare among Indian English writers, Khushwant Singh gives full freedom for all the points of view. However, the authorial viewpoint is implicit and subtly and artistically revealed which the reader gradually comes to realize in a natural way. But a rethinking or rereading makes him all the more clear of the sub-text which is a significant achievement of Khushwant Singh as a novelist.

Khushwant Singh's Delhi - A Novel attempts to refashion history through a hundred different voices that punctuate the long saga. Quite interestingly, it is a novel without a hero though it has a protagonist - narrator who is perhaps, the author himself. He holds the periods and historical episodes together. But the classical hero is the city of
Delhi which continues to stand despite the transformations that history has forced upon it.

Though this selective history which covers over 600 years Khushwant Singh is the guide and he is depicted as an ageing reprobate. Bhagmati, his mistress has that alternate inter-spacing chapter to herself that divides great periods of history. Yet continuity in the novel poses to be a problem. Robert E. McDowell points out this:

... in chapter 9, for instance the narrator explores present-day Delhi with an army officer's wife, and they discuss Aurangzeb; Chapter 10 then takes us back to Aurangzeb and other seventeenth century Muslims... many of the historical chapters begin apropos of nothing in particular, giving the book (Which was twenty-five years in the writing) a ragged quality. (World Literature Today 188)

Khushwant Singh's use of the bawdy is deliberate and seriously handled. Referring to the novel Delhi, Khushwant Singh's friend Gopal Das Khosla -- who was in the ICS -- who later became the Chief Justice of Lahore High Court -- wrote:

I've read your novel Delhi. I think it is absolutely filthy. I can't think of another
word for it except filthy." (Women and Men in My Life 133)

But in Khushwant Singh's art, it is the chief weapon and metaphor through which he expresses his disgust. Bhaqmati may be taken as a symbol of sterility. She, being a hermaphrodite, can never conceive and this is a wonderful symbol for the city.

The use of paradox, which is a major trait in Khushwant Singh is very much evident in the novel:

Although I detest living in Delhi and am ashamed of my liaison with Bhaqmati, I cannot keep away from either for too long. In these pages, I will explain the strange paradox of my life-long love-hate affair with the city and the woman. (Delhi 2)

Delhi, which Khushwant Singh claims to be his magnum opus reveals his love-hate relationship with Delhi. He loves Delhi emotionally; he hates Delhi intellectually. He is thoroughly disgusted with the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs of India. This disgust finds its bold expression:

As for licking British boots, I tell them that if I was given the choice of being born in any period of Indian history I liked, I would
not choose the Hindu or Muslim -- not even in the short period of Sikh dominance in the north -- but the British. (Delhi 344)

Khushwant Singh is a prolific short-story writer and shows special mastery of that form. Dorathy Blain Shimer comments:

The condensation and sharp focus demanded by the short story gives Singh's sometimes caustic view of human nature a special cutting edge and reveals his sure hand in irony. (The Journal of Indian Writing in English 50)

The comic element runs through all his stories; and irony is a major element in much of Khushwant Singh's writing. But not all irony is humorous. On the contrary, it can be tragic, poignant, and heart rending as one finds in "The Mark of Vishnu".

The action is unfolded in a series of complications which evoke curiosity and create suspense. A conflict in situation and character is created, developed, and resolved through a succession of scenes. The resolution of the conflict brings out the point of the story which is sometimes a surprise, sometimes an unexpected tragi-comic
outcome or revelation; but it is always a fitting finale to the interesting sequence of events.

Khushwant Singh's stories display a linear development in sequence and his stories and technique cannot be described as modern. In the modern short story in English and American literature, the theme is not expounded in logical narrative continuum nor is the point of view explicitly suggested. Its theme is discerned through a series of symbols or imagistic patterns which give it poetic and dramatic content. But Khushwant Singh's stories aim at creating a single effect on the sensibility of the reader and thus conform to the basic elements practised by Edgar Allan Poe and Somerset Maugham. The sociological commitment which Khushwant Singh has in abundance, perhaps might not have allowed him to adopt a more complicated technique in his short stories. To ensure maximum readership among people for whom English is an alien language, Khushwant Singh might have opted for simple technique. Quite understandably, this simplicity in language and style has made him popular in Indian English literature.

His story "The Voice of God" is marked by verbal irony and irony of situation. The story with a telling irony deals with the pretentiousness, hypocrisy and the deception that underlie the actual working of electioneering. In the
election the most undeserving wins; and the most deserving loses his deposit. This has his characteristic ironic touch. And the punch in the story implies a lot: the power of money and muscle, the gullible nature of the masses and the resultant mockery of the democratic system. "Karma" portrays the slavish psychology of the educated Indian in British India and is marked by irony and inversion. Lal takes great pride in his well-bred manners, English accent and such other things that he has acquired during his five years' stay at Oxford. The impact of the Western culture is only on his external appearance and it has not made any change in his attitude. Lal hardly realises this. He pays the price for his pride when he is flung out of the railway compartment.

In "The Mark of Vishnu" also, an ironic meaning emerges from the two levels of meaning of the title. The "V" mark becomes a symbol of both protection and destruction. Here, the authorial objectivity is the hallmark of his craftsmanship for Khushwant Singh pronounces no judgement on this episode. He simply presents the problem and juxtaposes the opposites, namely, superstition and reason, pagan faith in animal deity and the sheer aggressive beastliness of the animal world.
Khushwant Singh is a skilled craftsman in unmasking the central character in the story. In the process, he is satirical or lively and lighthearted. His art of satirical portrayal is seen in "Mr. Kanjoos and the Great Miracle." The word "Kanjoos" which is the Hindi equivalent of "miser" is the name of the character. Mr. and Mrs. Kanjoos are symbols of unscrupulous, premeditated and well-planned miserliness. They are figures of fun and also objects of Khushwant Singh's ridicule and satire.

The predominant quality of Khushwant Singh as a short-story writer is his comic spirit. This spirit evolves in him spontaneously by his observation of the bewildering phenomena of contradictions in life and the gulf that divides appearance from reality. In the words of Oscar Wilde:

The only thing that the artist cannot see is the obvious. The only thing that the public can see is the obvious. The result is the criticism of the journalist. (433)

This uniqueness, one can find in Khushwant Singh's journalistic writings. In his article "A Professional Provocateur" Amitabba Bhattacharya remarks:

... none can deny that he has done more good than harm in provoking Indian readers and in
attempting to shake their hypocrisy, double --
standardism and prudery -- quality we possess
in abundant measure. (Indian Book Chronicle
115)

Khushwant Singh has been often criticised that in order
to boost up the circulation of Weekly, he took to means
which are not always in good taste by the standard of an
average educated Indian. But Khushwant Singh argues that he
changed Weekly's "dull respectability" and took it from the
doctors' - dentists' - barbers' waiting rooms into the homes
of people who matter.

Khushwant Singh's literary skill makes his pieces
immensely readable. His piece on "Maazur Qadir" pays rich
tribute to Pakistan's former Foreign Minister:

... he never said a hurtful word about anyone.
And integrity which surpassed belief. He made
upwards of Rs.50,000 a month; income-tax
authorities were constantly refunding tax he
had paid in excess.... It was commonly said,
"God may lie, but not Manzur Qadir". Though
Godless he had more goodness in him than a
clutch of saints.... He was the human
touchstone of our moral pretensions. (Not a
Nice man to Know 14)
Bringing out the contradictions in personalities was his stylistic aspect which kept the readers in a receptive mood. For instance, he writes:

Manzur Qudir was a man of contradictions. He showed little promise as a student; he became much the most outstanding lawyer of Pakistan. Next to law, his favourite reading was the Old Testament and the Quran. Nevertheless he remained an agnostic to the last.... He was long-winded but never a bore; a teetotaller who effervesced like vintage champagne. (13-14)

It is characteristic of Khushwant Singh to coin striking phrases to attract the reader. In this piece on "Prabha Dutt" he refers to God as "Divine Reaper" who without any consideration for age and beauty, plucks mercilessly the fairest and the most youthful flower. Often his pieces end with a fine quotation which sums up the tone and meaning of the piece. In "Prabha Dutt" he expresses his deep sorrow at her sudden death and writes:

The most fitting tribute I can pay her is by placing a wreath stolen from Shakespeare:

"Now boast thee death, in thy possession lies
A Lass unparalleled!" (Not a Nice Man to Know 19)
On "Nirad C. Chaudhuri" he writes that Nirad is a scholar extraordinary and can talk on any subject under the sun. Strangely, he expects every one to misunderstand him and succeeds in his attempt. Nirad is an angry man; and he has much to be angry about. He proclaims in anger:

A man who cannot endure dirt, dust, stench, noise, ugliness, disorder, heat and cold has no right to live in India. (Not a Nice Man to Know 49)

Nothing pleased Nirad more than being abused for the wrong reasons. He seemed to enjoy provoking people into losing their tempers. In Khushwant Singh's style one can discern Nirad's influence. The fact that most of his journalistic writings create a lot of controversy proves that his writings give initial shock and they invariably provoke people.

Khushwant Singh's views on prostitution, prohibition, kissing in films and such other controversial topics are quite often that of a modern, progressive and cultivated mind. But, here again, it carries Khushwant Singh's characteristic punch:

I suspect that many people who wax eloquent against prostitutes do so because it gives
them the opportunity to indulge in talk about sex and yet not mar their "holier-than-thou image." (qtd. in Amitabba Bhattacharya 114)

Critics of Khushwant Singh say that Khushwant Singh has never been taken seriously as a political journalist. They argue that his understanding of the complex political issues and cross-currents is so simplistic. His views on what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad are so rigidly defined. So he is incapable of being a remarkable journalist. Despite all that, Khushwant Singh is widely read and talked about. This could be so because of the style and candour of his writing or his being the champion of communal amity or his being sensational and provocative. But, above all, his writings are often marked by an honesty of purpose and they carry the stamp of conviction. And his personality as reflected through his writings, brings out a certain amount of warmth and simplicity -- qualities lacking in most of the journalists.

His writings cover a wide range of subjects; often even serious subjects are written in an apparently lighter vein. These pieces are often sprinkled with jokes. As usual, some of them are either crude or even ribald. Sigmond Freud considered jokes worthy of deep attention and acknowledged the value of humour as a weapon against neurosis. In
Khushwant Singh's words:

A good joke is a tonic for appetites jaded by an unending and unsavoury diet of politics, corruption, religious and social problems. ("Preface" Khushwant Singh's Joke Book)

In a country like India, a sense of humour is a very much needed to cushion people from the shocks of multifarious problems. There are many things that make different people laugh. But laughter should be spontaneous. It is a phenomenon that releases tension and makes one feel lighter and happier. Good humour is goodness and wisdom combined.

The world is a perpetual caricature of itself; at every moment it is the mockery and the contradiction of what it is pretending to be. It intends all the time to be something different and highly dignified; at the next moment it corrects and checks and tries to cover up the absurd thing it was. So a conventional world or a world of masks is superimposed on the reality; and the world of masks passes in every sphere of human interest for the reality itself. Humour is the perception of this illusion. The world of mask continues to be maintained as if we had not observed its absurdity.
To laugh at others is easy; to laugh at oneself is rather difficult. Only people with self-confidence can afford to laugh at their foibles. That makes Khushwant Singh proud of his Sikh community which is capable of manufacturing the best of Sardarji jokes. Most of the communities in India do not have the confidence to poke fun at themselves. Here is an example:

Two friends Santa Singh and Banta Singh were always boasting of their parents' achievements to each other.
Santa Singh: "Have you heard of the Suez canal?"
Banta Singh: "Yes, I have."
Santa Singh: "Well, my father dug it."
Banta Singh: "That is nothing. Have you heard of the Dead Sea?"
Santa Singh: "Yes, I have."
Banta Singh: "Well, my father killed it."

(Khushwant Singh's Joke Book 3: 127)

Further, Khushwant Singh has his own targets to aim at. He finds the powerful and the self opinionated name droppers extremely ludicrous. Almost all Indians indulge in self-praise and name dropping. These diseases specially afflict our politicians who are forever dropping hints about their closeness to the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and the
people in seats of authority. It is a pleasure for Khushwant Singh to deflate their boasting with a carefully aimed pinprick.

Khushwant Singh seems to believe that the greatest joke in the world is to tell the truth. Often he clothes the truth in a joke and the joke provokes both laughter and remedial action. Here is a joke about the partial and biased nature of news given out by our government media:

A man went up to heaven to complain to the Good Lord about the sorry state of affairs in the world. "Almighty God, you are said to be all-knowing. I don't think you know a thing about what is going on the earth that you created. No one cares a fig for the truth." The Almighty Lord protested: "I know exactly how things are down below. Look at that board in front of you. Every time any one tells a lie, a red light flashes and I know who is lying."

The man watched the flicker of red lights on the board and was duly impressed. Suddenly a whole lot of red light began to flicker madly. The man asked, "Why are all those lights flickering at once?"
Replied the Almighty - "Oh that! we are tuned into All India Radio and Doordarshan."

(Khushwant Singh's Joke Book 45)

Interestingly there is a sense of fairness and justice in his jokes too. In the following joke, Bhindranwale is presented as refusing to accept the assassin of Mrs. Gandhi as his body guard in the other world. Here, Khushwant Singh seems to emphasise the professional ethics that a body guard should not betray whatever may be the other considerations for his betrayal.

This happened after the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. It might be recalled that her assassin Beant Singh was killed a few minutes after he had committed the foul deed. Beant Singh arrived in the presence of Bhindranwale and reverently touched his feet. "Santji, I have done the job you assigned to me. I have killed the woman who ordered desecration of the Golden Temple and gave you martyrdom."

"You have done well," said Bhindranwale.
"Ask for any reward and I will give you."
"Santji, I have nothing to do. Please find me some good job," pleaded Beant Singh.
"Ask for any job and I will arrange it for you," replied Bhindranwale.

"Santji, all I knew is guarding V.I.Ps. Please appoint me as your security guard."

Bhindranwale had second thoughts.

"Puttar, ask for some other job. I cannot appoint you as my security guard."

(Khushwant Singh's Joke Book 3:10)

This is not just a joke, but a self-appraisal and this reminds one of the English proverb, "Many a truth is spoken in jest." Further Khushwant Singh's jokes are "tonic" both to the individual and society; it promotes health and constant enjoyment of life. Emily Dickinson has said, "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant" (American Literature 1890-1965 338). But in the case of Khushwant Singh even for telling the truth obliquely many abuses have been hurled at him from different quarters. But Khushwant Singh does not mind paying this high price for taking "people's minds away from boring tedium of their daily lives and get them to smile" (Preface. Kushwant Singh's Joke Book 6).

Maybe, he advises all, as Shakespeare does:

Frame your mind to mirth and merriment,
Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life.

(The Taming of the Shrew Induction 2.137-38)
Khushwant Singh's writings, though essentially journalistic will certainly stand the test of time. Among the Indian English novelists, he is both an Insider and Outsider. This position has given him an objectivity which is rare among Indian English novelists. His style has helped him to make use of this objectivity to blend fact and fiction. All his fiction is factual. All his factual writings have fictional quality in them. His lucid style, his fine sense of ending, his sense of humour -- which tentatively hides the bitter truth behind it -- all go a long way to establish Khushwant Singh as a writer of merit. He is an Indian first, as he claims. He is at once an internationalist as well. He is multi-faceted and needs closer scrutiny if one really wants to measure his talents and achievements.