CHAPTER SIX

SUMMATION

There is much in the contemporary world to numb or stupefy, indeed to terrify us. Literature remains one of the great humanizing influences, and a career in literature can still be one of the most honourable careers. (Fraser 406)

Khushwant Singh is a paradox. He is an alien in his own Sikh community. His name is in the hit-list of the Sikh extremists. And he is an alien in the non-Sikh India as well. The non-sikh Indians sometimes dub him a "Pakistani agent" because of his open utterances in favour of India's peaceful co-existence with Pakistan and of his deep rooted attachment to Hadali (now in Pakistan) which is his birthplace. In spite of the fact that India has fought three bloody wars with Pakistan, Khushwant Singh is proud of his emotional attachment to Pakistan where his roots are.

The predominant Sikh consciousness which is embedded in his psyche is yet another factor which makes others look at him as an alien and makes him feel alienated from non-Sikh Indians. His pride regarding the Sikh community is so great
that during the interview with this researcher, he claims that Man Mohan Singh is the only minister who matters in the Central cabinet and he honestly admits that he feels happier when Siddhu hits a sixer in the cricket match. The redeeming factor is that unlike a hypocrite, he does not care to hide his sense of pride. Khushwant Singh is an agnostic, but quite strangely, he retains some of the external symbols of Sikh religion. This is all the more contradictory that Khushwant Singh inspite of his cosmopolitan outlook which prompts him to propose a new religion for India based on science and humanism, is not able to come out of the external rituals of Sikhism. The underlying overwhelming Sikh consciousness is the reason for his surrendering the "Padma Bhushan" award in protest against the Bluestar Operation in the Golden Temple. Often, it seems, his Sikh consciousness overshadows his Indian consciousness and this brings in the alienation factor.

Again, Khushwant Singh dislikes many things in India; and he is not proud of being an Indian. Life is easier and more comfortable in foreign countries. There is more fun and entertainment. Yet he soon gets tired of all those things and wants to get back to his dirty country to be with the rustic people. There arises a conflict in him between his head and heart; between his sense of alienation and his sense of belonging. Ultimately as in the case of every true
artist, Khushwant Singh's head yields to his heart and he declares that he loves India despite its shortcomings. This paradoxical situation reveals how Khushwant Singh is maintaining a love-hate relationship with India. In Delhi, too, Khushwant Singh explains the strange paradox of his life-long love-hate affair with the city and his ugly mistress Bhagmati. This predicament of Khushwant Singh -- which is prevalent in his writings -- is the core of the thesis. Khushwant Singh too feels a kind of isolation or alienation as Shaw does:

Finding one's place may be made very puzzling by the fact that there is no place in ordinary society for extraordinary individuals. (qtd. in Fred Mayne 115)

Extraordinary individuals usually keep themselves aloof and look down upon the ordinary society with contempt. They give a gloomy picture of everything around them and in the condemnation of others there will be usually approbation of self. But Khushwant Singh is an exception. Like Osborne's Jimmy Porter he looks upon the happenings around him in anger and sorrow. But, in Jimmy Porter's anger against his parents' generation, the Labour Government they installed, the social order they tolerated, there is a painful sense of loss; and there is the collapse of the whole way of life.
But Khushwant Singh the artist presents a shiny picture out of a gloomy situation. He gives an optimistic twist to the otherwise sad ending in his artistic creations. His two novels Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale bear ample testimony to this aspect. Train to Pakistan is not a mere portrayal of the horrors of the Partition. On the contrary, the sacrifice of Juggut Singh has given a completely new dimension to the novel and the sacrifice has become a symbol of light and hope in the cruel world of darkness and despair. It symbolises the triumph of good over evil; and it is just the opposite of what Manohar Malgonkar's A Bend in the Ganges conveys. It is an epic presentation of India's struggle for freedom from the late thirties to the partitioning of the country in 1947. The novel attempts to probe Gandhi's ideology of non-violence in relation to man's hidden capacity for violence. It seems to suggest that non-violence is a futile experiment and true, voluntary non-violence is not possible because non-violence is a weapon of the helpless. Malgonkar goes one step further and states that violence is the fact of our existence—and it should be recognised.

In Train to Pakistan, though violence dances furiously in all its ugly form, Khushwant Singh does not recognise it as the fact of life. But it is only accepted as a sudden temporary phenomenon born out of emotion and despair in the
wide spectrum of human activities. The optimistic humane way out to the orgy of violence is found out -- the way out being the supreme sacrifice which is the culmination of true love.

Similarly the love and sacrifice of Sabhrai in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale solve the problem of the two families at the human, social, cultural and political levels. With Quit India Movement as a backdrop, the novel begins on a note of violence. Madan is persuading the reluctant Sher Singh to shoot the bird Sarus Crane:

    Steel your heart against sentiments of kindness and pity. They have been the undoing of our nation. We are too soft. (I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale 6)

At last Sher Singh mortally wounds a "harmless and inedible bird"; and there arises a conflict of emotions of guilt and pride in him. The anguished cry of the bird seems to suggest the pathetic cry of the innocent victims of violence. But, quite contrarily, the novel ends on a note of prayer, hope and love. Like Juggut Singh in Train to Pakistan, Sabhrai redeems the human world around her through her pious life and death. All through the novel, there is sorrow and suffering. Yet towards the end, Sabhrai dies in a mood of
triumph:

She seemed to be at complete peace with the world. An unearthly radiance glowed in her pale face. (I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale 234)

Though the setting of the novel is Quit India Movement, the novel does not seem to glorify the movement. Perhaps, Khushwant Singh does not want to. The characterization of Sher Singh, Madan and Buta Singh confirms Khushwant Singh's disillusionment with the movement. One can understand, on closer analysis of the novel, a sense of alienation of the novelist from the national movement. There was lack of total commitment and involvement in the movement. Instead of upholding the struggle, the novel ridicules the bogus and hypocritical nature of the so called freedom fighters.

In fact Indian Independence was a signal achievement for the Indian people after a long drawn struggle for freedom against the British empire. Any other country would have witnessed a flood of creative writings in praise of this rare achievement. But, quite strangely, instead of a sense of pride, there is a sense of guilt and shame in the novels. These novels echo various notes of mood ranging from light criticism to stark pessimism.
Novels like Manogar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Raj Gill's *The Rape* have even made Gandhi, the prophet of non-violence responsible for violence. In Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* the anger turns against the other Congress leaders like Nehru and Patel for being responsible for Partition. Interestingly, India's eminent writers like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand have avoided the subject altogether. This is not very surprising in the case of Narayan and Raja Rao. Narayan has always avoided political subjects. His only exception is *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Perhaps, the horror-packed Partition does not suit his comic genius. The subject does not appeal as well to Raja Rao who, steeped in religion and philosophy, finds sustenance in India's myth and rituals. But it is very strange that Mulk Raj Anand, a political novelist has avoided the subject though he has fought for Indian Independence. Perhaps, the incidents that followed the achievement of freedom did not make him happy. Or perhaps he did not want to be critical of the Indian leaders in the early stages of freedom. May be, as a humanist, he believes in man's essential goodness; but the Partition has shattered his belief to pieces and has distinctly depicted man's inherent capacity for evil.

Unlike Narayan's Bharati, Khushwant Singh's portrayal of Sher Singh does not include any trace of integrity or
idealism. Sher Singh is an unsympathetic version of a nationalist hero. A weakling devoid of physical and moral courage, he leads a band of adolescent terrorists with romantic notions. They dabble with sabotage and kill a police informer. Sher Singh is suspected and arrested. He breaks down at the initial stage of police torture. If he does not divulge the names of his accomplices, it is only because he is released before his commitment is put to the test thoroughly. Sher Singh is an unheroic hero hankering after position; and this lust for power is due to his sense of physical inadequacy with his wife. Sher Singh's father, Buta Singh, is a past master in the art of keeping up with both sides, thereby revealing the mixed motives of the revolutionary.

Khushwant Singh understands the Indian ambivalence which made it impossible for him to hate the British totally. There are evidences to this effect in the two novels of Khushwant Singh *Train to Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. It is but natural on the part of the writers of Indian Independence and Partition to feel a sense of alienation from the communities which are mad and from the political leaders whose lack of wisdom, foresightedness, tolerance and statesmanship have resulted in the holocaust. While the sense of alienation is distinctly explicit in the other writers, in Khushwant Singh it is implicit.
As a true artist believing in the dictum "the perfection of art is to conceal it" he leaves many things unsaid. Simultaneously his faith in the inherent human goodness makes his art create, beside a real world, a more humane one. In spite of the journey through the valley of despair, Khushwant Singh's optimistic outlook through his art finds its expression. It definitely makes the reader feel that all is not lost.

A remarkable feature of Khushwant Singh's short stories is his ability to ridicule the widely accepted values. By doing so, he becomes an iconoclast who alienates himself from the mob in order to be individualistic. He points out that there are many prejudices, customs and attitudes of mind generally accepted without question; they are in vogue precisely because they are neither challenged nor examined. Khushwant Singh is never openly didactic in his short stories. Characteristically, he poses as a cynic and he does his preaching quite indirectly.

As a conscious and sensitive artist, he looks for only the imperfect subject. Perhaps, he seems to agree with Oscar Wilde's maxim:

What is abnormal in life stands in normal relations to Art. It is the only thing in life that stands in normal relations to Art. (433)
His art thrives in abnormal conditions. That is why he uses irony as a mode of statement which does not express the normal meaning. The short story "The Mark of Vishnu" can be cited as an example. Ganga Ram's religiosity is presented in juxtaposition with the adventurous, but careful young children and also with the pragmatically careful teacher. The omniscient story teller reserves his comment till the end.

An agnostic like Khushwant Singh could have closed the story with a finality by pronouncing judgement on what the children or the teacher do or what happens to Ganga Ram after the fatal attack. But he has not done that and the story is "open." The story, because of its religious overtones, might have shocked some orthodox religious minded people. Shahane while appreciating the craftsmanship of Khushwant Singh is not happy with the religious content. His comments convey his disapproval of the theme:

... Ganga Ram's blind devotion to the Kala Nag, as presented by Khushwant Singh, seems a little unconvincing inasmuch as it is an exaggerated portrayal of a perhaps vanishing Hindu tradition and belief. (Khushwant Singh 39)
But the superstition has not vanished and the relevance of the story is very much felt even today. The following real incident reported in *The Week* confirms these aspects:

God is in oneself goes the saying, but Erammel Govindan of Karuvanchal village in Kannur district (Kerala) wanted to see himself as God. He decided to get himself photographed with a cobra around his neck, for he was a devotee of Lord Shiva. He picked up a snake in the forest and put it round his neck and trudged to the photo studio in the village.... The next moment the photographer was running for dear life even as Govindan lay dead, bitten by the snake. ("Hiss of Death" 18)

More than four decades have elapsed since the publication of this story. But the fact that the story is relevant even today is an ironic comment on the civilized society.

Another dimension of Khushwant Singh's short stories is that they represent colonial consciousness in the Indian way of life. The interaction between the typical Indian characters and the Anglicized upper class Indians reveals the fact that they cannot communicate with each other in a satisfactory manner. Also, the behaviour of the Indians
when they are in the midst of English men provides ample scope for ridiculous situations. These situations are almost invariably ironical, satirical and comic. Stories like "Karma" and "A Bride for the Sahib" scoff at the hypocrisy of aping the English manners. The two stories are a sad satiric comment on the futility of education.

Education instead of converting the mind into a living fountain has made Sir Mohan Lal's mind a reservoir. He worships everything that is English; and looks down upon anything Indian, his wife not excluded. Whereas he, an Oxford-returned barrister travels first class, his illiterate wife travels second class. But his pride which is at its peak falls headlong when he is unceremoniously thrown out of the train by the two English soldiers. Ironically, his humble wife travels in comfort in her Interclass compartment. Sir Mohan has failed to acquire an understanding of and a lively feeling for values. That is why he -- with his education -- resembles rather a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person.

"The voice of God" makes fun of the electioneering in India. In India quite often, the election becomes a battle between God and Mammon. In the story the most undeserving candidate Sardar Ganda Singh is declared elected with a huge margin. He and his men are embodiments of all vices. But
Baba Ram Singh, the genuine representative of the people loses his deposit. With the utmost authorial objectivity, the story ends.

Khushwant Singh seems to suggest that in a democracy the people have the right to make even a wrong-choice. People definitely speak by exercising their franchise. For making a fair and just choice, they must be sound in mind and body. When they make a bad choice it is not the fault of the system; it is due to their living conditions. Poverty and illiteracy have been reduced to the minimum in the western countries and so the people make the right choice. Here, in India, poverty and illiteracy which are in large-scale decide the voice of the people. Their wrong choice implies their sociological conditions, which call for remedial steps to keep democracy alive. This has to be done because democracy is good as all the other systems are worse.

In short stories Khushwant Singh excels because of his keen observation of men and matters. He exploits the art of story telling to the maximum extent by using techniques like humour, satire and anticlimax. A kind of prejudice against satire still remains because the satirist is destructive; he destroys what is already there and he does not necessarily offer any alternative. So the feeling that the satirist is
somehow negative, uncreative and irresponsible is still there.

Though there is a comic tone in Khushwant Singh's short stories, it always blends with satire -- mild satire. He never accepts the follies, imperfections, impudence, and faults of men and women as something provided for his enjoyment by the bountiful world. Unlike the writers of comedy Khushwant Singh cannot accept the human shortcomings and refuses to tolerate them. James Sutherland's comment on the role of a satirist is apt:

... he comes round knocking us up from a comfortable sleep to face hard and uncomfortable facts. *(English Satire 6)*

For instance, the story "The Great Difference" presents two religious spokesmen of Hinduism and Islam attending the World Congress of Faiths in Paris. Their behaviour on the boat train reflects their mutual hatred. Though all religions teach love and tolerance, these two religious leaders have deep-rooted prejudices towards each other. Their attitudes go beyond the individuals concerned and assume sociological dimensions. The story exposes the hypocrisy of institutionalized religion and the hollowness of its pompous preachers.
The implication is that religion is slowly losing its grip over the youngsters because of the corrupt and dishonest preachers who never serve as models. Further, modern generation, thanks to their independent and practical outlook, prefer practising religion to preaching religion. Shaw once wrote:

After all, the salvation of the world depends on the man who will not take evil good-humouredly, and whose laughter destroys the fool instead of encouraging him. (qtd. in Sutherland 4)

In one sense, Khushwant Singh's "The Riot" is laughter-provoking. The story satirically underscores the point that man, a social animal is less than ordinary dogs in matters relating to peaceful coexistence with his fellow men. The Hindu shopkeeper, Ram Jawaya and Muslim green-grocer Ramzan are involved in a bloody communal riot. Their shops are burnt down and the town is in the grip of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. But their dogs, Moti and Rani though they are of different breeds, love each other and together they take care of bastard brood in the courtyard.

Just as P.B.Shelley makes a pathetic plea to the bird,

Teach me half the gladness

That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness

. From my lips would flow

The world should listen then, as I am listening now!

("To a Skylark" The Golden Treasury 246)

Khushwant Singh, perhaps, is making a fervent plea to the communally-conscious people to learn from the dogs the art of loving and living peacefully. It is a sad commentary on man, the crown of creation, who has to take lesson on the vital matter of living together from the creatures which are not endowed with the reasoning power. The satire here is not aimed at individuals alone. To some extent, the emphasis in the satire has been shifted from individual man to mankind.

One remarkable aspect of Khushwant Singh as short story writer is that the artist in him is never brow beaten by the moralist. His reforming zeal is a humanized one and it is the outcome of honest indignation at vice or folly, and of a strong desire to promote the public good.

Khushwant Singh's A History of the Sikhs in two volumes tells the story of the Sikhs from their inception to the present day. He is aware of the fact that his work would be lacking in historical perspective; it may be somewhat biased and lacking in the objective approach of the outsider. But
as he himself observes:

...it has the advantage of being the point of view of the believer mentally and emotionally involved in the vicissitudes of the community.

(The Sikhs 7)

His total concern with the ups and downs of the Sikh community has, in one sense, made him feel an alien with other communities. And all through the history of the Sikhs -- which is of five centuries -- one can easily observe the Sikhs' longing for a separate identity. Khushwant Singh who has been keen on maintaining this separate identity at one stage, was afraid of the possibility of Sikhism merging with Hinduism. This fear, perhaps, has redoubled their vigour to maintain their separate identity.

It was Guru Gobind Singh who made the Sikhs into a fighting force and strengthened the military and political aspects of the religion. They took the name Singh (lion) and swore to observe the "Five k's"; not to cut hair or beard (Kesh); to wear a comb (kanga), shorts (kach) and iron bracelet (kartha); and to carry a sword (kirpan). Certain other codes of personal conduct, such as refraining from smoking were also enjoined. As has been noted in the
The main Sikh devotion was service; service to one's family, to Sikhism, to mankind, and finally, the greatest service of all, to God through martyrdom. ("Sikhs")

Perhaps, Sikhs are the only race in the world who can be easily identified by their external symbols. For them service to God through martyrdom is the greatest; all the other things are of lesser significance. This strong sense of religious consciousness -- Sikh consciousness -- and that too, placing it above everything else and the craving for a separate identity indirectly alienates them or makes them feel alienated. For Khushwant Singh also, the identity-consciousness is so dominant that in any other surroundings he becomes an alien. In paradoxical terms, a deep sense of belonging to his Sikh community has given him a sense of alienation.

In the post-partitioned India the preservation of Sikh culture and its identity seemed even more formidable. Khushwant Singh expresses the fear that secular India's new rulers fully supported the renaissance of Hinduism. He feels that this apprehension in the minds of the Sikhs pushed them to fundamentalism of which Bhindranwale became the messiah. Khushwant Singh cites two important incidents
which made the Sikhs feel humiliated and alienated. In August 1983, the Akalis decided to press for the implementation of long pending demands so they planned to raise anti-government slogans at the Asian games. Mrs. Gandhi's response to the threat shocked the Sikhs. Every Sikh going towards Delhi by rail or road was insulted and ill-treated by the police and the army. And the Sikhs as a community, for the first time experienced religious discrimination; and they felt they were treated "as a people apart from other Indians" (The History of the Sikhs 2: 355).

Following the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi on 31 October 1984 violence was let loose on Sikhs; a few thousands were killed and a few thousands were rendered homeless. Thousands fled from their homes in different parts of India and migrated to the Punjab. Khushwant Singh feels sad that the government did not take timely action to contain the large scale violence against the Sikhs; and as a result, the Sikh community felt let down and felt alienated.

The sense of alienation was so strong in some of the Sikhs and they passed the resolution proclaiming Khalistan and hoisting the flag of Khalistan in the Golden Temple. Khushwant Singh has at times felt alienated, humiliated and let down. On these occasions his reactions have been
emotional. He identifies himself with the Sikhs and all his sympathies are with them. But he would never compromise his faith in the integrity of the country. As a true lover of humanity he condemns violence -- especially the killing of innocent people by the Sikh militants.

Few people dare to condemn gangsters who haul out innocent, unarmed people from buses and kill them, lob grenades in crowded market places and cinemas. The Hindubaiter, Bhindranwale, has become a martyred hero of lumpen sections of Sikh society. (*The History of the Sikhs* 2: 416-417)

Like a historian, Khushwant Singh traces the past history of the Sikhs through all their ups and downs and ends on a sad note. This is because he feels that his traditional religion has lost its meaning and the message of goodwill towards all mankind enshrined in the Granth has been reduced to mere ritual litany. Towards the end of the book definitely the true artist in him excels. In spite of his compelling Sikh consciousness he looks at Mankind as a whole.

It seems Khushwant Singh is full of contradictions. This is more obvious whenever the question of his identity arises. He is a Sikh; he is an Indian. He is an agnostic and he is the religious man. This kind of dual identity, perhaps
is the result of a sense of alienation. In fact, his emotional involvement with the Sikh community forces him to look at every problem from the Sikh point of view. His reasons for condemnation of Bhindranwale are neither religious nor personal. A deeper analysis of his ideologies will reveal the fact that he is consistently inconsistent. What Margery M. Morgan has said about Shaw is worth considering here:

Like all reformers, he [Shaw] had to fight his chosen enemies within himself as well as in society, and the battle proceeds on other levels besides the rational. (5)

In one sense, Khushwant Singh too has enemies within himself as well as in the society. The inconsistency in him may be due to this factor.

But there is a difference between having contradictions and having self-contradiction. He is Hegelian in his perspective. He never stops with recommending either/or solutions. Life is not, according to him, as simple as that. He believes in Both/And concept. His sincere choices might sound inconsistent for superficial critics of him. If it is choosing between being an individualist and being a devout follower of Bhindranwale, he chooses to be individualistic. If it is choosing between being a committed Sikh and a
popular Indian, his first choice is his religion whatever be the consequences.

This double identity -- one with the Sikhs and the other with India -- perhaps is one of the reasons for his being alienated from both. It is paradoxical that one who is all for Sikhs and Sikh community is labelled as anti-Sikh and alienated for his "anti-Sikh writings." The anger of the Khalistan extremists is so much against him that they have kept his name in their hit-list. The reason is obvious:

I happen to be one of the Sikhs, and perhaps the only one who condemned this man [Bhindranwale] when he was alive. (My Bleeding Punjab 107)

This was conveniently forgotten by the non-Sikhs of India and they also became equally hostile to him. About this experience he writes:

When I lodged my formal protest against Blue Star by returning the Padma Bhushan conferred on me, I was roundly condemned as a Sikh communalist. I was flooded with abusive letters, telegrams and phone calls. (My Bleeding Punjab 141)
More than this, at the time of Delhi riot immediately after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Khushwant Singh -- because he is a Sikh -- had to seek refuge in the Swiss Embassy to save himself.

This aspect of non-acceptance of Khushwant Singh in the Sikh community as well as in the non-Sikh Indian community is a distinct pointer to his success as an artist. This implies that his writings bear a stamp of truth and fairness; and it results in his alienation from the societies he is writing about. Strange, though it is, this phenomenon happens in the case of every iconoclast. Like Shaw, Kushwant Singh has learnt how to stand alone. His education and temperament have made him remain unassimilated by the society.

Khushwant Singh's point of view is almost in agreement with that of Onkar Singh, the hero of Romen Basu's *My Own Witness*. A non-Sikh writer, Romen Basu writes with social commitment. Onkar Singh shows remarkable forbearance after seeing the damage caused to the Golden Temple by Bluestar Operation. Onkar Singh's reading of World scriptures during his three years in solitary confinement widens his perspective. Though he has stamina in fighting, he propagates
love and brotherhood through universal religion:

From the little that I have learned from the Bhagavad Gita and the Holy Koran, they offer the same message as Guru Granth Sahib. Violence, attachment, avarice and wrath, these are four rivers of fire; whoever follows them is consumed. Only those who have God's grace swim across. (My Own Witness 229)

In a secular country like India, Romen Basu discerningly states that religious tolerance is very much needed. His character Onkar symbolises the need for a new religion in India. This could be the reason for Khushwant Singh's alienation from the traditionally inherited religious ethos. He is critical of the enormous time many Indians spend in devotion to God and in pursuit of peace of mind. As a humanist, he believes that the religion which extols service to others and animates people to seek salvation through work among the poorest is the true one. His article on Mother Teresa reveals his regard and unadulterated admiration for her commitment to the poor.

He observes that religious Indians spend more time in performing religious rituals than any other people in the world. In a sarcastic vein he points out that even dacoits,
the worst tax evaders and blackmarketeers often seem devoutly religious. This alienation from the traditional religion, perhaps, is the outcome of his awareness of the meaninglessness of rituals and the total lack of commitment towards society. Khushwant Singh wants his religion to be based on reason, commonsense and humanism. This is quite contrary to the traditional religions which are based on rituals and superstitious belief. He is, perhaps, in agreement with what the Holy Bible says:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; For God is love. (I John 4:7-8)

The socio-political set-up of which Khushwant Singh has been an unsparing critic, had made him acutely aware of his own cultural alienation. Yet he experiences a kind of love-hate relationship with India as V.S.Naipaul does:

India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far. (India: A Wounded Civilization 8)
The apathetic attitude of the people towards many important social problems like squalor, population, politics, prohibition, corruption etc., makes a sensitive and committed writer like Khushwant Singh feel alienated. Khushwant Singh in his characteristic manner argues against prohibition. When majority of the national leaders have been for prohibition, Khushwant Singh's stand is quite to the contrary. This is characteristic of him:

Many a time I toyed with the idea of launching a one-man satyagraha for freedom of the right to drink liquor. ("Prohibition in India," We Indians 111)

He ridicules the hypocritical leaders who speak for prohibition in public and do the opposite in private. The fact that he is not a block thinker and an iconoclast gets once again confirmed when he takes a stand independently much against the hypocritical stand of the majority.

Another admirable trait in Khushwant Singh is that he often turns the telescope on himself. He knows how to enjoy a laugh at other people's expense; he also does it with just as much mirth at his own. His travelogues, for instance, bring the sights and sounds of the place with details of its economy, its flora and fauna, and the eating habits, hobbies and cultural diversions of its people. But, what makes his
pieces more enjoyable is that he candidly tells us of his own experience without hiding anything. He describes his Indonesian visit highlighting his disappointment:

By the end of my visit I was little disappointed. Perhaps I didn't get round enough to the right places where beauties congregate; cocktail parties, nightclubs, dance halls. I did manage to have a glimpse of Jakarta's red light areas. (Many Moods Many Faces 127)

To laugh at oneself one requires a wider and thorough perception of life. Khushwant Singh is able even to imagine himself to be dead and portray a picture of various hypocritical reactions of people over his 'death' in the short-story "Posthumous." Once finding himself in an airbus amidst so many celebrities, he comments:

My only fear was that if the airbus met with a mishap, these VIPs would muscle me out of the headlines of the next morning's papers. (Many Moods Many Faces 111)

Only very few people in this world find it easy to joke about death as casually as Emily Dickinson does:

Because I could not stop for death,
He kindly stopped for me;

(American Literature 1890-1965 332)

Khushwant Singh is one among the very few who can accept the reality of death as Winston Churchill does jovially:

I am ready to meet my maker. Whether the maker is prepared for the ordeal of meeting me is another matter. (qtd. in More Malicious Gossip 237)

It is but natural that a sense of alienation at various levels -- religious, social and cultural -- inevitably leads to an awareness in which everything in the modern world seems to be up in arms against the artist. This awareness mostly leads to despair and existential alienation as in the case of Matthew Arnold for whom the world,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

("Dover Beach" 365)
Thomas Hardy too was on the same wave length. His anguish against the world was so much that in his novel *Tess* he made Angel Clare to quote a line from a poet, with a peculiar emendation of his own:

> God's not in his heaven: all's wrong with the world! (298)

This kind of existential alienation prevails among the Indian English writers as well. The learned speaker in Daruwalla's "The Professor Condole" tells the man whose young brother has been run over by a car:

> Yes, in an absurd scheme of things
> Accidents are the order.
> (qtd. in Naik 85)

and Pritish Nandy's "No where Man" laments

> In the circus of my world
> I have often been
> The clown
> ................
> I have locked
> Myself in and lost the key
> (qtd. in Naik 85)

The man tormented like this "in the Kingdom of despair" welcomes death as a final stage. But, Khushwant Singh,
despite his sense of alienation believes that man never becomes "Lord of nothing"; and there is no existential alienation in him. As a creative writer Khushwant Singh is an embodiment of the synthesis of the realist and the humanist. This is indeed the essence of his achievement. His love and concern for humanity coupled with his spontaneous sense of humour equips Khushwant Singh the artist to win the battle against the simmering sense of alienation in his psyche.

To sum up either Khushwant Singh's writings or his achievements are not as simple as it looks. The fact that he is very much alive and still busy writing makes it all the more difficult to evaluate his writings. Yet this researcher has taken all precautions to present the writer and his works in the right perspective.

Khushwant Singh is a typical example for the blending of tradition and individuality. One can always find contradictions in him in plenty; and in a sense the paradox in him is the nucleus from which his works have emerged. The unifying aspect of Khushwant Singh's personality which encompasses both his multifaceted personality and all his writings is his sense of double identity. This explains the basic paradox in him. Again, to a question whether he is an Indian first and a Punjabi or Sikh second or whether it is
the other way round his reply is:

I don't like the way these questions are framed and I am denied of my Punjabiness or my community tradition, I would refuse to call myself Indian. (We Indians 37)

If one understands Khushwant Singh thoroughly this double claim is neither paradoxical nor enigmatic. This is to be related with the tall claim we often make — "Unity in diversity."

There may be contradictions in Khushwant Singh but they can be read as the signs of growth in the man. At the International arena, Khushwant Singh feels an Indian and he is not inferior to any other Indian. For instance, in a recent article "For the sake of Righteousness." in SPAN he takes strong exception to the Western media for not recognising the service and sacrifice of the Indian soldiers during the World War II:

It is a thousand pities that in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the victory over the forces of evil, little notice has been taken by the Western media of the sacrifices made by Indians. (13)
But, at the time of Operation Bluestar, the Sikh in him rebels and hence his surrendering the prestigious Padma Bhushan decoration. This paradox is prevalent throughout Khushwant Singh's writings. Sometimes the alien in him predominates; sometimes the Indian in him commands and as years go by the man and the artist merge.

This widening of perspective and sense of tolerance make him a citizen of the world. And if one rereads all the writings of Khushwant Singh from this perspective one can decipher the underlying leitmotif to the Man and humanism; the contextual things may be the Partition, the Quit India Movement, Delhi, Punjab etc. This broader outlook helps the artist in him to outdo the alien factor and in the case of Khushwant Singh as Jung defines, "it is his art that explains the artist, and not the insufficiencies and the conflicts of his personal life" ("Psychology and Literature" 186).

Khushwant Singh might have his own shortcomings. His jokes and writings, sometimes, bordering on vulgarity serve as a mask, projecting the writer as a clown. But the man behind the mask is to be identified lest we miss the thinker behind him. The consistent clash between the alien and the artist in Khushwant Singh has made his writings committed and unique. Future research may take the direction of
comparative studies of Khushwant Singh with similar writers like V.S. Naipaul, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Vikram Seth and Salman Rushdie. However, Khushwant Singh continues to be a charming and enigmatic personality.