Chapter II

Khushwant Singh: An Ironic Craftsman

Khushwant Singh is a versatile writer who ranks among the top of the India’s men of letters. He was born on 2nd February 1915 at Hadali in West Punjab (now in Pakistan). He studied in Saint Stephen’s College, Delhi. He also obtained L.L.B. degree from King’s College, London. He joined Bar as a lawyer at Inner Temple London. He is the author of 88 books. His weekly columns used to be published in over 50 newspapers and magazines and almost in all the regional languages of the country. He edited The Illustrated Weekly of India and The Hindustan Times.

He has written four novels till date, a number of short stories, a concise history of Sikhs, biographies of Sikh leaders and countless articles on diverse subjects. His literary fame rests on Train to Pakistan (1956) which was one of the first novels on India’s partition written in English. It is a major novel with an appealing combination of tragedy and comedy. It contains the grim story of individuals and communities affected greatly by the holocaust of the partition of India. His second novel, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959), is a fine chronicle of community in the period 1942-43. The third novel is Delhi (1990) and the fourth one is The Company of Women (1999). He has the following four volumes of short stories to his credit: The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories (1950), The Voice of God and Other Stories (1957), A Bride for the Sahib and Other Stories (1967) and The Black Jasmine (1971) appeared in The Collected Short Stories of Khushwant Singh (1980).

He won the Grove Indian Fiction prize in 1956 for Train to Pakistan. He was also awarded Men of Letters in India title by Government of Punjab.
From 1980 through 1986, Singh was a member of Rajya Sabha. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974. But in 1984, he returned the award in protest against the siege of the Golden Temple by the Indian Army.

*The Collected Short Stories of Khuswant Singh* was published first in 1989 and had gone into six other impressions declaring the popularity of the collection. There are thirty two stories which marked the matter and manner. Each story, at is not its root presents the subtle narrator and the requisite intelligent listener which can never be eliminated. His stories are queer blend of history, romance and sex. They give the vivid picturisation of events wrapped up with sex and romancis. The stories are heart rendering description with its peculiar style of its own. The stories give the voyeuristic view of male and female anatomy. He presents various social evils, oddities and eccentricities of society and one of the frequently recurrent themes is the expression of the lacerated psyche in man-woman relationship.

The following pages try to explore and examine how he views certain basic aspects of life reflected in his stories. “A Bride for the Sahib” is a story of intense human predicament and brings out temperamental, social and marital dissonance. (V.A.Shahane, 1972, p.65) It is a tragic tale of the schism and the dichotomy between a “Wog” a Westernised - Oriental gentleman and his un-westernised typically Indian wife. The story depicts Srijut Santosh Sen, an Oxonian and Indian civilian married to Kumari Kalyani Das in rather odd circumstances. Sen’s main contact with his country is his mother who wants to fondle the grandson just once before she dies. He returns to settle in India, and marries a country woman to respect the mother’s wish. His romantic dreams of marriage with an English girl are destroyed.
The gathering gloom of frustration accentuates the feeling of loneliness. He feels an utter stranger in his own country. The wife’s boorish ways add to his disgust. He loses all his desire for intimate moments with the uncouth woman. For the first time he spends a night with her on his way to Delhi. Now that the bride had spent a night with her husband and consummated the marriage, she returns to her parental home for a few days. The rift between the two widens for this reason or that. His mother tries to patch it up, but with no result. Eventually the wife commits suicide.

Mr. Sen is almost stuffed figure without any human attributes except those in relation to his mother a fellow without any human goodness except his love for his mother. He could not fathom the depth of Kalyani’s bitter frustration and pain which made her commit suicide. Mr. Sen’s unkind and cold attitude become a hindrance in the relationship, leading to the tragic end of the wife. Kalyani needed assurance and comfort from a loving companion in the figure of a husband. Contrary to this normal expectation in such an intimate relationship, his insensitive coldness gives her a deep sense of inferiority. The story also exposes the agony of an unfulfilled desire. The conflict arises out of the ungratifying matrimonial bonds which are characterized by a lack of contact, relatedness and communication. Although living as man and wife, they are strangers to each other. This gap of communication between husband and wife is dramatized throughout the story. Though their marriage is an unsuccessful one, they continue to live together. It was forced on them from outside and is therefore neither true or lasting. It can be said that Mr. Sen and Kalyani are individuals in their own right, yet they are also types representing facts of Indian society. It also reveals that
marriage by force and without consent of the individual still plays a dominant role. It leads to frustration caused by incompatibility and disharmony. The author believes that marriage does not solve the problem of the fundamental solitude of the individual. He views that there is something wrong somewhere inside the conjugal walls and the female partner knows where the shoe pinches. The neglect, the confusion and the isolation make women very unpredictable, excessively emotional and intolerant. She comes to the conclusion that her marriage and in fact all human relationships are just farcical. She is disgusted with the tedium and ugliness of a meaningless life.

The most crucial issue that the author takes up again and again is the question of women’s freedom. The freedom which men can always take for granted is denied to women. Fathers and husbands very often treat woman as their property which can be owned, controlled and disposed the way they like it.

The story is a scathing critique of our social institutions like marriage and family and the way they stifle the growth and free expression of the individual. The predicament of the Indian women can be viewed from two angles: manifest and latent. The disgust of living with a man who does not love the woman the way she expects him to do is a burning problem that even educated women face in the society. The author depicts the pressure of critical situations and emotional relationships. His attention is also focused on feminine suffering in the complex, cultured stresses and strains in Indian society, and particularly in husband-wife relationship. The burden of keeping together traditional values and modernity has further complicated the lives of women in India. The conventional woman suffers too, but her suffering is sanctified by the norms of Indian culture and particularly by that of a
patriarchal culture. This single story leads the reader to the general truth that
the conflict between tradition and modernity finds a prominent place in the
portrayal of man-woman relationship. Indian woman usually does not bother
about her personal happiness and comfort as much as she addresses herself
to the task of making other happy and upholding traditions and conventions.
A woman may be seen and understood by her father in one way, her husband
in another way, her son and daughter in some other way and by herself in yet
another way. The only result is a trauma that is difficult to get over for the
woman.

“ A Bride for the Sahib” concerns the problem of the maladjustment
arising out of the conflict between orthodoxy and westernization or the twin
levels of a son’s relationship with his mother and his bride. It is noteworthy
and enigmatic that the mother and the son get along well by making small
concessions to one another, but with his wife the son fails to achieve any such
adjustment. One also tends to ask at this point whether the writer is trying to
hint at a mother fixation on the part of the husband. However, the writer does
not explore it in depth.

The story “Karma” has a similar situation and import. It depicts and
holds to ridicule the slavish mentality of those Indians who disown their own
people and accept alien manners. Sir Mohanlal, the protagonist, looks at
himself in the mirror of a first class waiting room at the railway station (made in India). He smiles at the mirror and the mirror smiled back at Sir
Mohan. “You are a bit of all right, old chap”, it said.—Distinguished, efficient, — even handsome. The writer thus indirectly portrays the self-love
of the man. On a small grey steel trunk Lachmi, (Lady Mohan Lal), sits
chewing a betel leaf and fanning herself with a newspaper. She is short, fat and in her middle forties. She wears a dirty white saree with a red border. On one side of her nose glistens a diamond nose-ring, and she has several gold bangles on her arms. She is the very image of an unlettered, unrefined, unimpressive (Indian) wife of a man who has got an Oxford degree. It is a complete mismatch. She is completely aware of her status as a second class citizen. Sir Mohan travels in a first class. He is vazier and a barrister, and meets so many officers and Englishmen in the train, but she is only a native woman. She cannot understand English and does not know the refined ways of her husband; so she keeps to her Zenana inter-class. The rift is wide. Her husband never has any time to spare for her; she lives in the upper story of the house and he on the ground floor. He goes up to her once in a while at night and stays for a few minutes only. He just orders her about in anglicized Hindustani, and she obeys passively. They are at the railway station. Presently the train arrives and Lady Lal hurriedly enters an almost empty inter-class Zenana compartment next to the guard’s van, at the tail of the train. Sir Mohan has been doing the crossword puzzle in The Times. Sir Mohan walks to his special coupe with a steady gait, is dismayed because the compartment is empty. His face lights up as he sees two English soldiers trudging along, looking in all the compartments for room. Sir Mohan decides to welcome them, even though they are entitled to travel only in second class. However, as he enters the coupe, one of the drunken soldiers shouts to the other Tommy, “Get the nigger out.” (p.11) They opened the door, and turned to the half-smiling, half protesting Sir Mohan; they pick up Sir Mohan’s suitcase and fling it on the platform. Then follows his thermos flask,
briefcase, bedding and *The Times*. Finally they catch hold of Sir Mohan by the arms and fling him out of the train. He reels backwards, trips on his bedding, and lands on the suit-case. Sir Mohan’s feet are glued to the earth and he loses his speech. The train moves on and he stares at the windows of the train going past him in quickening tempo. The tail end of the train appears with a red light and the guard standing in the open doorway with the flags in his hands. In the inter-class Zenana compartment is comfortably sitting Lachmi, fair and fat, on whose nose the diamond nose-ring glistened against the station lights. The writer’s irony is fully operative here. He says, “Her mouth was bloated with the betel saliva which she had been storing up to spit as soon as the train had cleared the station. As the train sped past the lighted part of the platform, Lady Lal spat and sent a jet of red dribble across like a dart.” The train moves out fast and disappears leaving Sir Lal, all desolate, in discomfiture and devastated.

Sir Mohan suffers from the Narcissistic complex. He is a complete snob and an unsympathetic, unfeeling husband for whom a wife, if unsuitable to his status, is best ignored and humiliated for ever. “Karma” holds a mirror to all such hypocrites and unsympathetic people who never give dignity to others.

The story reflects how men take their wives for granted and still consider them as second class citizen as well as inferior to men. Their married life amounts to mere physical co-existence in the same house and to “nocturnal visits to the upper storey and all too brief sexual acts.” (p.10) the writer suggests what treatment such persons deserve in Sir Mohan Lal’s public humiliation by the two British soldiers at a railway station, while his wife,
Lachmi, travelled in comfort in her inter-class compartment. The last spitting action of lady Lal indicates her unconsciously gained triumph in contrast with the most unexpected defeat, humiliation, and misery suffered by her husband at the hands of the two illiterate ill-bred and aggressive Tommies. It also shows that ironically enough, Sir Mohan, the inveterate admirer of everything English, should suffer at the hands of Englishman themselves. Sir Mohan is individualized, but he also represents a social segment of the upper-class Indian during the heyday of the British Raj, who take pride of imitating the English way of life and ignoring everything native. Sir Mohan is a study in alienation; except in his dress, he is not English at all. The equality and uninhibited intermingling between man and woman, which is the basic element of western civilization, is totally absent in his relationship with his wife. He pays a heavy price for this artificiality from his native setting and his being flung out of the railway compartment. “He reeled backwards, tripping on his bedding, and landed on the suit case” (p.12) is an act of nemesis. The title of the story becomes relevant at this point. This nemesis itself is a part of his ‘Karma’: the unexpected turn of his fate, the inevitable nemesis and also the ironical turn of the wheel of fate.

Can we, at this stage say that the story projects what is wanted by women everywhere? India or otherwise, it is the same humiliation of the female by the male with man as their Lord and master. In this story Sir Mohan Lal never gave equal importance and status to his wife which the institution of marriage commands and the wife as a human being demands and deserves. This is a general picture of the society and Mohan Lal, the representative of this part of the man-made society!
Khushwant Singh’s art of the short story is marked by a preponderant comic spirit which assumes various shapes and forms. He is a skilled craftsman in unmasking the hypocritical characters in a story; in the process, he is mildly satirical, or farcical or lively and light hearted. This process operates extensively in Singh’s stories.

The story “Butterfly” demonstrates the process of unmasking a character in sharply contrasted situations. The character Charles or Romesh Chandra, with the double nomenclature, is the symbol of the butterfly. It was unusual. He has a double name but his favourites are Hindi writers. Here is a double or split personality. The Hindi reading chrysalis—the larva of a butterfly—burst its shell and blossoms into a Marxist butterfly. “Srijut Romesh Chandra was dead. Comrade Romesh Chandra – or comrade Charlie – was born”(p.21) Charles took his new role seriously. He joined the communist party. He organised the tongo-wallahs and sweepers into powerful union. At his command the sweepers went on strike till the city stank of filth and the tongas stopped plying. People stayed at home and prayed that Charles would change his mind. Charles has ordered a strike of the tongowallas. There was always an excuse for that because the corporation had refused to increase their fares. The policeman always demanded too much bribe. The magistrates dealt too much summary injustice and inequitable fines. So the tongwallahs struck and the city was deprived of its only means of transport. Charles was triumphant and celebrated the successful strike by sending them beer. Next day the authorities decided to act. This is his one face. He is secretly romantic also as his relation with Betty shows, but his love and bond towards Betty Brown is momentary. He
changes himself as time changes. His relationship is not of do or die concept, it is shortlived like the uncertainty and hollowness of a butterfly. He cannot stick to the everlasting and never ending trail of marital bond. Similarly Betty Brown’s shifting and far-sighted nature also reveals the inconsistency of pre-marital love and her immediate acceptance of another man.

Romesh has the making of a Don Juan too. During the period of his illness, Romesh comes across a pretty nurse who takes care of him and suddenly but gradually the scenario changes. He starts taking interest in her and she responds to his love. Man-woman bond rejuvenates and life seems to take off towards new dimensions and horizons. The narrative sequence revolves around the central character of Romesh Chandra or Charles, who is the butterfly, the symbol of inconsistency in relation with woman and the world. The butterfly in him is unmasked and the outcome is partly farcical, partly satirical. His appearances, gestures and speech are well brought out, portraying the main quality of his temperament. This, at first, appears to be a story of character, but it generates into caricature. Khushwant Singh repeatedly turns to such phoney s and delights in exposing, even punishing them.

There is a kind of exposing in the story “Kusum” also but there is no punishment or suffering of the protagonist. The story presents a depressed, ordinary looking and unrefined adolescent girl who had become a prisoner of her own psychic fences. The writer’s ironic tools are operative in the description of the girl, Kusum. She was a good girl with a capital G. Although she was only eighteen, she looked twenty-eight and her manners were that of a middle aged woman, in her forties. She was short and fat. Her
dark, oval face was spotted with darker smallpox marks. On her stubby nose was a pair of gold-rimmed glasses whose thick lenses magnified eyes to bovine proportions. The hair on her head was short and sparse. As for Kusum’s figure, one could not tell about her bust or belly or behind distinctly. They were all contained in one squatty frame which Kusum draped in a simple white saree. She worked hard and had a string of first classes to her credit. Her glasses and her figure bore testimony to the many hours spent over books. Kusum was no trouble to her parents. She got up early and cycled to her college. She came back from college. She had no engagements. She had no distractions and she did not distract anybody. Kusum had no use of modern fashions, nor did she have any interest in boys. She had no use for makeup and cosmetics. She shunned sex. She believed that people should be content with the skins God gave them, even if they were pock-marked. She believed in virtue and kindness, work and propriety. She believed that a woman’s place was in the kitchen and that girls should never be seen with their heads uncovered. Kusum was popular with old men and women but young men took no notice of her. On Kusum’s nineteenth birthday some college girls sent her a lipstick and some rouge as a present. She took this as a personal insult. She hid the things in a corner of her drawer and coldly announced that she had thrown them out of the window. She turned the face of her mirror towards the wall and decided to squash the desire to see herself. Kusum hardly laughed or smiled after her nineteenth birthday. She became more earnest, grimly earnest. She knew it made her uglier, but she could not help it. She thought since no man ever took notice of her, there was no point in trying to look attractive. Kusum’s University life
came to an end in April. When she took her degree examination, other girls came out of the examination hall and went on a binge with their friends and relations. They could look forward to matrimony. “Kusum had nothing to look forward to—nothing but her sparsely furnished room with her mirror facing the wall and a few text books” (p.47) Kusum cycled home with her mind a complete void. She was alone on the road and could afford to love herself in thinking of nothing. She took the turning home on the wrong side of the road, and before she could collect her thoughts she ran into a young hawker with a basket of oranges on his head. She fell on him and then rolled over the road. Her glasses were smashed. The bicycle was on the pavement “The hawker was just a bit shaken—not hurt. His basket of oranges was all right too. The hawker looked around. He shut one of his eyes in a long, lecherous wink and made the sound of a loud kiss. Kusum’s face coloured. She was furious, picked up the bicycle and got on hurriedly. In a hoarse voice she swore at the hawker ‘pig-ass’ (p.47) The hawker was not offended. He seemed to be enjoying the situation ‘Ass’ he questioned lustfully winking with the other eye “Have you seen one?” (p.47)

Once home, Kusum lay buried in her pillow and her thoughts for several hours. The wrath disappeared but the picture of the hawker winking and making lewd suggestions stuck in her mind. Nobody had ever done that to her before. Did the hawker find her attractive? The sun went down and the pale moonlight crept into the room and lit the bed she lay on. Kusum was thinking of the hawker—now with tenderness and regret. “May be’ she said to herself, ‘May be’. She got up and opened the drawer where her lipstick and a rouge lay hidden. She patted her cheeks with the rouge.
She turned the face of mirror towards her and pouted her lips to put on the lipstick. She undid her hair, shook her head and loosen it. The hair fell in profusion about her shoulders. She picked up a rose bud from a vase and put it in her hair. She stepped back and tilted her head side ways to admire herself.

“Mirror, Mirror, on the wall,  
Who is the fairest of all?”  (p.48)  
An attractive dark eyed girl with a mass of tumbled black hair adorned by a rose bud smiled back at her – “I should say so”! (p.48)

The story interprets that it is nature’s instinct which attracts and creates a magnetic effect between man and woman. What is initially a lewd trauma turns out to be a moment of self knowledge. The hawker’s gesture is the mark of the psychic release which enables her to begin realising her true self. Her whole behavior is turned topsy-turvy. She loosens her hair, uses the lipstick and stands before the mirror administering herself. Although “Kusum” has a thin structure, the Freudian element in it is unmistakably operative in the mental processes of the girl. Above all, surprises never end in life; and it is precisely this element of the unpredictable that life becomes exciting; it becomes lovable. The extremely austere Kusum suddenly finds excitement and reason in life. She as it were finds her *raison d’etre*, a reason to live (and perhaps love too.).

Another story “The Rape” has the element of suspense. Dalip Singh, who was not on good terms with his uncle, is presented as an adolescent young man in love with Banta Singh’s daughter Bindo. In a moment of infatuation and mad courage he catches the girl all alone and molests her. He is nabbed and tried in a court of law. The writer dramatizes the whole court
room scene: Bindo shuffles into the witness box with her face still covered in her shawl and blowing her nose. The Inspector asks her about her father’s enmity with Dalip. He produces her clothes stained with blood. When she is asked the overwhelming question, “Did you go to the accused of your own free will?”, another spell of suspense begins. Bindo blows her nose and weeps. The magistrate and the crowd wait in impatient, irritating silence. The world ends not with a whimper but with a bang of Bindo’s answer, “Yes” (p.58). That is where Khushwant Singh as an absorbing, crafty story-teller is seen at his highest performance! Nodoubt, he manages the endings of his stories very deftly and effectively with O’Henry-like strokes.

The story deals with the basic animal instinct in a man-woman relationship, the compelling demand of physical needs of a man and a woman. Singh again steers away from emotional drama but leaves much to the imagination of the reader. He touches upon the possibility of physical chemistry and also suggests that the physical need deconstructs the boundaries of society and law. Singh portrays the physical reality of woman’s passion for man and man’s irresponsible desire for woman makes sense to deal with man-woman relationship as a universal and natural subject.

Khushwant Singh is an advocate of modernity about sexual freedom. But his etching of sexual liberalization handles the problem realistically from the angle of human need. Antithetical forces of society and human nature have their play in the story. “The Black Jasmine”. It is about the sexual relationship between an African woman Martha Stack and an Indian, Bannerjee. Thirty years ago he had tried to impress his friends with his association with Martha. He had her photograph in his album with one
particular picture of the attractive Negro girl in a large straw hat worn at a coquettish angle, with the inscription, ‘Love-Martha’. They were about thirty boys and girls in the class mostly American with a sprinkling of Dutch and Scandinavian. He and Martha were the only coloured students in the group. He remembered that Martha attracted attention from the very first day. On the third day she came upto Bannerjee. “Do you mind if I sit next to you? I am Martha Stack, I am American; she said holding out her hand. Bannerjee gives her an Indian name, Yasmeen. Soon physical intimacy is developed and the moment of a sexual union is also reached, “Clothes were strawn on the bed. Bannerjee paid his faltering compliments. ‘You know what Martha, you remind me of the picture of Venus. Know the one I mean? By the Italian – of Venus rising out of the sea!” (p.114) Bannerjee rose from his chair. His eyes remained glued to the nude dimly visible in the glow of the street lamp; his trembling hands caressed the wall. He found the metal knob and pressed it. The light flooded back into the room. He was hypnotised by Martha’s large bosom. He advanced with uncertain tread and took Martha in his arms. He went limp in Martha’s embrace and took Martha in his arms…Both of them slipped down from the chair on the floor… Khushwant Singh is good at such scenes because he knows that the narration has to capture and retain the reader’s attention. As usual the twist comes at the end after a lapse of several years. “She protested weakly: What will your wife have to say! He knew he could not let her down a second time” (p.118) clearly, it is a story of unfaithfulness of the man.

Relationships, according to Khushwant Singh are ‘vital’ and not ‘mental’, ‘bodiless’ or ‘dead’. They should be pulsating with life and
meanings. The important question is, does such a relationship involving sexual encounters elevate into what K.K. Sharma calls a “spiritual consummation”? that decides the height of a writer. Otherwise it remains only decorative. The story depicts that though sex is a physical action, it is also related to human psyche and personality as a whole. The beauty of the union is obvious from the tenderness, from the softness of the theme of marriage. Nothing in life gives a greater sense of fulfillment that the satisfying coupling of male and female. The author wants to take sex and love from sensual to celestial. However, he remains mostly at the physical level and cannot resist himself from exploring sex as body. His characters are always sexually alive. He keeps us feeding with sexy talks, dialogues, scenes etc. The conversation on any topic—politics, philosophy, sport—soon comes down to sex, so far as Khushwant Singh is concerned that is what holds good of the present story also. Here as a student the Indian young man had failed to respond to the overwhelming physical beauty of the black girl. But many years later when she had turned into a middle aged, the Sahib takes her because he knew he could not let her down a second time, despite his marital status.

The story “The Morning After the Night Before” is an illustration of Khushwant Singh’s physical, farcical comedy, and farce is mingled with absorbing melodrama. The action takes place on the physical level, and the episodic element borders on the farcical. The outcome of the development of curiosity and mild suspense as primary motifs in the story is sheer fun. The narrator says at the beginning of the story that it was the proverbial morning after the night before. It is one of those rare experiences which live up to the reputation which makes them proverbial. It seemed to him that as
if all the liquor that he had consumed had solidified and shifted into his skull to make it burst. “I dare not get up. No, not even move. Each little move would get the artery on the temples throbbing and produce a dull, heavy headache” (p.180) It was a Sunday morning and he could lie in bed as long as he liked or his wife allowed him. The narrator went to the dance party. They were five couples. All the men were friends and their wives also friendly. The men generally admired their friends’ wives more than they did their friends. But the rules of the group strictly forbade admitting it.

At any party of their group, the motto of the he-man was ‘bottoms up’. He was determined to be the he-man par excellence. “So ‘bottoms up’.” (p.180) He had a lot of beer inside him and the effects began to register him. He had to excuse himself several times. As soon as he returned to the table, his weak protests about having had enough had to be abandoned to answer the taunts of his friends. The liquor was beginning to get the better of me. The girls were eyeing them suspiciously. He went to the floor little unsteadily. He could not recall who was his partner. But one lass began to look dangerously attractive to his inebriated person; she was smiling and laughing all the time and her face was lit up by the sparkle from her pearl white teeth. She tossed her head back with an abandon and laugh at the moon. He was beginning to feel unsafe. He wanted to dig his fingers into the dimples in her cheeks and to smother the curls that she had let loose on her cheeks with studied carelessness. The desire seemed to be overpowering but he was determined to resist. He bit his lips till they bled and burst. That was symbolic of the resistance. Later he decided to dance with some one safer. Dancing now for him was for the sake of exercise and not fun. His
eyes wondered ground the circle looking for a suitable partner. They rested on the most unsuitable one, because she was not particularly good looking. Just fair and buxom. “Her chin rested in the centre of the protrusions and she looked bashful - and bashfulness enhanced her desirability. She was vulgarly desirable. I knew I should not dance with her, but I did” (p.182). His will power yields to the gentle and persuasive pressure of her contact.

Adultery, unfaithfulness in marital relationships. The ‘hero’ of the present story has a similar problem. What would my wife say when she discovered it? (p.182) He remembered that she had warned him one thing she would never condone was physical disloyalty “Had I ruined my home life by one senseless fling? She had often threatened ‘If you do it once – I’ll do it a hundred times.” His only excuse is: What can a man do when he is drunk!

But, after all, it is all a dream sequence. In this story the humour rises not only from the twist but also from the sudden collapse of the erotic dreams. The only comment one could at this stage offer is, marital life has its own advantages and disadvantages. One has to learn to put up with them. Khushwant Singh’s heroes try to do this in story after story.

Madhumalathi Adhikari is of the opinion that Khushwant Singh as the short story teller is eclipsed by his popular image of journalist and historian. Though Singh cannot be ranked with the best like W. S. Maugham or R. K. Narayan, he always succeeds in presenting a “slice of life” that is unusual and yet true. (p.174) In different ages, different genres have gained popularity, unfortunately no literary era is recollected as the era of short story. But it has always existed implicitly or explicitly. It has never been dead. “Who says the short story is dead?” Asks Khushwant Singh and it is
he who answers, “In India, it has only recently had its rebirth and literary
pundits who make horoscopes have forecast a long and prosperous life for
it.” The writer feels that the demand of the short story has increased and it
has no rivals. One of the reasons of its popularity is related with its
translatability. He is of the opinion that the stories in regional languages and
in English have great future in India. Obviously, Khushwant Singh is the only
writer from Punjab, who could give the best in Indo-Anglian writing.

William Walsh writes that Khushwant Singh is “better known as an
eminent Sikh historian, editor, journalist, rather than a novelist”. (1977, p.3)
Under such circumstances, one tends to forget his contribution towards the
Indian English short story. It is true that his journalistic style has crept into
his novels and short stories but one cannot overlook his role as an observer
of human nature. In his stories and novels, one can appreciate his “calm,
control, objectivity and self-effacement”. (1977, p.4). Singh’s presence as an
actor or as an observer is felt in many of his stories but he is not the real
Khushwant Singh. He is the implied narrator and in his stories, his business
is to watch and observe man. His characters are varied, situations are many
and it is predictable that the particular trait of a character or the central issue
has been picked up from real life.

Khushwant Singh’s concepts regarding the technique of the short
story are very clear. In his opinion a short story writer must be conscious of
the “unwritten” laws of story writing “-a short story must in fact be a short
story A novel is large canvas, a story is like a miniature painting.
Personally, he fixed 3000 words as the outside limit of the short story. He has
further added that a short story should be built on “one incident or series of
incidents illustrating one theme”. He believes that a short story would be “read” or “fantastic” but it must be “a ring of truth” and a “message” to convey. It must naturally have a beginning, a middle and an end with a “scorpion’s sting at the tail, a curlieque which sums up the story”. He feels that these rules are “personal” and arbitrary but a closer scrutiny would reveal that his directions are the fundamental laws of short story writing. A great admirer of W.S.Maugham, he wishes to be known as a “spinner of tales”. It is, therefore, interesting to delve into Khushwant Singh’s fictional world.

Khushwant Singh’s several stories were published in various journals and magazines. No reader can miss Singh’s irony in the story. The story “The Bottom Pincher” presents the picture of a middle aged Parsi gentlemen who suffers from a typical male aberration. This gentleman, otherwise dignified and respected, has a great weakness for women’s bottoms. He cannot resist the temptation of either fondling or pinching them. The contradiction between appearance and reality, which is the soul of irony, is one of the central ideas of Khushwant Singh’s short stories. He refuses to take sides and in fact, he lashes out more frequently at the male participants of the human drama. Fitting to his journalistic style he is in search of reality. Being extremely objective, he rarely touches upon the deeper human emotions. He is either incapable of portraying them or he shies away from the delicate nuances of emotion. Sex is not a taboo for Singh. He has described it as a passion and need of the body. But according to him sex should not become a plaything and should not be misused and exploited. Hence this story gyrates around perversion and abnormally towards the sex which is otherwise sacred and divine.
In many other stories, as in “A Punjab Pastoral”, Singh has captured the ethos and the bawdy language of rural India. The Colloquial and the idiomatic use of the Punjab language has been translated into English. In “A Punjab Pastorale” a blossoming girl, drawing water at a well in a scanty attire saves the day for a depressed American missionary and a bored Sikh Communist who are visiting a secluded village in Punjab. The vision of a rustic beauty dispels any impending gloom:

“Suddenly Hansen stopped talking. He sat up straight as if electrified. From Moolah Singh’s courtyard emerged a girl, barely sixteen, with too pitchers balanced on her stately head, she came towards the well where we were sitting. She wore a man’s striped shirt. It has no buttons in the front and made a V formation running from her neck down to the middle of her flat belly. On either side, the V was mis-shaped by her youthful breast.” (p.45)

“A Native Woman Drawing Water at a Well” might be another title for Khushwant Singh’s Short Story. Wells are obviously a key site in Orientalist and post-Orientalist texts, because of their easy association of feminine beauty with learned reminiscences. As a genre piece, also pictorial, the conventional icon of women fetching water bares lanes the self conscious forays of the colonial male, gazing into the forbidden field of exotic voyeurism. He writes when it comes to wells and lasses:

We saw a band of young girls going to a well with their pitchers on their shoulders, who appeared among the most beautiful of their sex. We saw in the east. They had slight and elegant figures, a native grace of men and air, added to which tasteful drapery of their light simple attire, the dark tresses that fell in wild luxuriance over their necks and shoulders. (p.45)

The hackneyed biblical concordance of the Victorian traveller is aptly mirrored by the missionary in the short story, who cites a most famous verse from the Hebrew Melodies by Byron,
“She walks in beauty, like the night”, and thus positing on embarrassing equation between the image of graceful innocence evoked in the poem by the feminine presence and the vision of the Other woman as a coloured and brown Venus, whose presence is specifically inscribed into a distanced past or space, either biblical or belonging to the Orientalist script. (Anonymous, The Indian Mirror: Illustrations of Bible Truth Drawn from life in India 1878, p.26)

It is true that Khushwant Singh rarely attempts to fathom the emotional depths of the human heart. His weapons of satire and irony are destructive in nature and are not constructive. This is the reason why the feelings of sympathy is absent from the reader’s mind. Because of his temperament and style, Singh keeps away human involvement. But in “Fawn” and “India Is a Strange Country” he evokes compassion for animals. Man’s love and cruelty towards animals is pictorially picturised in these two stories. Khushwant Singh is neither afraid to laugh at others nor at himself / the Sikh Community in general. His characters have been brought to life by his comic vision. He has the habit of looking at them through the convex and concave lenses. His wry humour is clearly perceptible in “Mr. Kanjoos and the Great Miracle”. Here is an observer as well as victimized actor. The story is narrated from “inside”. It is about an artful couple who continue to live merrily at the expense of others. This couple have learnt the skill of thriving on the goodness of others. Mr. Singh had known the couple since “the last three decades” (169) They had invited him many a times to share their “pot luck” (169) dinner but such dinner meetings had never materialized due to some reason or the other. Mr. Singh had continued to pay for their dinner and drinks because Mr. Kanjoos had always managed to disappear conveniently during the pay up moments. The story closes with Miss. Kanjoo’s marriage at Bonn engineered by mother Kanjoos. The wedding took place in the Indian
Embassy on the 15th August. Consequently, the celebrations come free to the Kanjoos family. The presents are so many that “Master Kanjoos had to be bribed with money to stand guard on the pile.” (p.174) The beauty of the story is that the reader vacillates between the narrator and Mr. and Mrs. Kanjoos. He identifies himself with both the sides: the victim and the victimizer. The reader’s advantage is that he surely becomes wise about the ways of the world.

The handling of the short story form for Khushwant Singh has been more successful than the novel because as he says, it has “its roots in tradition”. His style is original, his material realistic and varied. A large majority of his stories have a characteristic note of “a rather heavy handed satire” on several aspects of Indian life. As story after story reveals, sex and male understanding of sex are issues of major significance although Singh also writes about the vast complexities as well as superficialities. His first novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a powerful exposition of one of the most moving and violent events of contemporary Indian history. It is not only a political novel but it deals with the subject of sex. Singh thinks that it is not possible to keep Indians off the subject of sex for long. It obsesses their minds. It came out in their art, literature and religion. The stories on the subject are, “Kusum”, “The Rape” and “The Bottom Pincher” are a glaring example of this habit and obsession.

Khushwant Singh’s short stories derive their structure from the plot which is based on conflict or crisis in character and situation. The development of action in his stories is sequential and is marked by progression in time rather than in space. The stories are episodic in some measure since episodes, or units of action, often seem to dominate other
elements in the story such as character, theme and symbol. 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 senses. The resolution of the conflict brings out the point of the story which is sometimes a surprise, sometimes an unexpected tragic comic outcome or revelation: but it is always a fitting finale to the interesting sequence of events. His stories display a linear development in sequence, a geometrical design, the lines advancing in straight, though different, directions only to find the ultimate point of resolution.

Singh’s stories and techniques cannot be described as modern because they do not transcend the traditional narrative and episodic structure and enter the arena of modernity either of the “luminous halo” indicated by Virginia Woolf or the segments of space time polarity. Modernity is essentially a matter of outlook and should not be equated, or confused, with mere contemporaneity, the sheer fact of belonging to the present age. The definition or descriptions of the novel as a “dramatic poem” or the short story as an “poetic playlet” are inapplicable to Khushwant Singh’s novels and to his short stories primarily because the basic quality of his creative mind is not that of a poet but that of a satirically and comically inclined writer of fiction.

Although the focus of this study is the man-woman relationship in Singh’s stories, that is not the only area of experience dealt with by him. He branches out to the wider world and the larger humanity. Irony is one of the main characteristics of Singh and his stories illustrate this quality. Irony is sometimes a mode of statement in which the contrary of what is said as to be
understood, expressing a meaning contradictory to the stated or the ostensible one. He also envisages a discrepancy between an expectation and its realisation or between the appearance of a situation or character and the reality that underlies it. The total effect of the story is ironic, implying that the author has comprehended and expressed the incongruities and complexities, not merely of the particular situation described by him, but of a great deal of life itself. The title structure, and meaning of the story “The Voice of God” is marked by verbal irony and by irony of situation. It is a story of the people of two villages in Punjab. Bhamba Kalan was disturbed by electioneering and gusty political winds. A lorry carrying men, who wore white Gandhi caps, shouted slogans in support of the nationalist nominee, Kartar Singh Seth Sukhtankar. He told that all Indians should be united and “If 400 million Indians united and spit in a tank, there would be enough spit to drown the entire English population in India”. This comment is a fine example and Sardar Ganda Singh is declared the winner. Here the irony is that the people who are the backbone of a good democracy themselves do not know what virtues like goodness, honesty, truth are. The blindly and sentimentally accepted principle is that the voice of the people is the voice of God. The pretentiousness, hypocrisy and the deception that underlie the actual work of electioneering and vote-catching devices are thus effectively brought out by Singh with telling irony. Is the author suggesting that we hear that the voice of the people is the voice of God, but in elections frequently the divinity that lies concealed among the people is recklessly trampled upon by the demagogues, who on their success become the legally constituted
representatives of the people and begin behaving of the tiny-tin-gods of power?

Some of Khushwant Singh’s stories are episodic, and the events are related to the central character with the specific aim of unmasking that person and of creating a ludicrous effect. Some stories are also so short that the canvas seems extremely narrow and the scope of delineation of character and development of situation rather limited. Yet they stand out partly because of the sharp and emphatic portrayal of the traits of the individual. “A Town called Alice” is a case in point. This story is about a Muslim from Baluchistan who was taken, along with the camel, from India to Australia as part of a labour force to work on rail roads in central Australia. What was the then almost barren land in Australia, later sprang to life through the untiring efforts of Reverend Flynn. Alice Springs began to take shape as a town of about five thousand people. The town became well known after Neville Shute wrote and entitled his novel ‘A Town called Alice’.

In the short stories of Khushwant Singh, men and women dwell and tolerate each other with their natural instincts and weaknesses. Through them he reveals such truths which often trouble the common man’s life. He comprehends human nature with sympathy and ironic humour in his stories like “Karma”, “Mr. Kanjoos”, “The Great Miracle” and “The Voice of God”. He is much concerned about intellectual and situational framework of his stories in which the issues of insecurity and other relationships are examined. He takes a definite stand either as an author or through a character on the issues he raises very often. He also involves his readers to share the society as it appears. In his opinion, “the short story can be fantastic and its characters
and situations as fanciful as the writer cares to make them, provided they have the ring of truth and a ‘message’ to convey” (p.xiii) Almost all the stories have an element of truth. He is one of the few writers who observe, record, analyse people and place of freshly without recourse to hackneyed situations. He uses the genre to reveal comedy of life, which makes him an absorbing short story writer.

Singh seems to believe that stories are means for submerged population groups to address a dominating community. Though he shifted from short story to journalism, he never gave up writing short story because of his sensitivity to the world around him. He is an artist of rare caliber. Experiences stimulate his imagination in such a manner that a story emerges giving him on occasion for reading motives of men and women. As a short story writer, he pursues and practices the art of short story in its early twentieth century mold and narrative form. His stories reveal a distinct narrative structure and in almost traditional development of the plot which recalls and approximates the early phase of the Italian Novella or German Novellum in his short stories. Although his stories are not tales in the traditional sense, they exemplify many narratives elements of the tale. His stories, however, contain the quintessential element of the form. His stories aim at creating a single effect on the sensibility of the reader and thus conform to the basic element of the form enunciated and practiced by authors from Edgar Allan Poe to Somerset Maugham.

Some of the Singh’s stories are episodic, and the events are related to the central character with the specific aim of unmasking that person and creating a ludicrous effect. The story demonstrates Singh’s intention of
creating this effect through a single incident. For instance, the story “Little Man, You’ve Had a Busy Day” (reprinted under the title “Man, How the Government of India Run”) is highly realistic and some of the incidents may even be factually based. The story, events and characters are life like to such an extent that they appear to be almost a photographic reproduction of everyday life. Sunder Singh does a stroke of work in the office, and the intended criticism of slackness, inefficiency delays and red-tapism in government work is well founded in certain respects. The divergence between truth and pretence, reality and appearance is well brought out. Real life has many facets and in this story only the surface levels are explored through the strokes of gentle humour, satire and irony. The exposure of individuals is only part of the exposure of the social situation.

These short stories are governed by the concept of additional plot based on conflict. The resolution of this conflict either in terms of action or character leads to the main point of the stories and its aim. His stories have almost a geometrical design though they are marked by many deviations from that pattern. Some of his stories seem to have a thesis, though their plot is not necessarily a straight jacket. He does not quiet create what may be termed as “formula” stories though the elements of ideological and structural manipulation in them are unmistakable. Stories such as “The Great Difference” are essential sociological and therefore, approximate to the pattern of the formula story. The accepted pattern of the “well made tale” too, is relevant to stories as “Rats and Cats in the House of Culture” and “The Constipated Frenchman”. The predominant quality of Khushwant Singh as a short story writer is his comic spirit, informed by the sense of incongruity
and by the bewildering contradictions in life. His short stories communicate elements of experience in which darkness is distilled into light and in which the comic is creatively transmitted into essence.

In his short stories, the man-woman relationship is tinged with all colours but pure romance. He always appears to suspect the free flow of the milk of human kindness. Naturally, his stories are never permanently moving or elevating the lack of universality but his characters and situations are easily recognizable. Their follies and foibles, meanness and graciousness are familiar. His criticism of life and man gives us a sobering thought. Hence the compression of a maximum of life with a minimum of space, which is the essential element of the modern story, characterises his stories of social import. He is a humorist and realist in one way, and his stories reveal this dual artistic power. The stories exemplify his gentle irony and his “faculty of being ironical at the expense of his own countrymen”. A reviewer in The News Chronicle in an article assessed the substance and significance of his stories: “plenty of sardonic wit and knowledge of people and their circumstances: “no nonsense” (V.A. Shahane, 1972, p.33)

Khushwant Singh’s success in rising the English language as a medium for expression of creative urge lies in the devise of using irony, satire, social follies, foibles language and the hypocrisy of society in the simple possible language which one easily understands. His stories represent a mirror images of Indian society. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, low, high, and all Indians. His short stories reveal a chestnut narrative structure and an almost traditional deployment of the plot and structure. His stories represent the powerful expression of the consciousness and a comprehensive knowledge
of man-woman. (facts, accounts of action and follies of the relationship) reason and situation for the turmoil failure of marital relationship. Firm faith is required for upholding the institution of marriage. Khushwant Singh presents the minute details which shatters the myth of marriage. Khushwant Singh traces the facts concerning the various problems of marriage rigid social codes. His stories are symbol of social solidarity and presents a fine caricature on the mentality of the couples leading the married life. His stories touch the surface of life. The moral world cannot grow in isolation from the world of facts and their interaction is as complicated as life itself. The essence of the story arises out of the author’s moral dilemmas and the complex operative forces of his “clear conscience”. It has many notable features such as an unobtrusively symbolic framework, meaningful atmosphere and a powerful, unvarnished naturalistic mode of expression or style. It is a creative endeavor of transcending the actual, asserting the value and dignity of the individual, and finally, of expressing the tragic splendor of man’s sacrifice for a woman. Both knowledge and love are complementary approaches to reality. “All’s well that ends well” holds the key to the basic question of the evaluation of experience as presented in the short stories. Its presentation is also varied since it is sometimes expressed in depth of moral awareness and emotional involvement and at other times it touches merely the commonness and banality of contemporary history.

The quality of tentative realism and the question of values are reflected in the short stories. The modes of reconciliation and synthesis of the diverse elements are usually denoted by such terms as tension, conflict, climax and resolution. The complexities of the human situation and the implications of
the sequence of events, as presented in the short stories may be analysed in terms of these devices, for the cumulative effort which leads to an exploration and evaluation of the form of the following stories. The stories are essentially a social and human document. The stories symbolizes the impetuosity, recklessness and aggressiveness of insensitive to the finer feelings of love; they betray a defective sensibility in marital life which does not allow the relationship to grow into full stature. Married life should have an extraordinary profound and instinctive understanding of life. There should not be marked by extreme uneasiness and an odd lack of communication. The relationship should not be physically hungry and sexually abnormal. The motif of love is the basic principal in Khushwant Singh’s stories. The unending Trail – a factual, pathetic, heartrending account of the plight, misery and sufferings of man-woman relationship. He writes with directness, simplicity and unsentimental fidelity to truth which are overpowering in their ultimate effect. The writer realises that despite the weaknesses of this relationship they are many admirable qualities which make the relationship stand. He realises and acknowledges the principle that man and woman will supersede and establish the relationship. This relationship is the crowning glory of creation and though he is a partly beast, he is also partly angel. In moments of crisis, the angelic in man will triumph over the beastly element in him. This is indeed the moral triumph of man so forcefully demonstrated in his short stories.

When we talk about the novels of Khushwant Singh, the theme and substance of his novels are based on realism relating to the individual, social and political dimensions. The events of the novel comes out naturally due to
interaction of characters and situations of events. The elements of the novels, such as theme, symbol, political, ideal, realistic treatments, etc, quite befitting to social and political situations presented therein.

Khushwant Singh in one of his novels, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) presents the picture of Indian family, pictures of the land of Punjab and sikh people. The author, by exposing the unfulfilled sexual desires of Champak, wants to draw people’s attention towards certain drawbacks of Indian joint family where married couple cannot meet openly particularly to appease to their carnal desire. As such the young men are forced by the circumstances “to take the extreme step of renouncing life and seeking solitude as a hermit”. The writer thinks that this is certainly one of the reasons, if not the most important reasons, why so many in the country take the ascetic life of the yogi”. The system of joint family resumes a change allowing sufficient opportunity for the married couple. Due to such unpleasant situation of maintenance of privacy the institution of “the honeymoon where a young married couple can make each other’s physical acquaintance is unknown except among the anglicised upper middle class.’ (p.47) The young newly married girl is so lukewarm to the knowledge of sexual activities that, after some days, her mother-in-law persuades her to take a tumbler of milk to her husband before he goes to sleep so that her husband could take the advantage of this situation to fulfill her desires. India, the land of Kamasutra, is really unfortunate, thinks Khushwant Singh to have such an unpleasant and unfavourable socio-sexual situation for young married couples. The unfulfilment of sexual desire has many other consequences also. Khushwant Singh depicts the situation of Champak in the
novel, who by her manipulated skill, manages to enjoy it by being involved in a lengthy flirtation with Madan at Simla. The illicit sexual encounters with Peer Sahib and Shunno run counter with the illicit affairs of Madan and Champak. Yet there was a difference of social stratification. But Madan and champak belonged to the upper class of Indian hierarchical society and Shunno and Peer Sahib are from the lower section of society. But their repressed carnal urges are universal and the same. Their tendency of “tearing off the padding of respectability”. Man and woman whether they wear rich clothes or barely the same – a naked, social animal with all similarity. Singh’s attempt to depict and expose the “tearing off the padding of respectability” is ironical presentation of their stark reality and truth in all its horror and elemental passion.

Singh pleads ironically for providing equal opportunity to the women in the matter of sex. The author is of the opinion that suppression of sex, by widow, unmarried girls and even married women, causes several consequences. Champak breaks social norms to enjoy sexual pleasures with Madan. The portriature Shunno suppressed volcanic passion burst into repeated encounters with Peer Sahib. The portraiture of Sher Singh’s wife, the tempestuous, sex hungry Champak is remarkable. She offers a sharp contrast to the moral values embodied in Sabhru, mother-in-law. He is of the opinion that such water tight social prohibition are against Indian tradition and customs. The Indian cultural way is represented through Kamasuitra and thirty seven postures of sex on the ancient temple like Khajuraho and also at Sun Temple of Orissa. He is of opinion that Indian young man do not have opportunity to practice its devises and are living with “unfulfilled sexual
impulses resulting in an obsession with sex and in many pervertions which results from frustration. Sadism, masochism, and, most common of all, exhibitionism” (p.48)

Hence, the nightingale in the novel is a symbol which is multi faceted and multi dimensional. It is not merely dawn of freedom. The “plaintive anthem” of the nightingale cause aches in the heart of men and also arouses a drowsy numbness. The songs of nightingale, besides being a song of spring, are on expression of “intense agony, misery, and spiritual deprivation”, (Phoebe Adams: Atlantic Monthly, January 1960, p.28). It transcends the theme and substance of realism relating to the individual, social and political dimensions. Here the sexual theme has a political backdrop, and it is as important, if not more, as the political.

He cannot resist the temptation of returning to the theme of sex. His latest novel The Company of Women is centered on the individual’s search for the truth of existence within society and various reasons and consequences leading to the failure of man-woman relationship. Mohan Kumar, the protagonist is a thriving businessman. He wants to overcome by the boredom of socially respectable Delhi and embarks on an experiment with short time companions for he is of the view that he opted for marriage with a family whose life style, pretentions behavior and lack of class he abhorred. He shows that the desire for sex was the propelling force that led him to marriage and not romantic notions of love. Infact he considers love as an elusive concept which does not necessarily lead to a happy marriage. Mohan Kumar says:

I weighed the pros and cons of marriage. To me sex was the more pressing need, then love or companionship. For too long we have
been fooled into believing that the basis of a happy man-woman relationship is love. Love is an elusive concept and means different things to different people. There is nothing elusive about lust because it means the same thing to all people: it is the physical expression of liking a person of the opposite sex. Love cannot last very long without Lust has no time limit and is the true foundation of love and affection” (p.138.39)

The book narrates the life story of Mohan Kumar and his social exploits. He disregards social norms and pursues the philosophy to eat, and drink and be merry but never get tied down by the bonds of marriage. He has his own philosophy about marriage and love.

“Marriages, he concluded, are not made in heaven. They are made on earth by earthly reasons. The first priority is money: it may be property, a profitable business or well paid job. The couple concerned fell into line without bothering to find out whether or not the person they are committing themselves to will make a good life long companion” (p.17)

Mohan Kumar’s marriage is a failure. His wife Sony is a daughter of a very rich businessman and is arrogant. He prefers divorce to loveless, sex or no sex in her married life: “All said and done, a man or woman had one life to live, neither should waste the best years of their lives with some one with whom they had little to share besides occasional loveless sex.” (p.7)

Khushwant Singh is fair to the woman in Indian society; he as it were pleads for her by exposing her silent suffering. He does not merely talk of adultery of man but also thinks in the same terms as far as woman is concerned. He describes all the relationships of Mohan Kumar and many women he had right from his young days and their love making. His women belong to different religions, different colours and different places. Their sole point of existence in the story is to fulfill the desires of Mohan Kumar. They play, act the roles they are assigned and disappear easily as they had
appeared. Singh laughs at these pretentions of both men and women. He ironically presents how even the Indian women came rushing to Mohan Kumar and how they admire him and his body. His last encounter with the lady in Mumbai makes him ill and he suffers from Aides. There is only one woman whom Mohan fails to charm; his wife yet marriage is the one sexual relationship which society not only accepts but also encourages Sonu’s refusal to confirm to societal expectation then, is the source of both breakdown of the marriage and Mohan’s unacceptable ‘secret life’ of sexual experiences that inevitably leads to Aids and his suicide. Mohan Kumar feels that his adventures with women brought punishment at the end-Adultery, sexual relationship without any intention of getting married is a sin and must receive punishment. His journey ends where it began without acquiring any meaningfulness in life. The story reflects that if a person ignores the moral ethics and discipline of conjugal bonds, the consequence is disaster and death – a final destination of man. The author is conscious of the best things that life offers but he restricts himself to the realistic portrayal of an earthly man who does not want only aesthetic or artistic things in life rather disciplined conjugal life.

The complexity and diversity of human nature is well brought out by Singh in his autobiographical account, *Women and Men in My Life*. He says that there could be diverse factors for some men becoming more successful than the others in the matter of securing the love of women. He narrates one which seems to play a vital role in the matter of love. The story of Chetan’s success with girls reveal to a large extent the inherent nature of girls. He tells that Chetan was inveterate philanderer and he succeeded in
“winning the heart of the most sought after girl in the University, Uma Chatterjee. Though she was a Christian, defied her parents and agreed to marry a Hindu boy who till then had no job” (p.102) Singh threw a party to celebrate their engagement. In the presence of fiancée. Chetan flirted outrageously and shamefully with the other girls present. They got married, had two children but Chetan’s rakishness proved too much for Uma who left him for Alkazi. “Chetan shacked up with a sikh girl young enough to be his daughter (p.102) The secret of his success was that Chetan would put on his overcoat in the month of June, and with a stubble on his chin and a single flower in his hand, he could call on his girl-friend. Inevitably, she enquired about his wearing the coat in that hot weather. He would reply: “This is all I possess in the world” and he would then present the flower to the girl. It worked and make the girl sorry for herself. He won the half battle. This explains why very often so many ordinary looking men walk away with pretty and charming girls. The author brings out the inherent instability and the shifting nature of human relationships and offer thin threads of marital bonds leading to many crisis for upholding and maintaining the moral code for rather smooth functioning of the sacred institution and also underscores the fact of the mortality of human beings - a fact which is well known to all of us, but which we, in our daily life tend to forget. There is something for tuituous and mysterious in the ways, people come close to each other, become intimate friends, sharing the most intense moments of joy and sorrow and then inexplicably drift apart getting separated by geographical or emotional distance, becoming cold and apathetic. The writer does not offer
any explanation for the phenomena but underlies this feature in several of his write ups.

Khushwant Singh’s comic presentation, perspicacious exploration of real people and places, revelation of historical events proves his keen interest in contemporary man and the society where he lives. The childhood of Singh was spent in the atmosphere of a village. The rural environment of Punjab where he spent his childhood, has influenced tremendously in his writings. He writes in an autobiography. “My roots are in the dung hill of a tiny Indian village”. The education in Britain has made him cultured and a humanist. He writes, “I am the product of both East and the West. I am, if I may coin the Word, Ori-o-accidental”! The rural countryside atmosphere of Punjab, urban Indo-Anglian environment of Delhi and sophisticated city of London – all the three have rendered dominant influence on the personality of Khushwant Singh.

Khushwant Singh’s talent of creative writing emerges from journalism to fiction. His basic quality, which governs his creative talent and characterize the development of his art, lies in his art of creating real people from the common parlance of society. The events of his novels and short stories emerges from the usual happenings of social milieu. The fundamental quality of his art is ‘comic’ which makes his literary creations interesting and readable to the readers. The comic in his fiction is apparently linked with social and moral criticism and it emerges from laughter and the deeply ingrained social motif.

His style of creative writing is substantially influenced by the Punjabi trend of literary writings, where ‘sex’ and violence happens to be one of the
most favourite themes. Santha Rama Rao says ‘Khushwant Singh is direct to the point of brutality, unsentimentally observant, and in his bold characterization he is ready to explore the least appealing aspects of human nature and relationship. (Santha Rama Rao; Review, December 13, 1959)

He prefers to opt English as a medium for expression of his creative genius. He uses pure and simple English showing his superb skill both in fictional and non-fictional prose writings. His prose style beautifully communicates the different ways of expressing the Indian scene and sensibility. The presentation of wide and extensive socio-political and cultural aspects of Indian life is Singh’s integral part of narrative design. His novels and stories reveal an extraordinary acumen in highlighting the realities of life. The religions and festivals of India, such as Baisakhi and Christmas symbolize the multi-religion culture of India. Another significant aspect is his use of language and style in his realistic, down to earth, idiom, transposed from Punjabi to English which is pronounced expression of the quality of his mind and his views of life. He unconsciously almost inevitably revolts against the deceptively soft and sweet style of the Romantics and what he believes to be its fake exterior.

Singh’s realism is singularity free from this blemish because it is profoundly permeated with moral values. As a creative writer, Singh is an embodiment of the synthesis of the realist and the humanist – which is indeed the essence of his achievement. Hence Khushwant Singh, the typical Punjabi rustic has come to terms admirably with Khushwant Singh - the highly educated, westernised, cosmopolitan, cultured person. In this peculiar
synthesis lies the extraordinary vigor and urbanity of his style and the visionary gleam of his art as a creative writer of great passion and power.

When it comes to note the final impression, one lands on the fact that the favourite subject of Khushwant Singh is love and sex. He has dealt at length with the emotions of love and passion – what exactly is this phenomenon called love? The basic cause which makes us seek the love of another person is extreme loneliness. He describes it as inner solitude – the feeling as being all alone in this world. It is rare to find people who fall in love only once in their life time. Most of them are forever falling in love with other people and hoping that the new involvement will prove more rewarding than the last one. If the wife is quick tempered, possessive and wanting attention all the time leads to a miserable married life. None of them can live a life of marital bliss. A search for respectable companionship, the concept of living together is an increasingly common feature amongst the men and women in Europe and USA. The conflict between man-woman can be one of tradition versus individualism. Wife cannot play the typical role of a conventional housewife women finds her territory threatened by the self-reliant and self confident attitude of the husband. If a women keeps nagging and needling, the man either ignores her or keeps out of her way. Khushwant Singh declares “love is an emotional and divine concept, it doesn’t last, but lasts.” (p.12)

The stories are pervaded by his view of life, which reveals his “acceptance” of the world with all bizarre associations. His view of the world shows his positive acceptance of things as they are thus become the kernel of his realistic creed: whereas his mind is expressed in the formulation of his
realistic attitude to life, his will asserts itself by imposing on that realism, his preponderant predilections and moral valuations. Singh’s literary talent is versatile and his comic pose makes him appear sometimes a hedonist and other times a supercilious social historian. But the fact remarks that Singh is deeply religious in his basic approach act of the will. Hence his tendency is to “accept” the world as it has emerged out of his varied experience of life and his positive approach to problems of existence.

Khushwant Singh’s contribution to Indian–English fiction should not be underestimated. His role has been the pathmaker. The subsequent generations of Indian English writers have been benefitted by his efforts. His “no-nonsense” attitude towards life has made creative writers aware of the grey sides of human nature. His eyes are always ready to tear the veil of euphoria. With his journalistic style, he is in search of truth and reality, no matter how bitter, comic or ironic sociological questions that are relevant in the evolving of good man-woman relationship and of a progressive minded and permissive society. The evolving of such a society, shorn of immorality double standards, deception and confidentialities and above all the general hypocrisy may actually user the society into a new defined era of healthy relationships without any hang ups and guilt complexes. The process of evolution of such a society is certainly a slow one that will acquire parameters of respectability after a long drawn period of several turbulences and ups and downs. The author is making a plan for a more open, more permissible and tolerant society in matters of sex-related societal norms.

To conclude, Khushwant Singh is a skilled painter of gestures and small give-and-take, and his descriptions are vivid and effective. His
narration of small but significant detail of human behavior and postures is accurate as well as man-woman relationship is authentic, balanced and appropriately presented. In the words of Warren French, “Singh’s terse fable suggests a profound disillusionment with the power of law, reason and intellect in the face of elemental human passions… Singh is a brilliant sardonic observer of a world undergoing convulsive changes; and his novels provide a unique insight into one of the major political castastrophies of this century”. (French Warren. “Khushwant Singh, 1991, 818-20) He is prepared to laugh at all: rich and poor, high and low, ignorant and knowledgeable. He does not believe in sparing himself. He refrains from passing judgments and yet the criticism is very obvious. Not many writers of today are seriously endeavoring to improve the quality and ways of human life. Singh has never rejected the final mission of literature, that always is, to teach and to entertain.

Khushwant Singh is a gifted writer who deserves to be adequately and fairly assessed and recognized. The fact that he is a leading journalist and that his creative writing has been influenced by journalistic styles has complicated the task of assessing his truth worth and of placing him in the realistic and humanistic tradition of Indo-Anglican literature. The author has observed India both as an outsider and insider. He is unintentionally observant of the West too, and his attitude to western civilization presents a sharp contrast to that of Nirad Choudhuri who is not a creative writer but who has been always harshly critical and unappreciative of India and Indians. This cynicism, harshness, anger and indeed a sense of rejection are foreign to Singh.

That helps him to stand out as a readable writer.