CHAPTER FOUR

THE RELIABILITY OF THE NARRATOR’S RENDERING

Reliability, a crucial factor in the understanding of a work, is a vital characteristic of the narrator. Narrators may be grouped according to their reliability. "A reliable narrator is one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth," says Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (95). On the other hand, an unreliable narrator, is one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it "the reader has reasons to suspect." Reliability varies in degree and kind. Therefore it is easier to define unreliability. Says Rimmon-Kenan: "Signs of unreliability are perhaps easier to specify, and reliability can then be negatively defined by their absence." The main sources of unreliability, according to Rimmon-Kenan, are: (1) the narrator’s limited knowledge, (2) his personal involvement and (3) his problematic value-scheme. It is not possible to find out whether the narrator is reliable or not. It is also not possible to know, to what extent he is reliable or unreliable. Moreover a narrator can be reliable in one part of the text but unreliable in another.

The present study on Khushwant Singh’s short stories and novels reveal that the narrators vary from story to story and novel to novel and, accordingly, reliability too. But most of the narrators are
highly reliable. There are parts of certain stories and novels which seem to be unreliable to the ordinary reader but there is not a single story which could be labelled as totally unreliable, except the first one in The Collected Short Stories of Khushwant Singh. Even there the reader finds reliable situations. Unreliability in the stories and novels is often the author’s conscious doing for the sake of readability and enjoyment. This chapter is concerned with the reliable narrator and the consequent reliable narration and also the partly reliable and the partly unreliable narrators and their narrations as well.

"The Interview," one of the shortest stories of Khushwant Singh is narrated by a reliable narrator. Being a Public Relations Officer, the homodiegetic narrator talks about the particular situation he was pushed in, his lack of knowledge on certain topics, the trick he played to head off the discussion of Mr Towers, and so on. Though he is involved in the story, the narrator and the narration are both reliable. He provides matter for a hearty laugh at his own expense and that of the Towers. The narrator depicts the characters as they are without commenting on them. The judgement and the interpretation are left to the reader.

The trustworthy homodiegetic narrator in "A Punjab Pastorale" is involved in the story because he depicts what he witnesses. The narrator, who is one of the two characters of the story, describes his
friend's humanitarian errand. As he accompanies him, he understands the difficulties involved better. Both the rendering of the story and the commentary are reliable. There are no double-edged images or contradictions in the narrator's language. The observer-cum-participant narrator proves that revolution is not an easy task, though it may apparently seem to be so.

The reliable narrator in "The Riot" shows that a silly matter could cause a major riot. The heterodiegetic narrator assumes the power of omniscience and watches the moments, the thoughts and the disappointments of the two dogs Moti and Rani, the principal characters in the story. As the narrator reports that the town is paralyzed with communal riots and curfews, he also laughs a painful laugh at the situation.

The reliable narrator in "When Sikh Meets Sikh" portrays the Sikhs in general, and widens the reader's knowledge about the Sikh community. Following that, the narrator depicts an event where he meets another Sikh who is a wrestler. Though involved in the story, the narrator is detached and so there is no emotional involvement on his part.

The narrator in "The Fawn" gives a normal rendering of an ordinary situation. Though the narrator is involved in the story, he does not over-rate himself or look down upon his friend. Instead he gives a
mimetic narration of the scene, and it appears a reliable one. The homodiegetic narrator reliably portrays his own experience as well as that of his companion and explains the difficulty of getting away from time-bound life. Though the narrator is a participant in the story he does not take undue freedom while narrating, and so there is no unreliability in the story.

"Man, How the Government of India Run!" is one of the most beautiful and reliable stories. Through the reliable portrayal of a government office, the narrator educates and enlightens the readers and thus renders excellent service to the society. The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator supports the stenographers in the beginning of the story. But as the story progresses the narrator takes an objective stand, and depicts the scenes at a typical government office. The narrator truthfully accounts how the authorities, hiding their pitfalls, trump up cases against the employees and how the employees play tricks to cheat their employers. The reader does not find any incongruities or contradictions from the part of the narrator. The writer serves the society by capturing "a wide range of themes, aspects and comic ironies of Indian life including bureaucracy, democratic election procedures, anglicized Indians and Indians abroad" observes Pradeep Trikha, in "Khushwant Singh's Short Stories: Our Exciting Literary Property" (Dhawan 316).
In “The Rape,” the omniscient heterodiegetic narrator gives a clear picture of Dalip Singh, his mother, his uncle, his daughter Bindo and other womenfolk in his house. Exposing Dalip’s mindset and the relationship between Bindo and Dalip, he says: “Bindo was always willing – even begging. Dalip condescending, even indifferent” (54). The narrator serves as an eye-opener to the reader in two ways: (i) He conveys the idea that the fault was more on the part of the girl than the boy. (ii) The machinery of impartial Justice degrades itself and indulges in partial dealings. The reliability of the narrative proves the unjust ways of the world.

The narrator in “Karma” gives a reliable portrayal of Sir Mohan Lal and his wife Lachmi Mohan Lal. As the narrator portrays them as persons belonging to two different classes, they appear reliable. But when he says that the lady lived in the upper storey of the house whereas Mr Lal on the ground floor, and they travel in two different classes – Lady Lal, in the Zenana inter-class and Mr Lal in the first class, the reader becomes sceptical. The narrator does the narration very consciously and with care. Mohan Lal is thrown out of the first-class compartment while Lady Lal has started her journey in the train. Showing the two types of people, who are supposed to live and share together, the narrator, invites the reader to think and act.
The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator in "Kusum" portrays a young girl, Kusum, who is very conventional and orthodox and different from other girls of her age and time. The narrator speaks of the changes that take place in her life as the result of some trifling events. Though Kusum was not pleased with the birthday present of the college girls, the narrator notes that it had a ripple effect on her: "After her nineteenth birthday she seldom smiled. She became more earnest, grimly earnest" (47). Likewise, the meeting with the hawker also had a lasting effect upon her. After a few hours of wrath her mood changed to tenderness and regret: She got up, opened the drawer where her lipstick and rouge lay hidden, patted her cheeks with the rouge, turned the face of the mirror towards her and pointed her lips to put on the lipstick. Then she undid her hair and shook her head to loosen it. The hair fell in profusion about the shoulders. The narration appears reliable because the change is depicted as gradual.

The reliable narrator in "India is a Strange Country" is also informative. The narrator talks about different types of foreigners who come to India and the attitude of the two parties to each other. Being homodiegetic in character, the narrator does not focus on himself, but on another character, Mr Kenneth Tyson, an Englishman, who dared to forego his home-leave year after year. The narrator finds out the answer for this and portrays it reliably. Talking of his personal
experience with Mr Tyson the narrator gives a new light – the reason behind the Englishmen’s retrieval may be manifold, but an Indian may not succeed in guessing it. The reader does not see any incongruities or contradictions in the narrator’s rendering.

In “A Bride for the Sahib,” the narrator describes a bride and a Sahib belonging to two different cultures. Consequently they face a lot of adjustment problems. Mr Sunny, being a westernized oriental gentleman, gets irritated if anything goes against the western culture which he cherishes. Suppressing his mounting anger, he appears a dissatisfied person. Every point like the matrimonial advertisement, the consequent steps and the honeymoon shows this point clearly. The narrator portrays vividly the discord between the couple and then a befitting climax.

The narrator in “Death Comes to Daulat Ram” takes into consideration a superstitious issue but he portrays it with confidence. One may not agree with such a coincidence in real life, but the rendering of the story and the commentary remain reliable. The narrator, being omniscient heterodiegetic, demarcates the usual and the normal, and the unusual.

In “Black Jasmine,” the omniscient heterodiegetic narrator mingles the past with the present in a credible ratio. With proper emotions and feelings, and the addition of apt words and phrases, the
narrator renders the story in a reliable manner. R. K. Dhawan rightly comments in "Khushwant Singh: The Man and the Writer": "By depicting such scenes Khushwant Singh wants to shock and provoke existing norms of Victorian morality, which have always discomforted him" (Dhawan 14).

The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator in "A Love Affair in London" travels from the present to the past and then to back to the present. His reliable comments on Kamini’s curious affair with the magistrate, Robert Smith, reveal clearly their relationship and how such a relationship sprouted. The narrator’s depiction of Kamini’s day-dreaming, anxieties, sense of loneliness and the vague hope of meeting Robert Smith is reliable. The narrator’s major focus in "The Convert" is on Mrs Sarla Sethi, who according to him has changed for the better. The boldness behind her actions is appreciable but she is unable to take up the "sniggers" and "elbow nudging" behind her back. The omniscient narrator renders all these facts in a reliable manner.

The homodiegetic narrator in "Mr Singh and the Colour Bar," delineates Mr Singh’s mission, his jokes, the way he practices the advice he gives to others and so on. At the end there is a hint that Mr Singh himself does not act according to the advice he gives others. The narrator knows that it is easy to preach for or against topics like racial prejudice, respect for women and so on. But when it comes to real
living, all these advices are overlooked, and a person is more prone to act according to his inclinations or his whims and fancies.

The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator in "Rats and Cats in the House of Culture" knows the past regarding the house of culture, and so he gives a long account of the same. He is in a lighter vein as he speaks of the House of Culture, the general conference, the Indian Minister of Education and so on.

"The Mark of Vishnu" is a highly reliable story in which the narrator focuses on the attitude of the older generation and that of the younger generation. When the elders are entangled in superstitious beliefs of various sorts, the modern youngsters are enthralled by scientific movements. The narrator talks of Gunga Ram thus:

Although a Brahmin, he was illiterate and full of superstitious. To him, all life was sacred, even if it was of a serpent or scorpion or centipede. Whenever he saw one he quickly shoved it away lest we kill it. He picked up wasps we battered with our badminton rackets and tended their damaged wings. More dangerous the animal the more devoted Gunga Ram was to its existence. (13-14)

About the youngsters the narrator notes that they never read their scriptures, they do not know what the Mahatma said about nonviolence. They thought only in terms of shotguns to kill birds and
jars of methylated spirit to drum snakes. The last part of the story, the scene in which Gunga Ram appears with a saucer and a jug of milk outside the classroom, and the following drama are possible in the countrysides of India. At the climax the narrator adds, “On his forehead were little drops of blood. These the teacher wiped with his handkerchief. Underneath was the V mark where the Kala Nag had dug his fangs” (16). In spite of the dash of unreliability towards the end, the story is credible.

Likewise, the narrator in “The Voice of God” appears reliable but the concluding part of the story says that on the day of polling, “thousands went in and being illiterate, named their candidate and walked back home” (39). This situation seems ludicrous for the present generation, but people who are familiar with such situations in certain remote parts of India, certify that the account is reliable.

The homodiegetic narrator in “The Great Difference” is reliable, especially when he talks about the Maulana and Swami Vasheshvra Nanda. Though the narrator is a participant in the story, he already knew the twin companions very well: “He (the Maulana) was a gifted orator and his speeches were echoed in the heart of many a faithful who heard him spellbound. . . . He was going to carry the message of Islam, the only true message to the people of the West. The thought filled his entire being, and there was no room for me in it” (66).
Similarly the narrator comments, "from his early childhood Vasheshvra Nanda was of a meditative bent of mind" (67). At certain points the narrator overrates himself. For example, "we entered the great hall together, I in the middle to keep peace. The delegates rose, the visitors rose and the applause was terrific" (70). It seems incongruous that, being merely a guest, the narrator was also introduced along with the Maulana and the Swami, who are supposed to address the Assembly of World Congress of Faiths. One more incongruity is seen in the story – when the young girl, Mlle. Jeanne Dupont approaches the trio and asks them whether she could discuss some of her spiritual problems with them, the twin companions turn to the narrator for a translation. From that it may be inferred that both the Maulana and the Swami both do not know the girl's language. Again the narrator continues: "So the Maulana preached Islam to Mlle. Dupont, while I heard the Swamiji propound the philosophy of the Vedas at the Congress. Then the Swamiji preached Vedanta to Mlle. Dupont, while I heard the Maulana expound the gospel of the prophet" (71). The reliability of the account is left to the reader.

"Mr Kanjoos and the Great Miracle," a highly interesting story, gives the typical picture of the Kanjoos. The narrator passes an ironic comment on Mr Kanjoos: "How absurd that a man as generous should have a name like that!" and again about the Kanjoos couple, "they are a
most thoughtful couple” (169). The story provides good reading matter, but the reliability of the narrator is doubtful. When the Kanjooses stayed in Germany, the narrator says that he bought a car at diplomatic rates and parked it on the road, outside the hotel to save money. The children spent the day in the hotel and slept in the car at night to save money. The narration regarding the Kanjooses’ entry into the cocktail reception is unbelievable too. Ironically the narrator comments that everyone came to know the Kanjooses. This is because they readily accepted hospitality and also because of the beauty of their eighteen-year old daughter, Bhooki Kanjoos. The narrator claims to be reliable in all that he says: “Papa Kanjoos spent a considerable sum in having the wedding invitation cards printed” (174). Naturally the reader wonders why Papa Kanjoos did not think of getting it done in some tricky manner. The narrator adds, on the day of Bhooki Kanjoos’s wedding: “there were so many presents that Master Kanjoos had to be bribed with money to stand guard on the pile” (174). This is the climax of unreliability and yet the narrator is able to keep the reader roaring with laughter.

The narrator in “The Red Tie” gives a fictional account of Chishti’s behaviour at a dinner party and one of his travel experiences. The end of the story is baffling. Chishti heard a sound from the lavatory. The narrator does not make it clear who the person behind the
sound of the feet was. But the narrator notes, "His coat and attach case were gone. His red tie still hung on the peg but saliva trickled down its broad end . . . Someone – a woman – had taken his wallet with its contents" (205). As the truth of the matter is fogged up the narrator's reliability is unconvincing.

The homodiegetic narrator in "My own My Native Land" narrates his own experience at the Bombay harbour, especially at the customs shed. Being very time-conscious, the narrator describes briefly how the time passed from 1.30 p.m. to 6 p.m. The narrator does not specify who the guardian angel was, and how his presence becomes beneficial to him. Thus the reliability of the narrator is shaky.

"The Portrait of A Lady," an autobiographical account, focuses on the narrator's relationship with his grandma. Grandmother's piety is discussed authentically. In spite of the authenticity of the narration, the reader smells a tinge of exaggeration here and there. For example, when the narrator goes abroad for higher studies he says, "she was not sentimental. She came to leave me at the railway station but did not talk or show any emotion" (31). Likewise the narrator reports that she did not speak a single word: "she still had no time for words . . ." (31). By the end of the story, the reader detects another instance of exaggeration. That is, after the grandmother's death when the narrator's mother throws bread crumbs as the grandmother had done in
the past, the narrator notes, “the sparrows took no notice of the bread” (32). Thus the reader finds a few loopholes in the narration even when we consider the narrator is highly reliable.

The narrator in the story, “The Bottom-Pincher,” is an observer in the beginning but by the end of the story he becomes a participant also. When the narrator is an observer, the trend of the narration is a corrective measure, but when he is involved in the story it adds to its humour. After describing Pesi Lalkaka’s daughter, the narrator gives a reliable comment: “No wonder our hero had such an obsession with bosoms and bottoms. Constant exposure to such temptation! Constant frustration because of not being allowed to touch them!” (121). The narrator talks of partially reliable situations too. For example the narrator says, “the next morning at eleven when the chances of any members of the family being at home would be minimal I dialed the number” (122). At the same time the reader notices instances for sheer unreliability. After the first phone call, when Pesi Lalkaka stopped coming to the fire temple, the narrator reports his condition which appears unreliable: “I felt sorry for the good man whose indulgence in a harmless part-time has been put an end to” (122). Later the narrator talks of Mr Pesi Lalkaka’s reaction as he watches three women whose bottoms presented a tempting variety of sizes and coverings; “his hand came out of the pocket and caressed the three in quick succession”
(123). This seems unbelievable. Likewise, when he reappeared after many days, the narrator passes a judgement seeing his left arm in a sling. "I was sure he had cut himself deliberately" (123). This adds to the unreliability of the narrator. About the author behind the narrator Namita Gokhale observes in "A Remarkable Writer": "A man who dares to articulate his vitality and his deep and abiding interest in life is a rarity in our society" (Prasad 183).

The narrator in "The Man With a Clear Conscience" is reliable as the story begins. But as it proceeds, there is an element of exaggeration, when he says about himself: "I am a man with a clear conscience because I am a good man. . . . I am not intolerant. . . . I do not judge" (104). But when he is unable to tackle the thief-problem satisfactorily, he says with an air of self-complacency: "I had done my duty. My conscience was clear. I was going to sleep the sleep of the just" (109). These portions diminish the effect of the narrator's reliability.

The humorous story, "Posthumous," provides matter for meditation. The homodiegetic-cum-autodiegetic narrator in the story begins the narration in a trustworthy manner. But he makes unreliable narrations like: "So I decide to die . . . In the evening, giving enough time for the press to hear of my death, I give up the ghost. Having emerged from my corpse, I come down and sit on the cool marble steps
at the entrance to wallow in posthumous glory” (1). This is contradictory to normal human life and belief. The story as such is an imaginary account and so reliability is not a matter for consideration. Notwithstanding the story grips the attention of the reader.

The reliable narrator in “The Butterfly” vividly describes Charles and the changes that occurred to him, the adventures he met with, his transformation to Sriyut Romesh Chandra and then to Comrade Romesh Chandra. He also narrates how Charles was beneficial to the narrator’s gang, how the narrator and party played a trick upon Charles and how Charles was let down by two girls. These reliable accounts are in contrast to the hyperbolic description of Charles’s cousin: “From the tiny red spot on her forehead down to the tips of her pink toes it was the Hindu goddess come to life – stepping out of the Vedas, descending from the heights of snow-bound Kailash, floating down the Ganges on a gorgeous lotus, and somehow face to face with Charles” (19). The reader senses, a little exaggeration in the description and the comparison but it is accepted as the evidence of a person overwhelmed by beauty.

The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator in “The Memsahib of Mandla” seeing a phantom figure reports: “Out of the misty haze emerged a figure of a woman in a long white dressing gown. Her hair was tied in two plaits, which fell on her shoulders. Her features were not discernible but her eyes had an inhuman brightness” (62-63).
“Maiden Voyage of the Jal Hindia” amuses and convinces the reader largely. But at a certain point the reliability of the narrator is suspected. He describes a scene as the professor watches, “an exquisitely beautiful nude lying with her face towards the wall . . . The nude turned on her side and lay now on her back.” It is unimaginable for the ordinary reader to think of a lady sleeping in a ship cabin without anything on. And the narrator adds: “Once again his feet come to a halt in front of the Tyson’s porthole, for inside . . . lay in recumbent pose ‘Venus de Milo’ – this time on her belly” (152).

In the humorous story, “The Morning After the Night Before,” when the reliable narrator was looking for a dancing partner, his eyes rested on the most unsuitable one and he describes her clothes: “The size of her clothes remained what it had been when she was in college. She had tried to squeeze all her protrusions in tight-fitting clothes . . .” (181).

The narrator in “The Insurance Agent” gives the impression that he is just joking: “A friend who had spotted me came up before we could greet each other, the stranger had opened his arms wide again with a triumphant ‘ah’ . . . and clasped my friend to his bosom. He slapped my friend on the back and asked about the health of his wife and children . . .” (83). The various comments passed by malicious people are reported by the narrator. Though there is also a tinge of
unreliability, the reader may read those comments as the opinion of the narrator himself.

*Train to Pakistan*

The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator in *Train to Pakistan* begins the narration with the summer of 1946 and 1947. The narrator gives a reliable account of a village, Mano Majra, the nearest river, Sutlej, the railway station and the people. The routine of the people is more or less regulated by the coming and going of trains. The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator is trustworthy when he reports the dacoity in the village in which Lala Ram Lal’s house was robbed and he was killed. He portrays the love scene of Juggut Singh and Nooran which took place simultaneously with the dacoity. By narrating these two simultaneous actions, the narrator reveals an important truth to the reader that, Juggut Singh was not involved in the dacoity at all. Thus the narrator gains the reader’s confidence. At the same time, the characters involved in the story are denied of this truth. As the reader is provided with the truth, he agrees with the narrator’s renderings. As the narration proceeds, the reader feels that the narrator takes him aside and whisper some facts and truths confidentially. In “A Nice Man to Know” Bindeshwar Pathak notes that Khushwant Singh’s fictional tour de force, *Train to Pakistan* is an ‘absorbing account of human struggle’: “The sweep of human miseries, depth of despair and strength
of humanism which survives amidst the devastating and brutal atmosphere, characterising this intensely moving piece of fiction, is borne out of the direct and deadly experiences of a sensitive teenager” (Prasad 24).

The narrator emphasizes the specialty of the name ‘Iqbal’: “He could be a Muslim, Iqbal Mohammed. He could be a Hindu, Iqbal Chand, or a Sikh, Iqbal Singh. It was one of the few names common to the three communities”(33). By giving such details the narrator warns the reader about the complexities which may arise from that name. Through the flashback technique he reliably delineates Iqbal’s journey as well. And he continuously follows Iqbal as he takes a walk around Mano Majra and depicts the scenes reliably. The narrator is also trustworthy when he narrates the villagers’ visit and the lambardar’s offering of milk to Iqbal. His portrayal of Iqbal’s arrest is reliable too. Thus the narrator becomes dependable.

At a certain point, the narrator reveals his prior knowledge of Iqbal. He says Iqbal had a semiotic consciousness of his hooked nose and any reference to his physical appearance always put him off. Thus the narrator becomes a confidant of the reader. But the reader senses a tinge of unreliability as the narrator reports on Jugga’s temper. Jugga, he says, recovered his temper as quickly as he had lost it. He forgot the
incident of the bangles and the beating as soon as he reached the threshold.

Once again the narrator makes matters clear for the reader as he reports that Jugga had no malice or ill will towards the policemen. The policemen knew that they had made a mistake. They also knew that arresting the social worker was a blunder and a likely source of trouble. On the other hand, Juggut Singh was too obvious a victim to be the correct one. Moreover it was clear that these two had met for the first time. The narrator gives a reliable portrayal of the police station and also states the difference in the attitude of the police toward Jugga and Iqbal. As the subinspector changes his tone, the narrator comments, “That was diplomacy” (165). And he sums up the effect of the subinspector’s visit to the prisoners: “His visits had been a failure. He would have to change his tactics. It was frustrating to deal with two people so utterly different” (67).

In the section, “Mano Majra,” the narrator depicts the scene of the release of Malli and gang. The narrator tries to make his report as accurate as possible: “Perhaps they were not all involved, some of the five might have been arrested mistakenly. It was scarcely possible that none of them had anything to do with it” (104). And the narrator stresses the point that the police let them loose, not in their village, but in Mano Majra where they had committed the murder.
He introduces three important people, namely Banta Singh, the lambardar, Imam Baksh, the Mullah of the Mosque and Bhai Meet Singh of the gurdwara for a smooth narration. The meeting at gurdwara, their discussions and the villagers bringing bundles of wood and bottles of oil at the suggestion of the policeman are all narrated in a trustworthy manner. The narrator reports, “In their excitement they had forgotten to prepare the midday meal... The men did not give fodder to their cattle nor remember to milk them as evening drew near” (73). This last part alone seems unreliable.

As the narrator depicts the wavering nature of the populace, he is dependable. According to the narrator, they are not sure of anything, and they are conditioned so by the senseless authorities. The narrator through an apt comment reveals the condition of Manó Majra: “The head constable’s visit had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter” (106). The narrator depicts the changes that occurred in the attitude of Mano Majra Muslims and Sikhs, and shows the bewilderment on the part of Mano Majrans as they faced the difficult task of deciding to leave or not. The narrator feels sorry for them: “Sikh and Muslim villagers fell into each others’ arms and wept like children” (112). (In “Train to Pakistan: A Thematic Analysis” S. P. Swain is of the view that Khushwant Singh is able to build up a novel portraying the hard and bitter facts of life
against the harrowing tale of India’s partition (Dhawan 117). When the
narrator focuses on Mano Majra as a whole and reports how they spent
that night and how the Muslims were transported the next day morning
with so much wailing and weeping on both sides, it is a trustworthy
account. The narrator, through his timely comment, and intrusion fills
the gaps and unveils the uncertainties and gains the reader’s
confidence.

In the chapter “Karma” when the narrator elaborates on the
problem of flood and how the Mano Majrans were affected by it, the
reader does not doubt its authenticity. The narrator also reports reliably
on another train from Pakistan to Mano Majra which contained corpses
and how it was treated differently from the previous time. S. P. Swain
comments in “Train to Pakistan: A Thematic Analysis”: “The
harrowing and spine-chilling events of 1947 had shaken the faith of the
people in the innate nobility of human beings. . . . To Khushwant
Singh, this was a period of great disillusionment and crisis of values, a
distressing and disintegrating period of his life” (Dhawan 114). The
narrator talks of the entire village which turned up for the evening
prayer at the gurudwara and their nervousness even when they slept.
The narrator proceeds to give a reliable portrayal of the strangers who
trespass the gurudwara and play smart and speak arrogantly and
sarcastically. The boy ultimately challenges the Mano Majra Sikhs to
rise against the Muslims. The narrator truthfully reports Mano Majrans’ unwillingness in the beginning and later their positive response to the strange Sikh boy. The narrator keenly reports, “some villagers who had only recently wept at the departure of their Muslim friends also stood up to volunteer” (132). And about the conspirators’ plan to derail the train, the narrator comments, “It seemed a perfect plan, without the slightest danger of retaliation” (134). Shikoh Mohsin Mirza’s comment in “Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan” is admirable: “Train to Pakistan however remains, like all Partition literature, more a warning for the future than a reminder of the past” (Prasad 181). On the whole the novel is a reliable account and is sure to stand the test of time.

_I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale_

The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator in _I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale_ gives a reliable narration of people and events. The narrator’s portrayal of Sher Singh’s training to become a terrorist is convincingly depicted. Though Sher had assumed the leadership of the rebel group, Madan was its backbone. The narrator says: “He was both Sher Singh’s chief supporter and rival: one whose presence was an encouragement and a challenge at the same time” (166).

Sher Singh’s meeting with John Taylor exposes Sher’s angry mood: “He was angry, humiliated, and frightened. He wanted to cry
but no tears would come into his eyes” (243). But the narrator does not forget to show the appeasement of his anger: “For the first time in many years, Sher Singh went to the big temple in the city to pray” (243). After moving to the Punjab, the narrator broods over Sher’s mind for quite a long time and renders it reliably. He also explains Sher’s difficulty concerning the removal of arms. The narrator is trustworthy when he reports that Sher Singh’s illusions of Taylor, not knowing about his activities were shattered. Sher Singh, pondering on the national restlessness and his own inactivity, “spent that day and night in these thoughts and decided that the hour of trial had come” (286).

The narrator gives a reliable account of Sher Singh’s attitude towards the headman who thrust the empty rifle bullets in his hand. Sher wanted to fling them in the peasant’s face, call him a dirty pig, spit at him, and kick him out of the house. The omniscient narrator faithfully reports: “This was the last time he was going to see this fellow, why not let the meeting end peacefully?”(296). The narrator reliably portrays how Sher and the gang trap the headman and murder him. It seems painful when the narrator coolly reports; “They dumped it (the dead man) into a ditch and covered it with earth and stones. They dug up and relevelled the path where he had fallen and bled” (299).
The omniscient narrator gives a reliable portrayal of Buta Singh. Loyal to British Raj, Buta Singh had begun to think in terms of bargaining with the British, only in recent years. Loyalty to the Raj had been a matter of faith for him as it had been for his father and grandfather who had served in the British army. The narrator shows clearly the change in the political scenario and the twisted attitude of the Indians to the British. But the predicament of Buta Singh was different. He favoured both the English and the Indians, certainly without each other knowing about it. His policy was 'keep in with both sides.' The narrator intrudes wherever it is necessary to lay down a comment, so that the reader may have clarity of thought. He also confides in the reader and discloses the secret that, "Buta Singh's accent and vocabulary changed when he spoke to Englishmen" (186).

When the narrator talks about the change that took place in the attitude of Buta Singh and his family towards the Wazir Chands it seems unreliable because of the hasty ness of such a change. The Buta Singhs were not fully happy with the Chands. Mr Buta Singh disliked Wazir Chand. Sabhrai had her own suspicion about Madan. Sher was not cent percent on good terms with Madan. Beena and Champak had already known about Madan's promiscuous behaviour. Even when all these disparities existed, the narrator takes a short cut to declare that everything was okay with the two families.
The narrator offers a reliable account of Sabhrai’s illness, her death and her cremation, and the mourning over her death. The narration on Buta Singh’s plan to erect a memorial for Sabhrai and the discussion on such matters with the Taylors, are also trustworthy. In “I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale: A Re-evaluation” Subhash Chandra observes that there is a lingering sadness enveloping the end of the novel. The sadness is not merely the result of the death of a good woman, Sabhrai, but much more: “It is the novelist’s strident awareness of a world passing, a set of values getting eroded and a “brave new world” emerging in which people like Sabhrai and all that they uphold in the midst of trying and unnerving situations will become either strangers, out of place or extinct” (Dhawan 167).

While the narrator depicts Shunno, the maidservant, at the Buta Singh’s, he does it in a reliable manner. His focus is on her new ailment, and her consequent absence in the gurudwara on the first of Jeth. Here the narrator provides an important revelation about the cause of Shunno’s mysterious illness too. Then he narrates Shunno’s meeting with Peer Sahib. And the omniscient narrator reports truthfully the thought of Shunno: “It gave her a peculiar pleasure to have a man, young enough to be her son, call her daughter” (274). As Shunno shamelessly allows herself to be checked by Peer Sahib, she becomes a curious person, and the reader giggles at Peer Sahib’s preparations:
"The Peer Sahib bolted the door of the courtyard. He washed himself once more and faced west towards Mecca... With his large calloused, peasant's hands he stroked the soft flesh of the woman's under belly and the sides of her thighs" (275-76). The narrator's portrayal of Shunno and the Peer Sahib, involved in sexual pleasures, invites a wide reading public to the novels of Khushwant Singh. As Sandhya Mulchandani observes in "A Conservative Iconoclast": "Mixing the serious with the sexy, Khushwant has become the raconteur of our times, commenting on life in the process achieving widespread appeal and readership" (Prasad 187).

Only a reliably discerning narrator can make statements like: "A national crisis has overtaken them and completely swamped their personal problems" (280). He shows how political agitations affect the life of the characters as well. The momentous events that took place in the country were in conflict with their own secret desires.

The reliability of the narrator is part and parcel of the time sequence as well. The time span of the novel is from April 1942 to April 1943. There are references to the incidents at the beginning of 1942 and 1943 and also to points of time almost every month. To give an example, the novel begins on the last day of the previous year. And other events refer to dates like: New Year Day, Baisakhi Day, the first of Jeth (in early May), the month of Asadh, first of the month Sawan,
again the first of the next month, and yet again the first of the following month, then Christmas morning, New Year’s Eve, and last, the first of Phaggan. These dates add to the credibility of the narrator, and prove that he is the son of the time and space, and the spirit of the time and space.

Delhi

The novel, Delhi, begins with the truthful narration of Mr Singh, the narrator, who portrays his experiences from the time he deplanes at Palam airport. In the chapter “Lady J. H. T.” the narrator accompanies Lady J. H. T. as a tourist guide. Without exaggerating, he depicts the sights they watch, the people they meet and their personal experiences in Delhi. A. Rajendra Prasad notes: “While narrating the saga of Delhi, and its people and rulers, Khushwant Singh in his typical realistic style unveils all the gory incidents that have made up the story of Delhi” (Dhawan 170).

In “Musaddi Lal,” the narrator, Musaddi Lal, weaves his personal history with the history of the nation. Depicting himself as a hijda he delineates his plight in the society. The narrator traces the period from the reign of Sultan Ghiasuddin Balban to the time of Ghiasuddin Tughlak and gives information regarding seven Sultans and how each of them came to the throne and how they were dethroned or murdered. And the narration till the death of the dervish is a more
truthful utterance. There are also reliable references to the historical years from AD 1191 to AD 1324 in the episode.

"The Timurid," a short account by the narrator, Taimur, begins with his dream and its interpretation. The narration is followed by the details as to how the narrator fulfilled the dream. Being a Turk and Muslim, the narrator's point of view is obvious. The monarch conquers many lands of India, enslaves many people and kills many others. The narrator tries his best to make his narration trustworthy. But the reader senses a tinge of exaggeration here and there. For example, about his birth, the narrator reports, "when we were born in the spring of the year of the mouse, sparks had flown out of our royal mother's womb and our hands were found to be full of blood" (456). When the narrator gets ready for the expedition he says, "The men who flocked to our standard were numerous as drops of rain . . ." (458). And about their speed the narrator notes, "By rapid marches we overtook birds in flight and reached the river Indus" (458). In all these cases the sense of exaggeration is conspicuous.

In "The Untouchables," the narrator, Jaita Rangreta who is an untouchable, narrates his plight during the reign of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. The narrator's account is reliable when he depicts the immediate aftermath of Badshah Jahangir's death; the reign of Shah Jahan; and his son Aurangzeb's usurping the kingdom by foul means.
And the comments that the narrator adds as the narration progresses seem to be very apt and timely. For example, as Shah Jahan was suffering from constipation, the narrator comments: “But big people’s illness are always made to sound big. The simple shutting and opening of the royal arse-hole was made to sound as if the world was coming to an end” (486).

In the chapter “Aurangzeb Alamgir, Emperor of Hindustan” the narrator calls himself Abdul Muzaffar Mohiuddin Mohammed and narrates his own story. He describes his birth, parentage, boyhood, studies, marriage, offspring and father-son relationship reliably. The narrator Aurangzeb mostly broods over his kingdom and his father’s dislike towards him. There is a slight unreliability as he narrates, “though we were in the prime of youth, and youth has its compulsions, we wasted little time on the nuptial couch” (504). And also when he describes Hira Bai’s death he notes, “We buried her in Aurangabad beside a tank full of our tears” (505). The narrator was careful about the chronology of years throughout the novel. But by the end of the narration there is a discrepancy. After mentioning spring of the year of AD 1706 in page 516, the narrator notes in page 517 “came the summer of 1705.”

In the chapter entitled “Nadir Shah,” the narrator, gives a reliable rendering of his expedition to India. Nadir Shah, the emperor
of Iran begins the narration with his two dreams and their interpretation. As Nasiruddin Mohammed Shah was reigning the Hindustan, the narrator got news about the emperor’s profligacy and the narrator wants to act the role of a saviour for the people, especially Muslims in India. He portrays reliably what he sees and does in Hindustan along with his troupe. Though trustworthy in his understanding of the people of Hindustan, there is an element of exaggeration: “Men were drawn to our ever victorious standard as moths are drawn to a lamp and they were as willing to sacrifice their lives for us as winged insects are for the love of the flame” (527). The narrator’s personal dislike of Hindustan and its people are clear from his narration.

In the chapter “Meer Taqi Meer” the narrator, Meer Taqi Meer, starts the narration depicting the beginning of his career as a poet and lover. Along with his personal history, the history of Delhi is unfolded nearly from 1737 to 1783 approximately. The narrator portrays his relationship with Begum Sahiba, wife of Nawab Rais Mian, and truthfully elaborates how this woman made him and destroyed him. In love with the city of Delhi and its people, the narrator reports the political disturbance and the personal disturbance that affected the people. The narrator adds: “The accursed Nadir Shah had left behind him in Delhi thousands of widows to beat their breasts over their dead husbands and forced
thousands of orphans to go begging in the streets” (577). The reign of three emperors, Ahmed Shah, Alamgir and Shah Alam II is also portrayed. The pathetic sights seen make the narrator’s language so poetic that it pierces the heart of the reader: “Tears flow like rivers from my weeping eyes” (583).

The chapter “1857” is narrated reliably by three personages: Alice Aldwell, Bahadur Shah Zafar and Nihal Singh. The chapter is subdivided into ten, of which two sections are narrated by a European lady, Alice Aldwell. In the second section, narrated by her she is renamed, Ayesha Bano Begum. As a wife, a mother, a Christian, a Muslim and as a subject she undergoes a lot of trials and tribulations. At last when she narrates the humiliations she underwent, the reader trust the narration. She also gives a true account of Delhiwallahs.’

In this episode five sections are narrated by the last Emperor of Hindustan, Bahadur Shah Zafar. He appears reliable in the description of his life and routine with Zeenat Mahal, his queen. Trustworthy in the portrayal of the disturbances caused by the English soldiers, he is full of sympathy for the European prisoners brought to him by the mob. But their death later by Mirza Mughal is against his wish. The narrator takes care to give a true account of the destruction that occurred in the city of Delhi by the firangi and company, and the consequent devastation of the city. He exhibits a pathetic rendering of his own
condition too. The imprisonment he had to undergo by the firangi along with his queen and son, and the treatment they received in the dungeon, and the sentence for exile are all narrated faithfully.

There are three sections narrated by Nihal Singh. Having been selected to the army in Jan Company, the narrator gives a reliable rendering of what he witnesses and what he does. Surprised at the courageous figure of Hodson Sahib, the strong leader of the army by whom the English made victory, one after the other, the narrator explains how Delhi became the property of Jan Company. The narrator reliably portrays how the last Emperor of Hindustan was surrendered to the English. There is no doubt that both Nihal Singh and Bahadur focus on the condition of Delhi, and the destructions caused to it by the invaders.

"The Builders" is reliably narrated by a Sikh builder whose name is not revealed. Son of Sujan Singh, an efficient builder of roads, the narrator gives a truthful account of how his family was devoted to the English rules, a devotion which remained steady till the end of the narration. The background information given by the narrator about the partition of Bengal and the shifting of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi is a reliable account. The narrator clearly remembers the past and delineates how he and his father got into the building of New Delhi with the advice of Hailey. His account of the replanting of the
milestone from kingsway to Malcha, and how the viceregal Darbar was disturbed by the bomb blast is also reliable. The narrator depicts his own progress as well as that of Delhi from 1955. Gandhi's appearance on the scene and the consequent changes in the political scenario is narrated admirably well. By the end of the narration the narrator makes a concrete study of the differences between the English and the Indians and the narrator's preference for the British is also manifest in the narration.

The narrator, Ram Rakha, gives a reliable rendering in "The Dispossessed." He narrates his life at Hadali, the circumstances which led him and his family to leave Hadali, how they reached Delhi and how they found their residence in Delhi. He gives a truthful account of the change in his parents' attitude towards him and how he was involved in the RSS. The narrator exposes the teachings and practices at the headquarters of the RSS and how anger and enmity towards the Muslims were instilled in him. He faithfully portrays how a well-known Muslim storeowner and four of his attendants were dramatically killed by the narrator and other boys. The narrator shares his happiness and bewilderment after the adventure he has undertaken. When the narrator is assigned the important duty of a watchman and reporter of the happenings at Birla house, where Gandhi was staying and giving darshan to people, the narrator proves his reliability in that case too.
Gandhi's promise to fast to death, the crowd coming to see Gandhi, people's various reactions to Gandhi's fast and the change in the attitude of Hindus to Muslims are all narrated truthfully. For the narrator, Ram Rakha, what is going on at the Birla house is 'a put-up show, a tamasha' (714). According to him, the old man stopped his fast as he heard that the RSS had joined the Peace Committee. The narrator watches the scene of the happenings at Birla house and thus he is able to portray the murder of the old man, and subsequently report his own feelings towards that incident.

There are ten "Bhagmati" episodes and the narrator is the same in all the episodes. The first "Bhagmati" episode is reliable as the narrator explicates his relationship with two persons - Bhagmati, a hijda and Fraulein Irma Weskermann, a lady stenographer working in the West German Embassy. Shamelessly the narrator exposes his sexual relationship with these two women. As the narrator reports, "And the memory of that one night she (Bhagmati) had spent with me came back to me with pain" the reader comprehends the attachment (406).

In most of the narratives, the narrator is seen with Bhagmati, the hijda. After introducing Bhagmati in the first narrative, the narrator is seen travelling with her, or in conversation with her in the remaining episodes. He regrets the scenes of Delhi's ruins. His love for Delhi is
so ardent that he equates it with his love for Bhagmati. In an article “Why I am an Indian,” Khushwant Singh notes: “This is where I belong and this is where I intend to live and die. Of course I like going abroad. . . . However, I soon get tired of all those things and want to get back to my dung-heap and be among my loud-mouthed, sweaty, smelly countrymen” (Mehta 6). Apart from Bhagmati and some of the narrator’s friends, the two important figures appear in these episodes are Georgine and Kamala. On several occasions the narrator is seen travelling with these important figures and showing them around Delhi. He reveals the sexual pleasures he had with the three women. Each “Bhagmati” episode prepares for the forthcoming serious narrative and faint hints are given. The narrator is reliable as he talks of his gostophobia, his trials to overcome it and his failure in it. Giving a typical example, the narrator enumerates his difficulty. There is an exaggeration in this section, where the narrator compares the dome of Bara Gumbad mosque to Kamala’s bosom: “Beautiful dome! Exactly like the bosom of Kamala, the woman from the south, the land of coconuts: firmly rounded with its taut nipple poking the sky” (522).

The narrator is reliable as he depicts the tragic scene at the Golden Temple where a thousand including women and infants-in-arms were killed, along with Bhindranwale. The narrator passes reliable critical comments after Indira Gandhi’s death. He neither
supports Indira Gandhi over her decision which caused thousands of deaths in the Golden Temple nor the people who celebrate the death of Indira Gandhi. Neither is to be applauded. The narrator is reliable when he reports that it was Bhagmati who came to save the narrator's life when she saw all Sikhs around were murdered. On the whole the narrator tries his best to be reliable. Khushwant Singh told a journalist soon after the publication of the novel:

Gone is the culture of Delhi . . . it breaks my heart. I no longer want to see Hauz Khaz or go to Suraj Kund which was a good four mile walk or visit Tughlakabad that was almost another city. Today they are in the middle of slums with construction all around. I came here when there was no New Delhi. . . . Delhi has not produced anything that will last. (Dhawan 181)

*The Company of Women*

The omniscient heterodiegetic narrator in *The Company of Women* reports Mohan Kumar's marriage and honeymoon, his strained relationship with his wife, his divorce from his wife and children and so on. Finally when they were separated, the narrator says: "For Mohan Kumar, it should have been a day of rejoicing. It was not" (3). As the narrator unveils Mohan Kumar's past he also understands his emptiness. The novel appears to be written from the point of view of
Mohan Kumar and the narrator seems to support Mohan in his decisions, divorce and his relationship with other women for a short span of time. It is the narrator’s problematic value-scheme that mars his reliability in several parts of the novel.

The narrator is reliable when he assesses Mohan’s further step to lead a normal life after the divorce. The reasons for ruling out the three major newspapers are also reliably narrated. He portrays Mohan Kumar’s longing for his children and every other move in a trustworthy manner: “His siesta was disturbed by the thought of his children. Somehow the decision he had made and acted upon that morning seemed to have put a greater distance between his children and him” (13).

The relationship of Mohan Kumar with Dhanno, the sweepress, may sound unbelievable because it is the union of an educated gentleman with an untouchable married woman. But the narrator here depicts the sprouting of the relationship with such care and accuracy that it becomes reliable. When the narrator says that till Mohan Kumar’s divorce, he had neither bothered to look at the sweepress nor cared to know her name, it is a trustworthy account. She was for him, just the jamadarni, the sweeper’s wife. Only after he missed his wife, Mohan Kumar began to notice her and her movements. He spends day after day, weighing the pros and cons of taking on a cleaning woman as
a mistress. He lets the woman know what he has in mind. And both wait for the fullness of time. The narrator makes this section reliable through his alert and painstaking narration, which would have been otherwise unbelievable to the reader. As Dhawan comments in "Khushwant Singh: The Man and the Writer," the novel belongs to "the tradition of critique-of-society novels," the narrator’s rendering of the events is helpful to understand the society around (16).

The chapter, "Letter from Rewari," is a reliable narration on the whole. Mohan Kumar seeing his ad at the end of the endless columns of both newspapers, entitled ‘miscellaneous,’ and Sonu’s reaction about it are well portrayed. The lady professor’s letter to Mohan Kumar and their meeting and subsequent relationship through letters are portrayed convincingly. The narrator notes her audacity too: "Mohan was taken aback by her bluntness. Less than half an hour ago, when she came in, this woman had touched his feet" (35). As the reader suspects how Mohan Kumar could keep this relationship a secret, the narrator ascertains: "Since he himself locked the front and rear entrances to the house before retiring to bed, neither Dhanno nor the other servants would know what went on indoors at night" (36). The information given by the narrator immediately after is unreliable: "In the course of the next week he received more letters from women showing interest in his offer. They were from distant cities . . ." (38).
With more definite proof, the narrator boasts of eight takers from different parts of the country belonging to different communities. This is too much of a lie for the reader to accept. If it is a truth, the reader may not wish to take it in. Sheila Reddy in her review of the novel regrets: “The truth about a Dirty Old Society” (Dhawan 222).

In the chapter “Sarojini” the narrator reliably depicts Sarojini’s arrival, her affairs till Mohan Kumar arrives and the consequent mental anxieties. When the narrator gives an account of their life together at the Mohans, he appears reliable. He hints at their private moments, how Sarojini spent time in the absence of Mohan Kumar, the servants’ attitude to the lady professor and so on. As time passed he notes, “Mohan’s ardour for the lady professor lessened” (57). He does a credible job with the leave-taking session too. By the end of their ‘shared’ life, the narrator notes “It was the first time in their month-long relationship that they had used the word love with each other” (70). Thus he depicts truthfully their life which was very superficial and hollow.

In the second section there is a change of role. The protagonist in the first section becomes the narrator and the section becomes homodiegetic-cum-autodiegetic. The narrator unfolds from memory his birth, parentage, the death of his mother soon after his birth, the young
maidservant who looked after him, his performance at school and college. All these are portrayed reliably in “I, Mohan Kumar.”

The chapter “Jessica Browne” shows a reliable narrator, Mohan Kumar, who remembers the day he reached Princeton, got acquainted with the Americans, started new friendships, and began his relationship with Jessica Browne, a sophomore and the best woman tennis player in the university. As Mohan Kumar narrates how he lost his virginity there is a slight discrepancy. To quote, “Want to see what I’m really like?” she asked. And without waiting for an answer she slipped off her blouse and skirt”(92). This seems hasty and unreliable to an extent. The narrator continues to narrate the blissful days which lasted for only a short time and soured soon. After drifting apart from Jessica Browne he took up with many girls: “I lost count of the girls I bedded the following spring and summer” (95). The narrator justifies the same, saying that American society is a permissive one. In “Lust for Life or Zest for Life?: A Study of The Company of Women” D. K. Pabby is of the view that Khushwant Singh is indirectly raising some significant sociological questions that are relevant in the evolving of a progressive-minded and permissive society. The evolving of such a society, shorn of sham-morality, double-dealing, deception and confidentialities, and above all, the general hypocrisy may actually
usher the society into a newly-defined era of healthy relationships without any hang-ups and guilt-complexes (Dhawan 266).

As the narrator narrates “Yasmeen” he is reliable as he was before. It is one of the memorable experiences he had in Princeton and he remembers how he came to know this Pakistani Muslim woman, how they became friends despite their heated arguments on religion, how he came closer to her during her last week in Princeton, and of course, the last-day climax. The narrator makes clear his stand when she bluntly asks him to make love to her: “To say that I was shocked would be an understatement. This was the last thing I had expected of the evening. Besides, Yasmeen had never appeared sexually desirable to me” (108). But “she was like a political boss in full command of the situation. . . . it had somehow drained out whatever anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan prejudices I had imbibed during my school and college years in India. . . . It was not love but lust that proved to be great healer” (109-113). The reader cannot fully agree with the narrator’s conclusion, which arises from his questionable value-scheme.

In the chapter “Getting Married” the narrator portrays the traditional customs before his marriage, beginning with his father giving ads in the matrimonial columns of the newspaper, his father interviewing people for his son, their visit to Lala Achint Ram and Haridwar, their giving consent to the marriage, their search for a new
house, Achint Ram donating it, their settling in the new house, and finally the marriage. In his elaborate narration the narrator being very careful gives a faithful and factual account of all these matters. At a certain point the reader senses a tinge of unreliability on the part of the narrator as he comments: "For too long have we 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..." (137). But the narrator reports that none of the liaisons, which were purely based on lust, lasted long. So there is an incongruity and the reliability of the narrator is diminished. Likewise, when the narrator reports Rai Bahadur’s display of wealth on the wedding day, the reader senses some sort of an exaggeration.

In the chapter "Honeymoon in the Shivaliks," the narrator is reliable when he speaks about the couple’s journey to Shivalik Hills, the reception at the Gargs, their dinner and Sonu’s initiation into sex, the subsequent sore throat and fever, their coming back home, the attitude of the narrator’s in-laws and the narrator’s everyday visit to Sonu, and bringing her home and finally the birth of the child.

In the chapter "Mary Joseph" the narrator focuses on one of the baby nurses and the narrator’s perverted attitude to her at home and later in the hotel. The narrator also truthfully depicts Sonu’s reaction
when Mohan had changed the residence and appointed a servant without consulting Sonu. It is difficult to accept Mohan Kumar’s uncouth behaviour, but measuring him from his past experience, the reader is not surprised. In "The Fantasy-Erotica Paradox in The Company of Women" Kapadia rightly observes the service rendered by Khushwant Singh:

By writing a novel of sexploits and the voyeuristic view of male and female anatomy and titillating accounts of the innumerable sexual encounters, Khushwant Singh is parodying all the religious and moral taboos and codes of social respectability imposed on individuals in contemporary Indian society. (Dhawan 222)

In the chapter, "How the Marriage Died" the narrator gives a detailed and reliable account of the instances which ultimately led to the divorce. The narrator portrays his father, his relationship to his son Ranjit, the reasons which made him leave home and his death in the ashram. It is a curious fact that even when the couple strongly desired for divorce, they were prompted to give birth to their second child. Sonu’s continuous nagging, the narrator’s indifference to her, their ritual performance of sex with Sonu, are all narrated reliably. His sorrow after his father’s death, the religious and social rituals related to the deceased father, Achint Ram’s visit to condole the narrator, Sonu’s
daring to have an end to their married life, and at last, the divorce are also narrated reliably. Kapadia reminds, “However it must be admitted that Khushwant Singh’s work like that of De (Shobha De) reveals pictures of a society in transition” (Dhawan 248).

Another proof for the reliability of the narrator is that whenever matters are repeated, there are no contradictions or variations from what is already narrated by the omniscient heterodiegetic narrator or by the protagonist, Mohan Kumar. The repetition may be considered the assertions or elaborations of what has already been narrated.

The chapter, “Molly Gomes,” narrated reliably by Mohan Kumar, explains how he got rid of Dhanno. Then he switches on to Molly Gomes, a trained nurse specialised in physiotherapy. The narrator reliably portrays the pleasure he derived from her: “... our only bonding was based on lust, and lust loses its frenetic pace as soon as the partners slip wedding rings on each other’s fingers” (227). As Molly stayed with him for more than three months, both of them had a good time with each other but, “It was becoming a little awkward for both of us” (248). The author depicts what is happening around us: People are earning quick money and indulging in ostentatious living and a lot of pretence about moral standards that no longer exist.

The chapter, “Susanthika,” a reliable narration, shows the narrator’s plight after his separation from his lady companions. His
musings over the past is a truthful account: “It was the loss of normal
human dignity that bothered me. There was nothing dirty in what I did,
but their looks and remarks made me out to be a filthy sex maniac”
(252). The reader is thrown into a dubious disposition as the narrator
justifies his stand: “But what was the alternative to the clandestine
affairs I had been having? . . . I could not think of a way out of the
impasse because I needed sex on a regular basis, with a change of
partners every few months” (252). The narrator also admits that river
Ganga had in some mysterious way become his spiritual sustenance.
As Susanthika departs, the narrator is more or less exhausted. He
truthfully admits, “The idea of inviting another woman to be my
mistress no longer appeared to me” (276).

The third section of the novel is narrated by a heterodiegetic
narrator who reliably portrays Mohan Kumar’s condition, his loss of
sex drive before he reached fifty, and his further initiations to sex with
the help of ‘the woman with no name’ in Bombay. The narrator
depicts the events reliably. In the chapter “A Fatal Illness” the narrator
talks of Mohan Kumar’s illness and the consequent treatment by Dr
Malhotra. His thoughts are turned to death, a horribly painful death.
And the last chapter, “The Death of Mohan Kumar” depicts Mohan’s
death which is a reliable portrayal of events. The end of it seems to
raise doubts: “thirty Gayatri mantras with thirty pills” (295-96). The
reader wonders whether he said the mantras as he took the pills. If he really recited mantras there should have been no provocation to take the pills. Pills and mantras are poles apart, the reader knows. Ranganath Nandyal observes in “In Defence of Khushwant Singh”:

Khushwant Singh’s provocative novel The Company of Women and the adverse criticism on it remind us of the age old conflict between the flesh and the spirit and importune us to ask ourselves whether it is really any deplorable inconsistency for a human being to be both angel and animal with equal devotion. (Dhawan 277)

D. K. Pabby suggests in “Lust for Life or Zest for life?: a Study of The Company of Women” that the concluding part of the novel does seem to make a definitive statement in favour of the need for balance and moderation rather than excesses and obsessions in all walks of life and more particularly with reference to physical indulgence and reckless gratification of sensual desires (Dhawan 270).

A man’s learning, the wisdom he has garnered from books die with him, but what he puts on paper lives on after he has gone. There is also his reputation, good or bad, that survives his death.

Khushwant Singh