CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The oral story form hails from an ancient time, but the written short story is a modern invention. The form was, no doubt, established with the publication of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* in 1837. Edgar Allan Poe comments that the short story has peculiar advantages, which the novel does not admit. He is also of the view that the short story is a far finer field than the essay, and it has points of superiority over the poem (Lane "Short-History"). The short story is, no doubt, the child of the American magazine. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the growing number of pulp magazines, like *Argosy, Shriek, The Literary Digest* and *The All-Story* needed short fiction to fill their weekly and monthly pages. Editors were eager to satisfy their audience with cheap entertainment. Thus fiction occupied pages in "Slick" magazines like *Collier's, Cosmopolitan* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Even though the price and contents were geared toward middle and upper class readers, the magazines captured the hearts and minds of all classes and creeds.

The power of the written short-story form has been brilliantly paraded for nearly two centuries, by writers like Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Sherwood Anderson, Franz Kafka
and Dorothy Parker. The Snows of Kilimanjaro shows Ernest Hemingway's terse style at its best. In 1966, Katherine Anne Porter was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her Collected Stories and she was noted for her accomplished style, form and language. Fascinated by the grotesque, Flannery O'Connor introduced a Gothic sensibility to her work, combining brutal comedy and violent tragedy in her collections A Good Man is Hard to Find and Everything That Rises Must Converge. Among short-story writers Raymond Carver is considered a master for he exhibits the ordinary and the extraordinary of everyday life. During its history the short story had to undergo various transformations. Daniel Halpern, Ecco Press founder and editor, observes in The Art of the Story, that writers born in the early twentieth century have cited Anton Chekhov as an influence, whereas the younger writers appear to be more influenced by popular culture, obviously.

The emerging writers need a set of leaders to emulate and admire. Today's younger writers make a wide selection than ever before by spanning the realist, the minimalistic and post-modernist eras of the short story. However this particular genre is not without competition at the present time. By the turn of the present century the short story came to stay in England. Kipling, with his Indian tales and tales of the jungles, achieved great fame. A memorable achievement in
this field is the world famous Sherlock-Holmes series. Writers like Oscar Wilde and W. W. Jacobs also wrote several short stories of great artistic standard. D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Galsworthy and James Joyce were great novelists and excellent short story writers.

The short story is now accepted as a regular and enchanting literary form both in America and in the Commonwealth countries, and it will continue to attract readers because of its brevity, concentration and immediate impact. Edgar Allen Poe defines the short story as a form requiring only half an hour or one or two hours in its perusal. This aspect of the short story is its main attraction and no other form of literature, except perhaps, the lyric can excel it in this respect. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly certifies: “Like other artists the short story writer too holds the mirror up to nature and life, but he tilts the aricle now this way now that, now uses a plain mirror and now a somewhat curved one; and so the reflected images seem to acquire a strange, eerie or tantalizing quality, though still obviously deriving from nature and from life” (186).

II

Indian writing in English also has a good collection of short stories, and Khushwant Singh holds a covetable position as a short story writer. Born in 1915 at Hadali in West Punjab, now in Pakistan, Singh attended St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, and later on King's College, London. For a while, he worked as a Professor of
Hindu Law at the Lahore Law College. It is believed that he felt a sudden urge to throw away his law books and he bravely did it, to his advantage, of course. Fortunately enough, the partition of India helped him to move on to a new path, his cherished path of writing. Both traditions affected him – the Indian and the Western. Though firmly rooted in the soil and in his own culture, he was moulded by the western education he received in England. Naturally his writings contain a smattering knowledge of the English traditions.

In the year 1950 there was a major breakthrough in Khushwant Singh's literary career when he published his remarkable collection, *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories*. Most of the stories were based on real experiences or those related to his colleagues and friends. These stories reveal Singh's craftsmanship and his mastery in fusing theme and plot. In 1967, he published another short-story collection entitled, *A Bride for the Sahib*, which also attracted the attention of the public.

With the publication of his first novel *Train to Pakistan* in 1956, critics declared the arrival of Khushwant Singh on the contemporary literary scene. The novel originally entitled "Mano Majra" brought Singh recognition and fame. This novel won for him the Grove Press India Fiction Prize for the year 1956. Singh was compelled to write this novel, deeply moved by the partition of India. In "Compulsions to
Write” Khushwant Singh confesses, “The partition theme was born out of a sense of guilt that I had done nothing to save the lives of innocent people and behaved like a coward” (Dhawan 24).

_I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale_, Singh's second novel, published in 1959, also has a historical backdrop like the first one. Singh here depicts the "clash between, two sets of values – the old and the modern" (Dhawan, _Indian Lit._ 198). Singh's third novel _Delhi_ appeared in 1990. In it, the novelist is not merely interested in reproducing the past of Delhi, but he admits in his foreword to the paper-back edition of the novel, "All I wanted to do was tell my readers what I learnt about the city . . . my aim was to get them to know Delhi and love it as much I do." In “Khushwant Singh: The Man and the Writer” R. K. Dhawan rightly comments that the novel _The Company of Women_ (1999) focuses on "the individual's search for the truth of existence within society" (Dhawan 16).

Singh has a considerable body of writing to his credit besides the novels. At present he is probably one of the best-known personalities in India. He is also, India's most widely read columnist. But the really serious side of Singh comes from his in-depth study of history and religion, particularly Sikh history. After writing a short history of his community in his early years, in the 1960's he was able to convince the Rockefeller Foundation to give him a grant to write
about the Sikhs. And this turned out to be the definitive history of the Sikhs.

A knowledge of Khushwant Singh is complete only with a knowledge of Sikh history, for Sikh culture peeps in and out of his writing. He is one with the Sikhs, and so he feels with them. At times he takes a stand outside them objectively, so much so he is able to laugh with them and laugh at them too. Some Sikhs live in villages and hamlets, but most of them in comfortable homes with expansive courtyards where their cattle are taken care of. Families of sons of the same father usually live under one roof until their land is divided. Almost every Sikh home today has a transistor radio and a television set as well. The more prosperous among them have their own tractors and tube wells. A Sikh village invariably has a gurudwara which can be recognized from a distance, because of its tall flagpole draped in yellow and the triangular flag bearing the Sikh emblem consisting of a quoit with a double-edged dagger in the centre and two swords in crossed position beneath.

In general, the Sikhs, love eating. Although not vegetarian, they seldom eat meat except on occasions like weddings. Then their preference is for goat meat which they honour with the name 'mahaprasad' meaning 'the great offering.' The staple diet of the Sikhs consists of wheat, buffalo milk and milk products like curd, buttermilk
and butter. During the winter months their favourite food is mustard leaf mash, capped with fresh homemade butter, eaten with bread of chickpeas or millet. All this is washed down with gallons of buttermilk. Their diet is both wholesome and nourishing and this explains the Sikhs' excellent physique, vitality and stamina. An English dietician, who experimented with the diets of different Indian communities by feeding rats on the food eaten by Pathans, Rajputs, Marathas and Gurkhas, found that the 'Sikh rat' was healthier than the rats of other martial communities. Even by outward appearance the Sikhs are judged a healthy sort.

The male Sikh bears the name 'Singh,' while the female Sikh is 'Kaur.' Although all Sikhs are Singhs or Kaurs, all Singhs and Kaurs are not Sikhs. The word 'Singh' means 'a lion.' 'Kaur' means both 'princess' and 'lioness.' Both terms were common among Hindus, especially in the martial classes like the Rajputs, Jats and Gurkhas, even before Guru Gobind Singh made them obligatory for his followers. The Guru had two objectives in doing likewise. In India, a person's caste may be denoted by his name. Thus by making Sikhs 'Singhs' or 'Kaurs' he made them one casteless fraternity.

It is true that the vast majority of Sikhs abide by the Guru's ordinance. They are also content to remain plain and simple Singhs. But a growing number of them now attach their caste or village names
to themselves. Thus those belonging to Guru Nanak's caste describe themselves as 'Bedis.' Those belonging to the caste of the last six Gurus add 'Sodhi' to their names. As a consequence, most Hindu caste names can be found among Sikhs. The lower castes often take on surnames of higher castes. It is also common to add the name of the village, e.g. Harchand Singh Longowal, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Parkash Singh Badal. Sikh poets often follow the convention common among Urdu poets and add their pseudonyms to their names, and also take pride in the fact.

Khushwant Singh took over the editorship of The Illustrated Weekly of India in early 1970's and managed to raise its circulation from 80,000 to more than 400,000 in eight years, making it the most influential and the most widely read publication in India. He introduced an element of daring and sex in the magazine, which upset a considerable number of people. By 1979, when Indira Gandhi was re-elected to Parliament, Singh became the editor of The Hindustan Times and also a nominated Member of the Upper House of Parliament. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan, one of the highest honours bestowed on a civilian but he returned the award after a period of time.

Khushwant Singh's autobiography Truth, Love and a Little Malice "is of a piece with his life and work." It is unbelievably loyal to the genre. The cover page of the autobiography states:
Writing of his own life, too, Khushwant Singh remains unflinchingly forthright. He records his professional triumphs and failures as a lawyer, journalist, writer and Member of Parliament; the comforts and disappointments in his marriage of over sixty years; his first, awkward sexual encounter; his phobia of ghosts and his fascination with death; the friends who betrayed him, and also those whom he failed.

The objective of this dissertation is to present a narratological interpretation of Khushwant Singh’s short stories and novels. Of the several angles of narratological study – the narrative, the narration, the narratee and the narrator – the narrator’s angle is the one viewed from, in this thesis.

The term ‘narratology’ is a translation of the French term ‘narratologie’ introduced by Tzvetan Todorov in *Grammaire du Décaméron* published in 1969. The theory of narratology falls in line with Russian Formalism and French Structuralism. The roots of narratology may be traced back to Plato (428-348 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) who distinguished between ‘mimesis’ and ‘diegesis’ or in other words, ‘imitation’ and ‘narration,’ two theories which still hold good. All kinds of narratives have (1) a story that involves
characters and action, and (2) a storyteller, who is called the narrator. A narrator who does not participate in the story is called heterodiegetic whereas the one who takes part in it is homodiegetic (Genette 255-56).

In *Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative* Manfred Jahn states that a heterodiegetic narrator is never a character in the story. He has a position outside the story, having unlimited knowledge and authority. This makes it easy for the reader to accept what he would not accept in real life:

Heterodiegetic narrators typically assume the power of omniscience – knowing everything – as if this were the most natural thing in the world. When inclined to speak overtly, heterodiegetic narrators can speak directly to their addressees, and they can liberally comment on action, characters, and storytelling itself. Homodiegetic narrators can do that too, of course, but owing to their specific 'human limitations,' especially their lack of omniscience they tend to do it differently. (N 1.15)

According to the *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Criticism* there are three types of narrators: Autodiegetic, Homodiegetic and Heterodiegetic. An autodiegetic narrator tells his own story. The homodiegetic narrator takes part in the narrative like an onlooker who is present in person, but does not talk about himself. Being a witness to
the events in the story, he poses to have a kind of control over the narrative. The heterodiegetic narrator is not a character in the narrative. He does not participate in the action, but he can move on as he likes, and be present in some places and absent in others. He can also fly to varying periods of time and go beyond the events in the narrative. He is in a way omniscient, and hence has an authoritative voice for he knows the 'what' and 'how' of the characters and 'how' and 'when' the narrative will begin and come to an end.

The concept of the three types of narrators is explicated by Susan Sontag in Barthes: Selected Writings. As an answer to her own question, "Who is the donor of the narrative?" Sontag explains:

There are various conceptions seem to have been formulated for this question. The first holds that a narrative emanates from a person. This person has a name, the author, in whom there is an endless exchange between the "personality" and the "art" of a perfectly identified individual who periodically takes up his pen to write a story: the narrative then having simply the expression of an I external to it. (282)

According to this specification, the narrator is an autodiegetic one. Sontag moves on to a second type of narrators: "The second conception regards the narrator as a sort of omniscient, apparently
impersonal, consciousness that tells the story from the superior point of view, that of God: the narrator is at once inside his characters and outside them” (282).

The third type according to Sontag is a recent concept: “The third and most recent conception decrees that the narrator must limit his narrative to what the characters can observe or know, everything proceeding as if each of the characters in turn were the sender of the narrative” (282). It may be referred that the first refers to the autodiegetic, the second, to the heterodiegetic and the third, to the homodiegetic.

The presence of the author behind the narrator is an interesting factor to be reckoned with, in a narrative. There need not be a coincidence between a narrator and an author. In fact, “The narrator is a carefully stage-managed effect. . . . no narrative is in essence the voice of an author; no narrative necessarily takes us back to an author’s experience and attitudes” (Tambling 34). The author’s values may be presented through the narrator, but the narrator’s thoughts and feelings may not be that of the author. Jeremy Tambling observes in Narrative and Ideology: “The narrator’s ideology may be at a distance from the author’s in cases where the narrator is presented for criticism: or where the narrator is presented as unreliable . . . But the narrator should never be given more status than that of a character in the text” (34).
In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C Booth states that the author’s judgement is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it. Whether its particular forms are harmful or serviceable is always a complex question, a question that cannot be settled by any easy reference to abstract rules. It should not be forgotten that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear (20). The umbilical cord connecting a narrative to the author is always intact whatever critics may claim down the years. Rimmon-Kenan endorses the same opinion in *Narrative Fiction* when she says: “An author may embody in a work ideas, beliefs, emotions other than or even quite opposed to those he has in real life; he may also embody different ideas, beliefs and emotions in different works” (87).

About Khushwant Singh narration it may be said that he assumes the roles of the autodiegetic, homodiegetic and the heterodiegetic narrator in accordance with the need of the narrative. Gillian Dooley observes in the article, “Attitudes to Political Commitment in Three Indian Novels: Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, and Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us*”:

Each writer has an idiosyncratic way of revealing his or her own ideals and opinions, and from each novel we can
learn something about the underlying attitudes the author holds to the difficult question of the individual's place in history, and whether loyalty to a particular ideal or system of political thought is desirable or useful.

(Dhawan 32)

This dissertation is based on the typology of narrators deduced by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. The concepts have been slightly adapted to suit the present study. The areas chosen are (1) The Extent of the Narrator's Participation (2) The Degree of the Narrator's Perceptibility and (3) The Reliability of the Narrator's Rendering. The study, focusing on the narrators in Khushwant Singh's short stories and novels, is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is divided into three sections: (a) the first section traces the brief history of the short story form and the novel. (b) The second section of the same chapter introduces Khushwant Singh in the light of his life and works. (c) The third section gives a brief explanation of narratology, in general, and the narrator, in particular. This section also lays out the description of the chapters of the study. The second chapter, "The Extent of the Narrator's Participation," deals with the three types of narrators – autodiegetic, homodiegetic and heterodiegetic – and attempts to find out the extent of the narrator's participation in the stories and the novels: *Train to Pakistan, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, Delhi and*
*The Company of Women.* Chapter Three, "The Degree of the Narrator's Perceptibility," analyses the role of the overt and covert narrators in the works. There are many overt narrators and a few covert ones sprinkled here and there. This chapter makes a study of the overt narrator from five angles: (a) Specific Setting (b) Character Confines (c) Unsaid Statements (d) Schematic Compression and (e) Discrete Discernment. Chapter Four, "The Reliability of the Narrator's Rendering," deals with three levels of reliability. The narrators may be fully reliable, partly reliable and unreliable. None of the Khushwant Singh's narrators is totally unreliable. All the same, the irony and exaggeration mingled in the works make the narration appear unreliable but endearing. Nevertheless, the dash of unreliability is negligible in comparison with reliability. Chapter Five "The Narrator as Observer and Server" concludes the probe into the narrator's role and functions. The difference between the narrator and the author in all these cases is hairline. In fact their observations overlap. Thus the works of Khushwant Singh reveal his own observation as that of the narrator. To put it in other words, these chapters probe into the author's power of observation and the service he renders to his reader. Singh's power of observation has three important qualities - concentration, respect and self-discipline. The service offered to the readers can be measured at
four different levels – aesthetic pleasure, emotional appeal, intellectual awareness and enlightening delight.

One of India’s celebrated authors, and the most widely read journalist, apart from being an outspoken public figure, Singh has established himself as a distinguished Indian writer of English.

Everyone has a story. It’s often told to great roaring laughter at dinner-parties and rolled eyes and groans at family gatherings.

Julia Kamyaz Lane