Chapter V

Summing-Up

As seen in the foregoing chapters, an indepth study of Khushwant Singh’s three novels – *Train to Pakistan*, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* and *Delhi – A Novel* -- reveals the historicity of the fictional materials and narrative strategies employed by the novelist. The analysis has substantiated how Khushwant Singh’s artistic presentation highlights the historically relevant social institutions by portraying the customs and habits of the people of the times. The discussion of the select works also illustrates how Khushwant Singh uses various literary devices with remarkable ease to articulate through the fictional mode the emotions of the people affected by the force of unforgettable significant historical events that occurred in the Indian sub-continent.

The Partition of the Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan is a major historical catastrophe that brought untold misery and umpteen trauma to millions of people on either side. Death and destruction caused by this division is beyond human comprehension. Khushwant Singh’s first novel *Train to Pakistan* brings out the unprecedented havoc caused by this great historical happening; and as a member of the society affected by the event, his presentation of the story against the backdrop of Partition and its terrible consequences in this novel reaches the zenith of verisimilitude and earned for him the appellation “a social realist par excellence”.

Depicting characters and incidents that are fictional, Khushwant Singh makes his world an excellent replica of the history of the days. He points out that amidst all the dance of terror that preceded, accompanied and succeeded partition, there exists a scatter of tiny villages which were oases of peace. One such village, Mano Majra is
composed of Sikhs and Muslims in almost equal numbers with a single Hindu, a moneylender, occupying the only brick building owned by any individual. It can boast of a Gurudwara and a Mosque. Yet when there is a special need for divine blessing, they go to the local deity. People of the village are a contented lot unaware of the goings–on in the outside world. This introduction makes us to have a peep into the history of the days, how there were places which were untouched by the holocaust. History is couched in a novel, which is a piece of art.

The first incident in the novel is a dacoity committed by a Sikh gang in the course of which the moneylender gets killed. These, the author makes the readers understand, everyday occurrences in India, as a result of rank unemployment among the able-bodied youth. Almost at the same time, Juggut Singh, known as badmash for being a dacoit, is having an affair with the daughter of the Muslim Mullah. It is significant that they are head over ears in love with each other, totally unmindful of their religious affiliation. The author emphasises through this scene that religion hardly matters to these folks who are living in tune with nature.

There is yet another incident going on at the same time -- the meeting between the Magistrate Hukum Chand and the Sub-inspector -- the two characters who are types with marked individual characteristics. Through these fictional characters, Khushwant Singh admirably brings out the way in which the government servants conducted themselves in those days. Through their discussion, the readers are updated as to the communal riots going on in the border provinces of India.

The second part of the novel shows how everything goes topsy-turvy in human affairs, as the title Kalyug implies. There comes a ghost train, carrying corpses, of the refugees who were shot by inhuman Pakistani rioters even as the formers were fleeing the country. The gory picture presented by almost each corpse is presented in all its
horror, as seen by Hukum Chand. The author has already mentioned how refugees walking on the road were mercilessly shot at by Sikh soldiers. He also mentions a train load of corpses having been despatched to Pakistan, showing that each side was equally guilty and equally devilish and blood-thirsting.

Hukum Chand and the Sub-inspector, as individuals, are unsympathetic towards the Muslims. Yet, as law enforcement officers, they want to ensure that no life is lost. The only way of protecting the Muslims of Mano Majra is to get them away to refugee camps. But having lived in the place together with Sikhs as their kith and kin, they would never sense the danger that is lurking for them around the corner. He decides to achieve this through dubious means, though his ultimate goal is the safety of the Muslims. According to his orders, Malli and his gang, arrested for Ram Lal’s murder, are released in the presence of Mano Majrans, making them wonder whether they were innocent, after all. The police constable also makes suggestive remarks connecting Muslims who have fled the area with the dacoity. Finally an innuendo is made regarding Iqbal, saying that he is a Muslim Leaguer. All these are deliberately uttered falsehoods and the purpose behind them is to divide the people in town; and the Magistrate amply succeeds in his attempt. The ultimate purpose is to remove Muslims from the village without protest from the Sikhs.

The refugees have started arriving from Pakistan with tales of woe. Once they spread themselves among the natives there is no telling where it will lead to. As a result of Hukum Chand’s surgical operation, the village is neatly divided and each group is suspicious of the other. They start brooding over whatever has been done to their co-religionists by the people of the other faiths.

Through the police operation, Khushwant Singh brings out how the police, with their ingenuity and authority, could easily brainwash the people and plant their
own thinking in their minds. While chalking out the thinking of people after the newly planted hostility, he gives a catalogue of atrocities perpetrated in the border areas of the two countries. Yet, their village loyalty persists, and the Sikhs are firm that they will not permit any harm to be done to their villagers by any outsiders. All the same, they cannot turn away the refugees who seek asylum in their village. This scene, where the young and the old speak out their mind, brings out the fact that Partition has created more problems than it has solved. Partition is the making of the politicians, and the common folk have had nothing to do with it. Yet, the emotionally swayed young men indulge in violence without giving a second thought to it.

In one of the most poignant scenes ever found in any literature, Imam Baksh confronts the Sikhs with the straightforward question as to their decision about the Muslims. A young man assures him that none of them will permit anyone to touch the Muslims. There is a lot of crying and sobbing, but in the final analysis both the communities are caught in a web created by the forces over which they have no control. The Lambardartells the Muslims to go to the refugee camp for a few days and come back later. This emotionally charged scene is an indication of communal amity that existed in the country even in the worst of days.

There is another heart-rending scene in which Nooran begs Jugga’s mother to keep her in the family since she is carrying Jugga’s child. The elder woman chides her affectionately, but expresses her inability. This scene indicates how cruel partition has been. Actually until the last minute neither the Sikhs nor the Muslims know that the Muslims are being taken to Pakistan. Their feeling is that the Muslims might be kept in the refugee camp until the turmoil is over, after which they might be brought back to Mano Majra. How pathetic! It is these people for whom nation was divided! It is
KhushwantSingh’s censuring of the selfishness of the politicians whose decision is harmful to both the communities concerned.

The fourth part, “Karma”, deals with nemesis. There is a lot of death, destruction and barbarism. Human nature takes a macabre turn. There is rain and the water of the Sutlej keeps rising. All on a sudden, people see corpses being carried away in the swollen water, corpses of men, women, children, cows and horses. At first, they feel that they might have been carried away by the flood. Only a close scrutiny reveals that they have all been butchered. Khushwant Singh describes each corpse in detail so that the reader can understand how mercilessly they have been slaughtered. He is able to communicate to the reader the frenzy and fury with which the massacre has been going on, without taking the readers to the scene of action. Before this is stomached by the villagers, there comes yet another train carrying corpses. This time the authorities do not bother to collect firewood and kerosene. They use bulldozers to excavate a large pit, throw all the corpses in and close the pit. The author describes every step of the movement of the bulldozer to bring home to the readers the horror and the pathos of blood-curdling incidents.

Then arrive at Mano Majra, a group of rioters, led by an effeminate boy who poses himself as a strongman and able to command the others to do as he bids. He manages to collect fifty volunteers to kill the refugees of Chundunnugger who were being taken to Pakistan by train. All hesitations shown by the Mano Majrans to kill their own fellow villagers, who are innocent and harmless are described in detail. Just when the saboteurs are waiting on the bridge with the guns and spears, Jugga gets on the rail bridge, reaches the rope tied across the nails and starts cutting it. He is not deterred even when his limbs are severed by bullets. He falls on the track and the train moves over him and into Pakistan.
Three characters stand out strong in the readers’ mind. The first one is the magistrate Hukum Chand who is both a type and an individual. He is a typical government official, loyal and duty-conscious, determined to keep law and order at any cost, if necessary through subterfuge. He has had an eerie youth, spent in occult practices, which has filled him with courage and wisdom. Even he finds it impossible to accept the dimensions of massacre going on around him.

The author also presents another side of this magistrate. Though as per the custom of the days, he requisitions the services of a courtesan, for whom all that he feels is filial love, when he meets with an unbearable crisis in his career. He soothes his nerves through talking to her. Finally, he frees Jugga, hoping that he would do something to protect the refugees since Nooran is also among them. His gamble pays off.

Iqbal Singh, a puzzling character with an intriguing name, is introduced by Khushwant Singh just to give a complete picture of the days. Though he professes to be a Communist, his claim seems to be hollow. He does nothing more than speaking in the jargon. Jugga, badmash, is a mixture of good and bad. A tall and able-bodied youth of peasant stock, he takes to robbery when he is deprived of agricultural work. This is the condition of most of the youngsters of the day. However, he grows taller at the end by sacrificing himself to save the refugees or to save his sweet heart.

The second novel of Khushwant Singh, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, deals with the struggle for the nation’s freedom from the shackles of the British rule by telescoping through the relationship between a Sikh and a Hindu family and explores the intrinsic human ties and the bond that unite the people. The readers are carried on wings of history to the pre-Independence era and they are made to visualize
the intense struggle in the Punjab during the last phase of the Indian Freedom Movement. The author presents a panoramic view of Indian life as lived during the times. Interestingly, many aspects of social life emerge spontaneously and realistically though the focus of the novel is on the life of a pious elderly Sikh woman who proves to be a fountain of love.

The novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* opens with a small group of youngsters, who are trying to practise shooting, in order to become terrorists and attack the British Government. They are led by Sher Singh, the son of Buta Singh, who is a magistrate in the British Government. The youngest of the lads suggests that they baptize their guns in blood. Sher Singh shoots a Sarus crane. In the melee, they leave the empty shells on the spot, that are noticed by the village officer and the gatekeeper. At home, his mother, a woman of lofty morals chides him for having used his father’s gun and tells him of her aversion to hunting. Sher Singh loses his sleep wondering whether his adventure would be reported to the government.

Buta Singh has earned the confidence of his British boss, Taylor, yet he does not mind his son hobnobbing with the nationalists, within certain limits, of course. Beena, Buta Singh’s daughter goes to magistrate Wazir Chand’s house and is greeted by Wazir Chand, his wife, his son Madan, his wife and Madan’s sister, Sita. There is not much of a celebration of New Year there. In the afternoon, Madan takes Sita and Beena to a movie. While in the cinema, Madan makes passes at Beena which she does not resist.

The contrast between the two households is clearly brought out by Khushwant Singh. While in the morning Buta Singh’s house wears an atmosphere of a temple, in Wazir Chand’s Hindu house-hold, religion enjoys only a perfunctory place. While the
Sikh family would have disapproved a visit to a movie, it seems to be a regular affair in the Hindu house-hold. Khushwant Singh’s purpose is to show how sophisticated Sikh household differs from that of a Hindu. The former is more conservative and the latter is more hedonistic.

Then comes the scene in which Sher Singh makes a speech in the Students’ Union. It is applauded and the young leader is pleased with the result. They were the days when students took to politics with gusto. They joined either the nationalists or the communists.

There is a scene in which Sher Singh’s wife Champak admires her own nudity. Khushwant Singh uses the opportunity to dwell on Indians’ obsession with sex, their inability to have privacy and their reluctance to be open about sex. Champak accuses the adolescent servant boy of voyeurism, though he has done nothing of that sort. Later events reveal that she is obsessed with sex. This character reveals Khushwant Singh’s complaint against Indians. As a nation, they are obsessed with sex because they rarely get any opportunity for having sex to their satisfaction. Women in particular indulge in the sex act only to please their spouses, rather than enjoying it. This inhibition creates pent up libido in these women, which is craving for an outlet. Champak is one such woman. She demands sex from her husband at every available opportunity. This character is born out of the author’s observation and his own theory. To the extent, it portrays a section of sophisticated upper class women. We can take it as reflective of the society.

Buta Singh’s wife Sabhrai is a picture of piety, putting enormous faith in God and believing that He would look after all their needs. She attends the temple procession and accompanies it as far as her age and health would permit and return home late at night with her maid, Shunno. There is no dearth of such fatalists in India.
even now, and their number must have been long in the first half of the last century. They believed in the efficacy of prayer and resorted to it for every need of theirs, big or small. This piety gives her mental strength and adds to her stature. The character is a type and hence historical.

Shunno is fond of gossiping, yet shrewd in observation. She passes on her suspicions to her mistress at the right opportunity. She is also a type, behaving like all maid-servants of India. She is rustic and robust in health. The author takes pains to give an elaborate account of how she completes her morning functions. This is also typical of Indians of the day. In the night in question she tells Sabhrai that Madan is not a likeable character and it is not good to allow Beena to go to Wazir’s household.

A deputation of Hindu merchants comes to Buta Singh seeking his help in getting the Commissioner’s permission for taking out a procession. The fact that they have come to him instead of going to Wazir Chand, a Hindu, pleases Buta Singh. He uses all his tact and gets the permission from Taylor. The scene gives us an idea how loyal Indian officers behave with their White Bosses. There were two types of White officials in British India. One type was overbearing and treated the Indians with contempt. The other type was conciliatory and understanding. Khushwant Singh dwells at length on the Taylor’s attitude to Indian officers. He preferred Indian company to that of his own people. Yet, his attempts to befriend Indians were not very successful.

There is a colloquy between Buta Singh and his son regarding the Britishers. Both agree that there is a lot to be learnt from the Britishers. Sher Singh, though partially in agreement with his father, finds fault with the British in some respects. They too have their racial pride owing to which they ill-treat other races. Later, Sabhrai cautions her son not to say anything that might compromise his father.
Taylor sends for Sher Singh through his father. When Sher Singh meets him, the Commissioner compliments him on his election as a student leader and asks for his opinion regarding the war. Without mentioning it, he makes the lad see three empty cartridges on the table—the one he carelessly discarded during the shooting practice. Sher Singh comes out thoroughly rattled.

Wazir Chand and Buta Singh decide to take their families to Shimla on vacation during the monsoon days, hiring a house. All of them cannot go together as each one has their own schedule of work. The two magistrates have their own duties to attend to. Madan, Beena and Champak are the early birds to go there. They have a nice time. Madan makes advances to both the women and both of them respond to him positively. Champak is carried away too far and reaches a point when she is eager to have sex with him. Madan’s wife is in her parental home and is not eager to join him.

Khushwant Singh’s purpose seems to expose the shallowness of Indians’ professing of virtue. Though they talk of strict morality, each one of them is vulnerable to sexual advances. Womanisers like Madan are aware of this weakness in women and exploit it to their advantage. Late at night, when Beena tries to enter Madan’s room, she finds that Champak has already gone in and the two are together. She feels bitter within and returns to her room.

Young Sher Singh is in the grip of fear after his not so pleasant a meeting with the Deputy Commissioner. He knows in the heart of his hearts that the deputy commissioner knows too much. It may be all right to be a nationalist, but to be a terrorist is an altogether different matter. He will not only put himself in danger, but also jeopardize his father’s career which has been constantly on the rise. He is aware of being put under constant watch. His attempts to remove the fire-arms from his
garage do not succeed. No one is willing to take them. He feels lonely and deserted. To confound his confusion, the village headman starts blackmailing him. The young men of those days are loyalists, nationalists or terrorists. This passage throws light on their nature.

Old Sabhraí gets a premonition of something going wrong with her daughter. Her fears are compounded when she learns that Madan’s wife has not joined them. She finds all the three in the Shimla camp and nothing seems to be amiss. Shunno, the maid-servant, a middle aged widow is having a strange ailment. She sees blood in her private parts. She goes to a celibate Muslim cleric for cure and he cures her by having sex with her. The author throws light on the rustics’ suspicion of English medicine, their faith in spiritual cure and the hypocrisy of celibacy.

Trouble erupts and everywhere there is picketing by the nationalists, who are beaten and arrested. It is decided that Madan can take Champak home. Madan bribes a ticket collector and gets a coupe. Bribing is common in those days. Madan has the satisfaction of having scored victory over the British army. Madan and Champak have sex in the running train. This is in accordance with the author’s theory of Indian women feeling frustrated with sex, and has recourse to extraneous affairs.

The young terrorists meet at the same spot, led by Sher Singh and take oath in the name of Bhagat Singh. Through all these incidents, Khushwant Singh points out how a lot of young people follow many shades of politics. The Deputy Commissioner Taylor, orders the magistrates to maintain law and order. He throws a hint to Buta Singh to keep an eye on his son.

In an unexpected encounter, Sher Singh and his group kill the Lambardar and hide his body near the bridge. By way of recording his life, the author gives an
excellent picture of life of peasant folk and their rivalries. The Deputy Commissioner gives a discreet order to the police officer to search Buta Singh’s house and arrest his son.

Buta Singh is put to utmost humiliation by Taylor. Sher Singh refuses to part with any information in spite of intimidation. The old woman Sabhrai makes nonstop prayers, when she meets her son in jail. She tells him that the Guru wants him not to name his friends. He follows her advice. He is freed for want of evidence. His father gets honoured. In all these episodes, there is a judicious mixture of history and fiction. And they have been presented by a master artist at his artistic best.

Khushwant Singh’s love for the Mughal, the Colonial and the contemporary history is distinctly evident in the work *Delhi -- A Novel*. He has added the words “a novel” in the title lest readers might mistake it for an interesting history book. Unlike in the other two earlier works, history dominates in it and fiction is like a strong spice added to flavour the work. A detailed account of the Indian history from Balban to the assassination of Indira Gandhi is dealt with in an artistic way. The reader never finds a dull moment while reading the 391 pages of this novel. This too is a gripping novel taking him to the bygone era.

Acutely aware of the fact that the Mughal History and Delhi cannot be separated, the novelist has chosen the city Delhi as a hero. He has concentrated on what makes Delhi a human document. It shows a wonderful insight into the heart and soul of the city and its people at various phases of existence. The novel, indeed, is an emotional reconstruction of the story of Delhi. It portrays the emotions of the rulers, conquerors, traitors, builders and the people in the street. The Sikh narrator dons the role of a passionate lover and commentator. He brings before the readers eyes noisy bazaars, dirty dead rivers, narrow lanes, stench of raw sewage and loud-mouthed
citizens of the present era. Besides, all the Muslim rulers from Ghiasuddin Balban to Bahadur Shah Zafar, and other very important personages like Mahatma Gandhi, Nathu Ram Godse and Indira Gandhi are brought in the narration as their lives were intrinsically connected with the destiny of Delhi.

The novelist’s kaleidoscopic presentation of the chronicle of the capital scatters the radiance of multi-coloured gems that throw their brilliance indicating the historical significance of Delhi and the hysterical extravaganza of sexual excesses of some of its inhabitants and rulers. The Sikh narrator known for his ambassadorial activities at the high profile acts as a guide to many a foreign diplomat visiting Delhi. Occupying a flat, he is venerated by the ever vigilant watchman. Unmindful of the mighty sojourns and returns of the tenant at unearthly hours either alone or in the company of stray girls or transgenders, the watchman remains a passive spectator. The narrator’s paramour Bhagmati is a betel-chewing whore keeping company with him. She is taken around the city and the suburbs; and thus begins the narration of the historicity of the great city and the adjoining regions and thus the dry facts of history becomes alive in the pages of Khushwant Singh.

Bhagmati is taken around places like Tilpat, Yamuna, the Holy River, Amphitheatre at Anangpur, Swaraj Kund built by Tormara Rajputs during the 7th and 8th centuries and christened after the ruler Swarajpal. Lalkot, a red-sand citadel, stands as a monument of architecture of the era in all excellence. The vivid portrayal of these places and buildings of historical importance strikes the readers making them speculate the opulence of the rulers of the period. The transgender rides with her lover to different parts of Delhi such as of Patel Nagar on Ridge Road, the famous Lohia Hospital, the Piccadilly Circus of Delhi the Cannaught Circus, not to talk of Palam Airport and the abode of the criminals Tihar Jail.
Visiting the houses of whores was, perhaps, a common practice during the times of the Mughals. In the material culture, prostitution became an institution. History relates the influential role of whores, courtesans and transgenders in the Mughal courts. Transgender Bhagmati’s life is inextricably linked to the nightlife and nocturnal activities of present Delhi and indicates that this practice has been continuing for thousands of years. She represents the hidja (transgender) whores inhabiting Lal Kuan, a locality of Delhi, which had been infamously famous.

The astonishing Delhi Gate leading to Faiz Bazaar, majestic Moti Mahal, fabulous Fatehpuri Mosque, the astounding Ajmeri Gate, and the resplendent Red Fort are brought before the reader’s eyes. The awful orchards and the mesmerizing landscape add lustre to Qutub Minar. Jamna River glides like a celebrity. People come in for a dip in Triyama. People of various culture and habits wind their way to Qutub. Matchless Jamali Kamali’s mosque Jahaj Mahal with inscriptions carved “Musadi Lal Kaisath of Mehrauli” in the reign of Sultan Ghiasuddin speaks volumes of the Sultan Dynasty.

In the foreword to the paperback edition of the novel Khushwant Singh states:

It took me twenty-five years to piece together this story spanning several centuries of history. I put it all I had in me as a writer: love, lust, sex, hate, vendetta and violence- and above all tears. I did not write this novel with any audience in mind. All I wanted to do was to tell my readers what I learnt about the city roaming among its ancient ruins, its bazaars, its diplomatic corps and its cocktail parties. My only aim was to get them to know Delhi and love it as much as I do. (i)
Interestingly the tale of Delhi begins with the arrival of the Sikh narrator to his beloved city Delhi, after his stay abroad for a long time. He declares his passionate attachment to Delhi and his “beloved” Bhagmati, a hidja whore, is immense. Immediately after reaching Delhi, he seeks the company of Bhagmati. The love episodes concerning the nameless Sikh narrator and his beloved Bhagmati jaunts the reader to popular historical spots and provides a chance to the narrator to recreate the history of Delhi; that is also the history of India. Bhagmati represents the present but her curiosity helps him to link the past and the present and the history of Delhi emerges unobtrusively. In fact, she serves as an intrinsic chain in the historical narration of Delhi’s past. The novelist refers to the tradition of Qawwali singing at the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya. It is another interesting feature continuing till today in the material culture.

Urdu poetry known for its sensuous appeal exercised a great influence on the Muslim rulers. Khushwant Singh himself, being a lover of Urdu poetry, has made numerous references to this in his novel. He has quoted the verses of Mir Taqi Mir and Ghalib. Ghalib is shown as a contemporary of Bahadur Shah Zafar. The novel begins with an epigram by Ghalib: “I asked my soul what is Delhi? She replied: The world is the body and Delhi its life.” Masuddi Lal is shown to be uttering verse to portray Muslim women’s beauty; and it reaches the zenith of sensuality. In their article titled “A Socio-Cultural Study of Delhi by Khushwant Singh and Twilight in Delhi by Ahmed Ali: A Comparative Analysis”, M. Shahbaz Arif and Hina Gull state: “Poetry has been a successful source of presenting the beliefs, values, sentiments and intellectual history of this soil.”(10)

The episode concerning Musaddi Lal at the earlier part of the novel has helped the novelist to depict the historicity of the beginnings of the Hindu-Muslim conflict in
Hindustan and the efforts of Saint Nizamuddin to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity and his endeavour to propagate secular ideals and universal brotherhood. Musaddi Lal, a Hindu by birth and a convert to Islam, is shown to be a victim of fanatically inclined social forces of the times. Being a new convert to Islam, he is not recognised either as a Muslim or a Hindu. His pathetic plight on account of cruelties inflicted on him by the non-secular forces and how the intervention of Saint Nizamuddin, who stood for amity among the two religious sects, brings happiness to Musaddi Lal’s private life are highlighted with sympathy.

Saint Nizamuddin has been presented as real saviour of lakhs and lakhs of hapless people who sought his guidance for leading a secular life. All historians have referred to the impact of the preaching of this saint on the social life of the people. Khushwant Singh has beautifully portrayed the greatness of the saint through this episode. The saint is adored even today by millions of people for his secular attitude. At the same time, Khushwant Singh has portrayed the fast changing society through the fictional character of Musaddi Lal. He has also depicted the emerging society and the trying times to the Hindus of Hindustan owing to foreign invasion. The novelist also has given a realistic picture of the Hindus reconciling themselves to the inevitable conditions and how they could find jobs in the Muslim administration.

Untouchability has all along been a bane and a curse tarnishing the image of Hindu culture. In fact, Sikhism came as a revolt to put an end to all kinds of discriminative practices prevalent in the Hindu society. The founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak advocated the equality of all men and abhorred the acts of discriminations but even the Sikh people indulged in segregating a group of Sikhs who were scavengers by profession. The story of Jaita Rangreta unfolds the poignant predicament of the so-called Sikh untouchables during the reigns of Shah Jahan and his son Aurangzeb. As a
citizen of the period this Sikh painfully recalls how Guru Tegh Bahadur Singh was beheaded by the tyrant Aurangzeb. A gibbet was set up displaying the naked dead body for public gaze. The Sikhs, being a minority community could not do anything against this barbarity and they wept and mourned. And even Mussalmans were moved to tears at the atrocious act of the Muslim ruler. The episode highlights how Jaita Rangreta could kidnap the body of the Guru and could give a decent burial to his Guru. The events happen like a miracle. Nature herself helps Rangreta by creating a dust storm and he utilises this natural phenomenon as a cover to lift the body of Guru unseen by the guards and others. After performing this act, in all humility, he feels that Guru has blessed him by permitting him to touch His body.

In the history of Hindustan Aurangzeb has earned a notorious popularity by his inhuman treatment of the people who did not follow the Islamic tenets. It has been documented by all the historians. That how this Badshah killed his siblings in the power game believing in the saying that in “kingship there is no place for kinship” is well-known fact recorded in the annals of Mughal Rule in Hindustan. His imposition of Jaiza tax on the Hindus and killing of thousands of sadhus of Satnamis sect are also historical facts known to the world. The last section of the story of Aurangzeb shows how Aurangzeb regrets and repents for his earlier sins. He is presented in a better light. Khushwant Singh has made him a human being with a moral perspective. History may fail to show positive traits of Aurangzeb but Khushwant Singh does not fail to use his imagination as a literary artist. The touching description moves the hearts of readers.

This novel elaborates on the opulent ways of living by the Mughal rulers and this has attracted the people as well as the historians. Many of the remnants relating to their rule are in evidence in Delhi. They remind the readers of their lavish life-styles,
and the consequent power-game indulged in by many a ruler of Delhi. The epicurean and lustful life of the rulers and their children have been portrayed in a number of episodes to drive home the fact as to how these contributed to the decline and fall of these dynasties.

The episode on Anglo-Indian woman Alice Aldwell poignantly portrays how she is bruised physically by Prince Mirza and his two companions and a transgender in Delhi. They are shown to be behaving like animals in their sexual encounter with the hapless woman who, in fact, seeks their help for protecting her young daughters from the infuriated mob. But unfortunately shattering her hope and confidence and taking advantage of her helpless and pitiable condition, they indulge in cruel and violent sexual acts betraying their sadism. It moves the sensitive reader to tears.

The Ram Rakha story tells the division of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan which caused unbearable pain to both the Hindus and the Muslims and uprooted many Hindu and Muslim families living in the border areas. The village named Hadali situated on the banks of the river Jhelum went to Pakistan in the division. The happy Ram Rakha’s family living there for centuries is thrown out of its moorings overnight. Ram Rakha’s sister is abducted by some Muslim goons. The family is forced to move to Delhi as paupers. It is in Delhi the innocent Ram Rakha joins R.S.S to eke out a living and becomes a “victim” of R.S.S indoctrination and indulges in terrorist activities against Muslims. As a witness to Gandhi’s horrible death, he weeps inconsolably and feels that all his actions are against his conscience.

Through the story of an Indian contractor and his son, the novelist tells the reader how some servile Indians became prosperous while others were on the warpath against the British regime. Without paying any heed to the popular sentiments of most of the people of India for freeing the country from the shackles of the British, a few
Indians pampered the British officials and could get contract for building the modern Delhi. At the same time, the novel highlights the methodical efficiency of the British officers in building a modern Capital.

The Sikh narrator’s wanderings with the transgender Bhagmati helps the writer reconstruct the past events of great historical and social significance. The reader gets a glimpse into various scenes enacted in the course of the narration. Different voices are heard speaking to the reader directly and these, in fact, add to the verisimilitude of the events portrayed. The Sikh narrator himself speaks elaborately at the end of the novel presenting the most inhuman killing of the innocent Sikh watchman Budh Singh in the riot that follows the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The carnage caused owing to the mob fury and its gruesome killing of innocent men, women and children is documented in all its horror at the end of the novel. The history of the period emerges distinctly proving that religious intolerance and religion’s failure to chastise the fanatical bigots are a continuing tradition in the so-called land of spirituality. The novel thus delineates socio-political setting with historic-political characters. The novel thus narrates the past events and their impact. It also pictures the society and its social norms. It ends with a heart-rending description of anti-Sikh riots after the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Whatever might be the limitations discerned in the writings of Khushwant Singh, there is near unanimity of opinion among the critics and scholars that he excels in narrative art. Many facts can be cited in proof of this. As far as the narrative structure is concerned, the three novels taken up for study show three different structures. In the first novel *Train to Pakistan*, the reader finds a well-planned structure with a distinct beginning, middle and end. The story moves in a fast pace and it is characterised by a gripping narrative with an unexpected end. It poignantly
portrays the impact of Partition on the lives of the innocent people of Mano Majra. The second novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is absolutely different from the earlier novel. Set against the background of Quit India Movement, it pictures the life of two households. The plot of the novel is loose. Though very interesting to read, the story moves in a leisurely pace; and there are many digressions and the ending is tame and flat. The third work *Delhi -- A Novel* has altogether a different structure. The story alternates between the past and the present presenting a number of stories in the form of episodes. In fact, different stories are woven into single fabric but the entire focus is on Delhi.

One of the constituents of narrative art, according to critics, is the selection of titles. The aptness of the title selected is acclaimed by all. For the first novel, he selected two titles. To begin with he had called it “Mano Majra” which was quite appropriate since the entire action takes place in this tiny village, supposedly tucked in near the boundary of the newly created Pakistan. Despite its proximity to Pakistan, the village remained a paragon of harmony with Sikhs and Muslims living together as kinsmen. They even transcended religion while performing worship at the common village shrine. The brutality of Partition is brought home through carcass-bearing trains, which arrive from Pakistan. Even that fails to evoke any animosity between the two communities. It requires an indoctrinated outsider to provoke them into enmity towards the other community. All this proves the suitability of the title.

The changed title “Train to Pakistan” is equally fitting, putting a bit of dynamism into it. The entire life in the village is perturbed by the passage of trains. Once the regularity is affected, owing to the post-Partition holocaust, life in this village goes awry. There are a couple of ghost-trains puffing into the station. The last train, the one the title is based on, enters Pakistan with live passengers, the attempt to
kill all of them is foiled by the compassionate heroism of a single character, who grows tall at the end.

The title of the second novel “I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale” is poetic in its appeal and symbolic in its overtone. The first person singular in the title stands for Sabhrai, the grand old lady, an epitome of loftiness. The nightingale or its music stands for the independence of India, which will usher in spring in the land. It also stands for spring in the life of Buta Singh when his son will be freed from the ordeal, freeing everyone else too from the trauma of waiting. Though Sabhrai says that she will not hear the nightingale, she is at peace with herself with the feeling that its appearance and singing are certain. To justify the title, the novelist uses the symbol of bulbul on two occasions.

The title of the third novel is simply “Delhi - A Novel” to insist that is not simply history. The city is bare, not deserving any adjective to qualify it. All this is symbolised in the bareness of the title. As critic Lalit Kumar puts it:

Delhi is the story of a grand failure, the failure of a city inhabitants, its past and its present. It is the story of races who have failed to explained their potential; society which failed to appropriate for itself values that make a people discover and realise themselves, a civilization that has crumbled before attaining its true destiny. Traces of the glory that could have been, serve to heighten one’s sense of the magnitude of the failure. (42)

Going further into symbolism all the chapter titles such as “Kalyug” and “Karma” in Train to Pakistan are significantly symbolic. Paradoxically, the story of the second novel I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale starts with the mindless killing of a
crane a not-so-romantic creature, just for satisfying the urge for a ritual, for swearing by blood. The remaining crane does not take the killing easily, it keeps chasing its killer like the albatross and the albatross does chase Sher Singh till the end in the person of Thimma Singh, who keeps haunting him even after his own death.

Both “train” and “the nightingale” are undoubtedly realistic. The characters are true-to-life, all of them belong to the middle class, the situations are what can be met within everyday life and the language they use is of the humdrum type – there is no epic grandeur about them. Characters of Khushwant Singh cannot be labelled good or bad. Police Officers introduced in the course of the narrative are very much humane. Iqbal, the outsider, may be an enigmatic character even he is life-like and behaves just as anyone in his station would.

Jugga has many redeeming qualities from the beginning. His love for the Muslim girl is sincere; he does not break the code of conduct of his own – thieves’ clan. At the end, when he scarifies his own life for saving a train full of Muslim compatriots, it is not totally altruistic. Would he have done it if his sweet-heart were not travelling in the train? Perhaps not and that shows he is a selfish human being, after all it smacks of his romance towards his beloved. The language used by Khushwant Singh rings true because he often uses native words and sometimes native phrases translated into English. He does not hesitate to use profanity since it adds to the realism of the narrative. The words and phrases he employs strike similar vibrations in the readers to share identical response and reaction.

Pankha, badmash, sahib, pukka, memsahib, and acchaji are illustrations of native words. Hukum Chand is called ‘government’. “What honourable name does your honour bear?”, “They are a sort of four twenties”. Sardar Buta Singh is the king of this district, “the one with these hairless Hindus.” The Indian Sub-Inspector’s
words to Sher Singh. “It is because your father has been rubbing his nose at Taylor’s threshold that you are given the opportunity.”

He makes abundant use of expletive to add to the verisimilitude of the narrative and emphasizes the nativity. It is quite common in almost all the languages in India to use words combined with ‘mother’, ‘wife’, and ‘sister’ as words of abuse, which are badly used by the illiterate villagers. Phrases like ‘pigs’, ‘penis’ belong to this category.

There is one more factor regarding Khushwant Singh’s prose style that is his capacity to make his scenes visual, by presenting every detail and sincerely following every movement. His novels read like movie scripts. Even the arrival of a car, the way in which it is opened and how the corpulent Hukum Chand gets out of it are described in such a manner that the reader feels as if it is taking place before his eyes. He feels more like a spectator than like a reader.

Taking into consideration, the characterisation in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, we find there are characters representing the macrocosm of all communities involved. There is the family of Buta Singh of the Sikh community, Wazir Chand’s family of the Hindu community, the Tylors representing Englishmen, a Muslim cleric and a couple of Anglo-Indian Policemen. Buta Singh is a loyal police constable, committed to the discharge of his duties in all seriousness. He is not averse to showing off his closeness to the Deputy Commissioner to his fellow magistrates. He is proud of belonging to a lineage of warriors – his father belonged to the native army that fought the British; but in Buta Singh’s case, times have changed and he is serving the British government with all loyalty. Naturally, his son, Sher Singh of the next generation, wants to chase the British army and entertains the idea of taking to terrorism, though he does not seem to have any idea of how to go about it.
Wazir Chand is a loyal magistrate who discharges his duties in all earnestness. His son, Madan, though a friend of Sher Singh, lacks seriousness of purpose when it comes to the question of opposing the British. He is a cricketer of repute and enjoys his reputation. He is out to take advantage of women, and does not have any qualms in seducing his friend’s wife. Among all such people Sabhrai stands out as the grand old woman, a noble soul, large hearted and endowed with love and affection for her family. Being spiritually minded, she seeks guidance from the Holy Granth and gets proper direction without fail. She meets her death peacefully, displaying streaks of heroism. The author has taken a lot of care in delineating the character of Taylor, a decent English Officer, who wants to establish friendly relations with the natives, but is disappointed at their indifference and sycophancy. Mrs Taylor comes out as an understanding and compassionate person while deciding to deliver Sher Singh to his mother as a festival gift. The narrative is enlivened by suitable quotes from the Holy Granth, and Khushwant Singh has taken care not to overdo it. Destiny plays a vital role in the denouement of this family-drama as if the body of Thimma Singh were never found. If it had been, Buta Singh’s family would have met with total ruin.

In Delhi – A Novel, probably every character in every episode is a symbol of the grandeur that was and the decadence that followed. It may be alright for the narrator with all his waywardness to have a paramour, but why a hermaphrodite? Why not a normal woman? Does the author want to emphasise the fact that love, the finest of all human emotions, has become gross and vulgar and has been made mechanical? Khushwant Singh remarks: “Delhi and Bhagmati have a lot in common” and elaborates “having been long misused by rough people, they have learnt to conceal their seductive charm under a mask of repulsive ugliness. It is only to their lovers, among whom I count myself, that they reveal their true selves”. (DAN 376)
Calling it a novel, Khushwant Singh has taken liberties with the facts, justifying the genre fiction to label it. Yet what is barred to us at the end, is the degenerate soul of Delhi after it has been soiled by one black deed after another, going on for centuries. Khushwant Singh exploits the techniques of dramatic monologue to permit his characters pour out their pent-up emotions. All the historical personae presented in the novel from Ghiasuddin Balban upto Mahtma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi represent one or the other aspects of theirs, whose tale the novel is. The author succeeds in making the narrative captivating through his poetic style, often replete with humour. It is amazing that Khushwant Singh can find some buffoonery and foolery amidst so much of trickery and treachery. There is no dearth of similes and metaphors, which are on many occasions English-rendering of native sayings and proverbs. The author has added to the loftiness of style by quoting voraciously from native poets of many languages. On the whole, the author’s primary aim in all these works is readability, which he has very successfully achieved through the employment of various devices.

To sum up, the future researchers are welcome to think in terms of broadening the perspective of their research insights into fresh woods and pastures new and arrive at the peaks of similarities in the treatment of life against the backdrop of India’s struggle for independence by the choice of writers both in English and regional languages especially with Khushwant Singh. Though Khushwant Singh is no more with us wielding his pen writing more and more novels, the novels so far written lend themselves to the interpretation so far not done and thereby creating ample opportunities for further research.