CHAPTER I

AGE OF KHUSHWANT SINGH
(1915-......)
The beginning of twentieth century is characterised by social, political and economic changes. It was a period of great termoil, a period of deep intellectual strivings, a period of scientific discoveries, of industrialisation and urbanisation. In such state it is very difficult for a writer to live in isolation, therefore the age reflects itself in his writing. All personal experiences and must have a reference to human experience and consciousness if they are to have a permanent value. According to Achebe, all art is propaganda though not all propaganda is art.\(^1\)

The Twentieth century saw many Indian writers coming up with their work. The work of Indian writers in English has been known as Indo-Anglian Literature. For long time the emergence of this term can be traced out somewhat near middle of the twentieth century. George Sampson in his, "Concise Cambridge History of English Literature" (1949), used the term Anglo-Indian Literature to describe Indian Creative writing in English. "Thus Anglo-Indian Literature is usually English Literature with Indian local colour, and it is written for the whole English public, not merely for the English in India. English is the medium of literacy expression for the educated Indian, and Anglo-

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Indian literature must therefore include works written in English by native Indians.’” This term, however, it was felt, did not indicate a distinctive meaning because the connotation of the term “Anglo Indian” changed, under the impact of new social and political factors. For a time the term “Anglo-Indian” literature implied creative writings of Englishmen in India and also the creative efforts of Indians in English on Indian themes. It became thus a diverse creation of cross-fertilization of cultures. It included the creative work of Englishmen and women such as Rudyard Kipling, Flora Annie Steel, E. H. Forster and also the writings of Indians – Toru Dutt, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and others. It was felt that these two strains of writing could be seen clearly only as separate forces. In view of this new literary approach, the term “Indo-Anglian” was coined, which helped to distinguish the creative work in English of native Indians from that of Englishmen in India or outside on Indian themes. Later this term has been modified and a quite simpler term, “Indian writing in English” was used. “The Sahitya Academy of India has re-christened it as Indian English Literature.”²

“Indo-Anglian” literature or “Indian writing in English include every part of literature i.e. poetry, drama, fiction and prose. The present study is surrounded with fiction therefore it will be relevant to discuss fiction which according to Oxford dictionary is, “Type of literature describing imaginary events and people”. Fiction is an ordered

² Ibid, p.6
restructuring of reality by means of which the bewildering of life is included into an artistic unity. The movement of the creative process in fiction is from disorder to order and from particular to general. What the novelist or, for that matter, any writer of imaginative literature attempt to do is to introduce “a little order into this chaos” of experimental existence.³

Novels tend to present an intimate view of life while providing a holistic picture of perceived reality. Novel tries to transport the reader into a particular setting to involve him with the set of characters, which are based on the real characters of the society. Novelists portray the characters, which they have either come through in life or have in their mind. Thus fictional characters are also real as they resemble the real people of that particular age or era or they can be easily identified in the society of that period as George Lewes says, “Art always aims at the representation of reality, i.e. truth.”⁴

Fiction being the most characteristic and powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in the Indo-English Literature. The nineteen thirties and forties constitute the most flourishing decades in the history of Indo-English fiction. Novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan have gained worldwide

³ Leon Surmelion, Technique of fiction writing: measure and madness, New York: Doubling and Co. 1969, p.3
⁴ Realism in Art: Recent German fiction: West-minster Review 10(1858), p.493.
recognition. Their works have been translated into many languages. They are said to be the fathers of the Indo-English fiction.

The initial attempts were made by the Indian writers in the field of fiction during later half of the nineteenth century. National movements for freedom and the impact of Mahatma Gandhi made writers to take up the writing, which would help the national unity and awareness for the betterment of the nation. It was K. S. Venkatarmani’s *Kandan the Patriot* (1932) and Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) and *Cooie* (1936), which continued to discuss how the status of the neglected and downtrodden could be raised and the right of the people recognised for freedom from hunger and political slavery.

The first ever Indo-English novel was written by Benkim Chandra Chatterjee, who curiously left his English novel incomplete and turned towards Bengali, his mother tongue writing. Till nineteen thirties novelists wrote only for the largely Indian readers. Later the social background shifted towards nationalism. The Indian nationalism as everywhere else partook of social and radical movements, which certainly came in for creative attention in Indian fiction and also in Indo-English fiction.\(^5\) In the initial phase of Indo-English fiction, historical novels were written with a view to inculcating self-respect among Indians. The landmarks of modern history have also been isolated for detailed depiction and examination of

\(^5\) R.K. Dhawan: Common wealth Fiction V.1.; Classical Publishing Company; p.8
their socio-political fall out. If Mulk Raj Anand’s trilogy – *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) were written in the context of the second world war. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) revolve around the partition of India in 1947. Bhavni Bhattacharaya’s *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) was written in the context of India China war of the early sixties. Nayantara Sahgal’s *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *A Situation in Delhi* (1977) give the view of the political situations of the time.

The Indo-English fiction has enjoyed its golden period during the last few decades. More novels after independence have come out from aspiring novelists. The abundant growth of the novel may be attributed to the fact that there is much more intellectual life in India now than there was before independence.

Various Indo-English novels can be divided into four subgroups, according to their themes. First group includes novelists whose novels depict the social, economic or political oppression of individuals. This group includes Mulk Raj Anand’s most work, Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, Markandya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*, Bhavni Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers and Music for Mohini*, Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* etc.
The second group includes novels, which deal with individual's search for identity. Like Mulk Raj Anand’s trilogy, *Across the Black Waters, The Village* and *The Sword and the Sickle*; B. Ranjan’s *The Dark Dancer* and *Too Long in the West*, Khushwant Singh’s *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* etc.

The third group includes R.K. Narayan’s works and also Bhavni Bhattacharya’s *He who Rides a Tiger* is less concerned with autonomous characters of man but with his role and position in society, which in turn, is conceived of as part of a hierarchically structured universe.

Fourthly and finally a small number of works where Indian authors attempt to bridge the gulf between India and the west like S. Nagrajan’s *Chronicles of Kedaran* or Bhavni Bhattacharaya’s *Shadow from the Ladakh*.

We see that Khushwant Singh’s work deals with social, political effect on individual and his quest for identity in the society. Khushwant Singh’s work brings about his deep relation with the time and its effect, which is directly visible in his work. His characters include both rustic and metropolitan. R.S. Singh says, “Khushwant Singh deals with the changing patterns of life of the metropolis.”

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⁶ R.S. Singh, Contemporary Indian Fiction in English, Creative Books; New Delhi, p. 26
Khushwant Singh was born on 2nd February 1915 at Hadali in West Punjab (now in Pakistan). He was the second son of Sir Shobha and Lady Singh. The date of his birth has some contradiction. He himself says, "Where I was born I know when I was born remains a conjecture."7

He got his school education at Modern School in Delhi and College education at St. Stephen's College, New Delhi and Government College Lahore. He obtained his law degree from King's College London. He practiced as a lawyer in Punjab High Court, Lahore for eight years, from 1939 to 1947. He joined Indian Ministry of External Affairs in 1947 and later in 1948 he was appointed as Information Officer of Government of India at Toronto and else where in Canada. It was only there that he first wrote for Canadian Forum in 1947. He was a member of Indian Delegation to the UNESCO Sixth General Conference held at Paris in 1954-56. He was the chief editor of the Illustrated Weekly of India from 1969 to 1979. He also served as editor of National Herald and The Hindustan Times, and also wrote for many National and International dailies and journals like The New York Times, The Observer (London), The New Statesman (London), The Harpur (U.S.A.), The Evergreen Review (U.S.A.), The London Magazine etc.

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7 Khushwant Singh, Sex, Scotch and Scholarship, New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1992, p. 13
Khushwant Singh has written a lot both for newspapers and journals besides he has four novels to his credit, namely *Train to Pakistan* (1956); *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959); *Delhi* (1989); *The Company of Women* (1995). He has received a number of awards. He was awarded with Padma Bhushan in 1975 and in the same year the Punjab Government honored him for his distinguished contribution to literature and journalism. He was later awarded with Grove Press Award for his first novel *Train to Pakistan*.

His literary career began sometime in the middle of the century. During his second posting at London he got tired of diplomatic life and decided to switch over to writing. He says, "I began to seriously think of taking up writing as a career."\(^8\) He first published his literary debut under the title of *The Mark of Vishnu* in 1950.

His literary career can be divided into two phases:


II Phase (1971-present day): More expressive work and other achievements.

As the purpose of the present study is to illustrate and examine Women's sensibility in Khushwant Singh's novels, let us consider them

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\(^8\) Ibid, p. 27
in their social status. The nineteenth century was a time when the condition of women was very bad they had no liberty. Contrary to these women of middle of twentieth century was a person full of vitality. This century brought about changes in life style and social status of women. The mentality of men towards women also changed. Now she was considered a social being who can work and can by her will compete with man. She was no more a doll in the hands of man.

Now she was not confined to her home and giving birth to children. As time passed she learnt to walk and talk as man and do as a male did. Although novel is an unreal treatise, it depicts the social values and thus to uplift the society. Novelists tried to follow the path, which led to the upliftment of women. Many novelist like Mr. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan and women novelists like Kamla Markandya, Anita Desai etc. played an important role to improve the status of women.

The women of the twentieth century thought about both her family and her work. She kept the family members together by her love and cares and also earned for the family. Though this trend was not visible in the rural areas of India, but this was the beginning. Later half period of the century brought a lot of changes in the status of women. Now even the women of rural areas joined many professions. Some became teachers, office bearers, some also fought elections and became great leaders and are holding high posts.
The twenty first century seems to be a turning point in the life style of Indian women. Government is trying to bring about reservations for women in government posts. It is a step to uplift the downtrodden section of women. The major role of novelists now is to bring about such women characters in their novels who can make woman think of herself and also try to make herself a viable being who can be equal to man in all walks of life.

The novels of later half of the twentieth century addressed the demand for improvement of social status, revival of past traditions and search for national identity. The increasing awareness of the individual in society also gives a new responsibility to the Indo-Anglian novel. This lead to a new look at the status of woman in the Indian society. The whole burden of civilization is summed up in its feminine image.

The Indo-Anglian writers, like the Indian society is torn between two extremes, on one hand he glorifies and idealises Indian woman and on the other hand he is compelled to brood over her pitiable condition. Indo-Anglian writer tries to project a total view of society, and its culture. Large numbers of novelists have concentrated on the experience and exploration of cultural clashes when East and West meet. The theme of East and West cultural clashes glorifies the Indian woman. Indian woman is considered as a saintly person by novelist’s through whom he conveys the Indian cultural values. She is drawn in contrast with everything that is modern because in India modernity is often associated
with westernisation. Thus, whether it is Savitri of *The Serpent and the Rope* or Premala of *Some Inner Fury* or Kamla of *The Dark Dancer* or Nalini of *Too Long in the West*, or Sabhrai of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* they strive hard to project the best of their culture, to manifest India's timeless traditional values. In the novels of Raja Rao we find that he divides his characters into personal and impersonal. The Indian women are impersonal in the sense that they fulfill their duties beyond personal self.

Novelists depict women characters in personal and impersonal forms. Many novels written after freedom, which are written on or set against Gandhian background depicts women of unprecedented courage and determination. Some of the novels of this sort are *The Patriot and Chronicles* of Kedaran, *Motherland*, *The Devil's Wind*, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The House at Adampur*, *A Goddess named God* etc. On the other hand there are such novels which describe subjects peculiar to the Indian scene such as hunger, famine, joint family system, indurtrilisation and superstition where women is the victim of natural or man made cruelty, injustice and exploitation.

The role of women in family has been multifarious. Raja Rao pronounces in *'The Serpent and the Rope'* that "Life is made for woman, man is a stranger to this earth."\(^9\) It is true that her complex physiological nature has endowed her with certain specific obligations.

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The status of woman, more than that of a man is bound up with the traditional wife and mother role. We find that service; sacrifice, sub-massiveness and tolerance are the qualities which come to them naturally.

Anita Desai and Nayantara Sangal protest against monotony, drabness, and injustice and humiliation. Their women refuse to be taken for granted and do complain against this condition. The final and sublime role of feminine image is in the words of Anand Coomaraswamy, "For everything feminine is of the mother."\(^{10}\) The strong maternal instincts essentially run through the veins of every feminine heart in Indo-Anglian novels. Kunal's mother in *So many Hungers*, Little mother in *The Serpent and the Rope*, Sabhra in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* show the privileged mothers who give everything they have without expecting anything in return.

Women characters of Khushwant Singh's novels are blended with many qualities. Mr. Singh portrays women characters, which belong to different classes and sections. Some of the characters like Shunoo of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*; Nooran and Haseena of *Train to Pakistan*; Hira Bai, Noor bai etc of *Delhi*; Dhanno of *The Company of Women* etc. all belong to lower class of society. Some of the characters like Sabhra, Champak, Beena of *I Shall Not Hear the

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\(^{10}\) Anand Coomaraswamy, *Status of Woman*. The dancing Shiva (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1948, p. 94.)
Nightingale; Sonu, Sarojini, Yasmeen etc. of The Company of Women are from upper class.

Mr. Singh's women characters have different instincts some characters like Sabhrai, Shunoo of I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale are religious. Whereas women characters like Champak of I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale; Dhanoo, Molly Gomes, Yasmeen of The Company of Women; all are full of sexual instinct. Mr. Singh's first novel Train to Pakistan brings about the condition of women at the time of partition. Women were abducted, raped and were also killed. This novel bring about the drastic condition of Sundari, the daughter of Hukum Chand's orderly, she was raped by many man one after another. Most of the women characters of Singh's novels are full of sexual instincts the incidence of love between Champak and Madan; Shunoo and Peer Sahib in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale are two incidences which bring about Mr. Singh's quality of providing such incidences in his novels which divert the attention of his readers towards sex. "The affair between Shunoo and Peer Sahib is presented as a counterpart to the illicit relationship between Madan and Champak. Whereas, Madan and Champak belong to the upper-class stratum of hierarchical Indian Society. Shunoo and Peer Sahib are from the lower sections of society."

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"Train to Pakistan" is about the partition of India. This novel describes the pain and suffering of people during the time of partition. This novel is the outcome of what Mr. Singh has seen during the time of partition. He spent the war years in Lahore. In 1946 savage killing of Hindus and Sikhs had begun in North-Western Punjab, and the violence gradually spread eastward to Lahore and Amritsar. By the summer of 1947 it was clear that to stop such fighting Hindus and Sikhs would have to get out of Pakistan. In 1947 Mr. Singh decided to leave Lahore till the violence subsided.

Though the freedom struggle was over by now but the political theme was not over. This impact of freedom struggle and aftermath and the later wars with China and Pakistan became the events, which persuaded the novelists to take up the topic for their novels. The tragic events of partition had inspired a lot of novelists to write on them. Mohan Kumar says:

"The tragic drama of partition had inspired three novels, none of which can however claim to have met adequately the challenge of the great theme. Khushwant Singh and Chaman Nahal dilute the stark realism of their narratives with a strong ad mixture of conventional romantic love in 'Train to Pakistan' (1956) and 'Azadi' (1975) respectively; and Malgonkars patent inability to look beyond the sheer horror and brutality of it all in 'A Bend in the Ganges' (1964) allows an intended epic to dwindle into a melodrama."\(^{12}\)

Mr. Singh’s second novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is not as popular as his *Train to Pakistan* but it has all the major features of Mr. Singh’s art. Khushwant Singh is a product of western culture and education, and it seems that he has written this novel with the typical western readers in mind. This novel is the blend of Indian and Western cultures, but western culture dominates the Indian culture.

There are two major women characters Sabhrai and Champak. Sabhrai is a typical Indian woman who believes in God, performs holy rituals everyday. Mr. V. A. Sahana compares her to Mrs. Wilcox in *Howards End* and writes, “She is nature’s greatest creation.” He adds:

*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* has many weak elements, but it succeeds through the portrayal of Sabhrai, in communicating the innate understanding of life, the moral prophetic power that issues from a deeply religious personality and a wisdom that supersedes all rational of thought.”13

This novel of Mr. Singh has women characters who are different from each other. Champak is full of sexual instinct and is in opposition to her mother-in-law, Sabhrai, she brings the view of western culture to Indian readers. Thus during the portrayal of this character Mr. Singh had a foreign woman in mind, as she crosses the limits of an Indian woman of her age and time. On the other hand her mother-in-law, Sabhrai shows a well-behaved religious and home-loving woman. She brings

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about the typical character of her age and time, who believes a lot in God and her family. She is devoted both to God and her family. When her son Sher Singh is arrested for the murder of Jhimma Singh, before going to her son she performs a ritual of purification. She spends the whole night praying in the Golden Temple for the safe release of her son.

Through this novel, we come to know that while writing this novel, Mr. Singh had a western reader in mind all the time. The character of Champak is truly Western character. The relationship of man and woman depicted in this novel is not Indian type; the love episode of Champak and Madan brings about the realistic view of Western culture. It does not confirm the middle class social norms of Indian society. This novel of Mr. Singh is therefore a blend of both cultures.

After a big gap of about twenty years Khushwant Singh came up with his novel Delhi, which was published by Penguin India in 1990. The important aspect of this novel is Mr. Singh’s treatment of history.

It was Allen Tate who distinguished between, “Historical novels” and “Novel as history”. Jate describes Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind as a historical novel. ‘The novel as History’ refers to historical consciousness of a writer. Such historical consciousness is a peculiar quality of Indian writers and Khushwant Singh is no exception. Thus Delhi is categorised as “Novel as history”.
The novel Delhi is a story from the beginning to the present time. He has constructed it from the records of history and chronicled by eye-witnesses. Therefore the novel is written in first person. Mr. Singh writes in ‘A Note from the Author’: “History provided me with skeleton. I covered it with flesh and injected blood.” This novel includes characters of Moghuls, princess and paupers, pimps and prostitutes, dervish and saints, the Turks, the Hindus and the Sikhs.

The narrator of the earlier chapters on Bhagmati is an eyewitness to riot of 1984. Who is Bhagmati? If we go by the author’s version, “If Delhi is the body, Bhagmati is the soul”. Other characters like Laxmi are full of sexual instinct and these characters make a casual reader to think this novel based on sheer philandering and sex.

This novel has women characters from all sections of society. It brings about the historical events and characters and are allowed to bring about their views regarding life and likes.

Khushwant Singh has observed India both as an insider and as an outsider. Through this he gained a deep knowledge of India, what Indians think about it and what foreigners think of it. In an ‘Evening with Authors’ programme held in Bombay on 1st December 1969, Singh describes himself a writer of history and mere fiction. “I write about the people I detest most.”

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14 Quoted in Sahana, Khushwant Singh, New York: 1972, p. 21
In this novel the women characters are portrayed by Mr. Singh in historical sense. Like the character of Begum Rais Sahiba whose love affair with poet Meer Taqi Meer, made him and also destroyed him. Poet himself says:

“For the time she was my mistress she made me feel as if I was the only God she knew and every sentence. I wrote was like a Sura of the Quran. She became at once my mother, mistress, nurse and companion...........This woman made me and destroyed me.”

The novel Delhi, in brief, is a recreation or re-interpretation of the past by the present for its own purposes.

Women characters of the novel like Lady Jane Hoity Toity, Georgine, Mrs. Kamla Gupta, and Fraulein Irma are neither outstanding nor are above average. They are all a symbol of treachery and dacoit. They are connected with the amoral activities of life. They break the norms of society as their love affairs and sex affairs depend upon secrecy. Mr. Singh as a realist is aware of presenting these characters with an eye for realism.

His recent novel ‘The Company of Women’ published by Penguin India in 1995 is also a treatise of women involved in sex. This novel is divided into chapters based on the women characters. This novel contains characters especially women characters who belong to different state, country, social class, profession etc. This novel shows

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15 Khushwant Singh, Delhi, p. 202-203
Mr. Singh’s deep knowledge of women’s psyche. He has portrayed
women characters who are deeply interested in sex. They are even from
lower section of society like Dhanoo who is a Jamadarni (Sweeper) but
is interested in sex, when her master Mr. Mohan Kumar offers her
money she refuses to take in the beginning by saying him not to offer
money in return of her love for him.

Other characters who are from upper and middle sections of
society are also involved in sex. Molly Gomes a masseur is deeply
involved in sex. She comes on her own will to entertain Mr. Mohan
Kumar, after reading his advertisement in matrimonial column of the
Hindustan Times. She enjoys sex with Mohan Kumar to its fullest.
Another character Yasmeen Wanchoo, a Kashmiri politician also has
sexual instinct fulfilled by having sex with Mohan Kumar. Though she
repeatedly says that she has destroyed the rules of Islam by doing so but
then consoles herself by saying that what she did was good and was
enjoyed by her.

Another women character Sarojini is a Professor by profession
but is willing to have sex with Mohan Kumar and to fulfill this demand
she takes a full month leave from her college. All these women
characters are full of sexual instinct, which is highly powerful; even it
crosses the boundaries of moral order. They cross the norms of society
and thus these characters bring about the view of Mr. Singh about Indian
women of twentieth century.