Chapter-IV

Political Vision

With the wound deep in the heart which the close perusal of 
*Train to Pakistan* presents, we move on to a critical appraisal of Khushwant Singh's next novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*: Train to Pakistan has historical importance as a comment on recent Indian history set in the backdrop of partition tragedy while Khushwant Singh's second novel published in 1951, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is set in the backdrop of Northern India during the early years of 1942-43 with the Japanese at the gate of India, the British face the collapse of the Indian empire and at this critical juncture the Indian nationalists consider this very moment most suitable for revolution. The novel explores the different Indian reaction to, the freedom movement of the forties. It is the story of people emerging in the ambiguous, disturbed pre-partition period.

*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale'* basically concentrates on the inner tensions of one Sikh family of Punjab--the family of one bureaucrat Buta Singh. It was he period of "Quit India" movement and
relations between bureaucracy and the people were much strained. This strained relationship is very much noticed in the family of Buta Singh.

Buta Singh, a senior magistrate, is a shrewd man. He whole heartily works for the British in the hope of being awarded a decoration which will be a reward for his long loyal service. While he is anxious to be on the right side of the movement, his only son Sher Singh has ambitions in another direction. He is a young college student and at the same time acts as the leader of a terrorist group. He is assisted by Madan along with his other friends in his activities. Actually Madan is the life-force of the team. It was Madan who "had brought the other boys with him and would have been the leader of the bank except that he knew little of politics. And it was Sher Singh, and not he, who had arranged the smuggling of rifles and hand grenades from across the frontier." 1 Although Sher Singh was the leader of the group, Madan was its backbone. We are told that Madan was Sher Singh's chief supporter and rival, for his presence was an encouragement as well as a challenge for Sher Singh. But at heart Sher Singh was sentimental and kind. These two characters, in fact, are contradictory and complementary to each other.
Madan is basically lighthearted and rather immoral. He tries to corrupt Beena, Sher Singh's sister, and at the same time is involved with Champak, Sher Singh's wife. On the other hand Sher Singh who is rebelling agate foreign rule is highly emotional and we find him no where in the novel indulging in immoral acts.

At the call of revolutionaries, Sher Singh plans to disturb the peaceful administration of Punjab. Thus he decided to blow up the little bridge in a deserted place where they had gone for their target practice, and 'baptism in blood'. While returning after the target practice Sher Singh forgot to pick-up the empty cases of the bullets, and act which finally led him to prison. For the village Headman Jhimma Singh, came to know about them all and he started blackmailing the young boys. Ultimately Sher Singh plans his killing and one fine morning the village headman is shot dead. And it is at this juncture that tragedy occurs. The Deputy Commissioner Mr. Taylor issues Sher Singh's warrant-of arrest on the charge of the murder of the village headman. Buta Singh' s house is searched. 'Buta Singh's-loyalty accounts for nothing. His house is ransacked and his son is ill-treated in the cell.
At the time of crisis when Sher Singh is arrested, the whole family gets mad. Father is dead against his son. He reacts: "I can no longer show my face to anyone. All my life's work has been thrown into a well." Wife Champak too is against husband. At this moment of crisis the matriarchal strength of Sher Singh's mother, Sabhrai, sustains the family. She is totally guided by her faith. She goes in for non-stop reading of the *Granth* for two days and nights. When Buta Singh rejects the offer to meet Sher Singh in the prison it is she who opts to go and meet her son. But she is not in haste and takes sufficient time to think over the matter. The night before visiting the prison she spends at the Gurudwara. Her only weapon was her faith:

"She tried to dismiss all other thoughts and bring the picture of the last Warrior Guru to her mind .... There was a man.

He had lost all his four sons and refused to give into justice. She was to lose only one. How had the Guru faced the loss of his children?"
Here in the Gurudwara, the temple of peace, she gets enlightenment. Sher Singh's request for her suggestions and advice saves her. It is like a rock of adamant. Khushwant Singh—very impressively describes the scene:

"She dried her tears and blew her nose. 'Son, I spent last light at the Golden Temple, asking the Guru for guidance? I do not know whether I got it right. In any case his orders were for me, not for you .....'"

"He said that my son had done wrong. But if he named the people who were with him he would be doing a greater wrong. He was no longer to be regarded as a Sikh and I was not to see his face again.... May the Guru be with you in body and spirit."  

The excitement of the interview in the jail and the cold night spent at the Gurudwara proved fatal for Sabhrai. She fights for life down with pneumonia. Sher Singh is released and Buta Singh is duly honored for his services. But the saintly Sabhrai doubted her son's release. Had he ignored her advice and confessed? With unanswered questions heavy on
her mind, one morning she declares that her end has come and chanting Morning Prayer and stating that "I shall not hear the nightingale" she died.

This novel was written by Khushwant Singh after resigning from UNESCO. The first draft was finished at Houdon and was the first published in 1959 by the Grove Press. But this novel unlike *Train to Pakistan* brought both brickbats and accolades. Some dpraised the novel but it was underestimated in comparison to the first novel. H.M. Williams' opinion is that "as a novel, it is less effective than *Train to Pakistan* by the very fact of its greater complexity and its psychology."\(^5\) Its publication brought critical reception from its reviewer's too. Rosanne Archer, in Saturday Review points out the failings in the novel - It is sometimes interesting in spite of one dimensional characters, heavy handed plotting, a flattened Climax, and dollops of sex piled on irrelevantly...."\(^6\) Nissim Ezekiel too has commented upon the "odiousness" of the characters in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, (Imprint, Vol.I No.6, September 1961, Bombay, p.159). While Santa Rama Rau praises Khushwant Singh's art saying that he "is direct to the point of brutality, unsentimentally
"observant" and is willing to explore the least appealing aspects of human nature" in his characterization.

But Khushwant Singh acknowledges his second novel better than his first one. In one of the interviews with Mahfil, he states that *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale;* got very adverse criticism in America, Britain and India. "Now I haven't the slightest doubt that it is the better novel, although most of my critics say otherwise. This is for the simple reason that the book was at least an attempt to write a novel; it is not a documentary. It is a novel of tensions; it's basically my own family. I am the main character, and therefore, I was more at ease with it."  

"The novel derives its title from Sabhrai's reply to her son's assurance that after independence, "once more the Nightingales will singh". But she replies: "I shall not hear the nightingale." his is a sentiment in tune with the temper of the novel. The question is who this 'I' in the novel is and certainly it is Sabhrai. In the novel her role is of prime importance for she is the symbol of human and more value. It is she who will not "hear the nightingale". Here nightingale symbolizes happiness, coming of spring and above all the advent of Indian independence. Once
Sabhrai had enquired from her son, to explain what would happen if an when the English left India:

"Tell me, son" she asked, putting her hand on his shoulder.” What will you get if the English leave this country?"

"I; Nothing. But we will be free."

"Then what will happen? What sweetmeats will we get?"

Sher Singh would not answer simple questions like these; at least not in words his illiterate mother could understand. He became lyrical.

"Spring will com to our barren land once more. ... Once more the nightingale will sing."⁹ Here the term nightingale is highly symbolic of Indian freedom and the joy it will bring. And it is this nightingale that Sabhrai will not hear, that is, she will not be alive to see the Indian independence. Before saying the last prayers she utters in her son's ear- "I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, my son. May the Guru give you long life."¹⁰ Sabhrai, in fact, is the leading light of the novel. The title of the novel signifies the poetic intention of the novelist. Khushwant Singh
desires to make a poetic communication about life. The moving scene of Sabhrai's death is explicit of Khushwant Singh's desire. Sabhrai knew her death was near, and instead of calling a doctor she wished to be surrounded by her family and requested them: "Let me go to the Guru with your blessings..." With these last words Sabhrai participated in the family recitation: "She seemed to be at complete peace with the world. An unearthly radiance glowed in her pale face. A few verses before the epilogue her lips stopped moving." She spoke her last words from some Coe of keep spiritual inside her. This love and affection for her family and country and her great belief in God transcends her above all. Love, Khuswant Singh defines, must be God, from whom flowed all goodness, beauty and truth, the higher consciousness of being, an evolution towards transcendence which was the destiny of man. Love was too serious to talk about, too difficult to realise, a bright star in an otherwise humdrum existence, from which life drew its meaning and perspectives (as told to Prem Kirpal). This proves Khushwant Singh's deep religious nature.

The plot of the novel revolves around the exposure of differences between the bureaucracy and the young revolutionary
generation of the quit India Movement. Khushwant Singh in this novel raises the question of values. And for the purpose he has chosen a simple plot of two families, one Sikh and the other Hindu, set against the decaying power of the British Raj. The background is set in the Punjab of the period 1942 and 1943. But the novel cannot be termed as a political novel or a documentary like the 'Train to Pakistan' for it does not describe the great upheaval of 1942 or the Quit Indian Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Still the tensions and anger of the people against British rule are echoed. Thus the plot revolves around political situation of India of 1942 and 1943.

Khushwant Singh, in this novel, tries to handle double plotting. The main plot revolves around the activities of Sher Singh and his bureaucrat father Buta Singh. While the second plot deals with the relationship of Champak, Sher Singh's wife, with his friend Madan. The description of the relationship between Madan and Champak is in fact a digression from the main plot. The writer takes us to Simla just for a diversion but it becomes a diversion from the main plot. The description of the incidents at Simla and Madan Lal's behaviour towards Beena and
Champak is done in quite detail and it seems as though he has forgotten the theme of the novel. Although Khushwant Singh has used double plot, still it has a limited range and restricted canvas.

As V.A. Shahane puts it: "it does not transcend the' obvious limits of a social-cum political narrative fiction of contemporary interest, though it has an element of intensity and fullness of apssion."\(^{13}\)

Unlike 'Train to Pakistan', the novel is not very tightly knit. The narrative design of the novel has a historical context which is deeply rooted in character and situation. The novel is divided into thirteen chapters and the writer has taken sufficient effort to explain Sikhism to his readers. A brief introduction of Sikh religion and its custom has been given to facilitate the reading of the novel. Also in, the beginning only he gives the names of the characters and their roles in the novel. The period of action is limited from April 1942 to April 1943. In this way the author has presented the picture of the plot. Still the novel lacks that tight construction which has been noticed in his previous novel.

The novel open with the scene of baptism in blood. Sher Singh and his friends are engaged in target practice and rifle shooting in a remote
rural area. The boys, at a preparatory stage of becoming extremists, desire to perform a baptism in blood. Madan Lal, son of Wazir Chand, a magistrate, is a local hero who too supports the plan of killing either a deer or a duck. The boys see a pair of Sarus Crane and they compel Sher Singh to kill One of the pair. Sher Singh hits the crane. But he is filled with both a sense of guilt and a feeling of pride for his accurate shooting. He walked to the wounded bird and putting his right foot upon its neck, shot it with a revolver. The crane died. The male cried in pain and "the anguished cry of the flying crane was almost human."14

The killing of the crane reminds us of the killing of a deer in one of Khushwant Singh's short stories 'The Fawn'. In both the scenes we find his intense love for the animals and birds. In I 'The Fawn' we read a Muslim committing this' senseless crime brutally and relating it with religion. Here' in this scene the brutal killing is done by Hindu and Sikh boys as it is a Hindu custom of dipping swords in goat's blood and laying them before the Goddess Durga or Kali. In both the scenes Khushwant Singh has mocked at the killings on religious grounds. Khushwant Singh
seems extremely fond of birds and portrays the life, habitat and activities of the birds minutely.

The first scene of killing the crane is highly suggestive of the development of situation and character in the novel. The inhuman act symbolizes the utterly senseless act of recklessness and aggressiveness of youth. Both Sher Singh and Madan Lal are insensitive to the feelings of love. Madan Lal betrays his wife and friend Sher Singh. He is involved with Champak and tries to corrupt innocent Beena too. He has no respect for moral values. Sher Singh kills Jhimma Singh, and this murder engulfs him deeply. In fact the young boys are involved in the world of violence, bloodshed, cheating and lying for the sake of their county's freedom. Indeed their world is quite different from the world of the Cranes who love and pine for each other. The pining for the loved one is seen in Sabhrai. She dislikes killing of innocent creatures and harmless birds. She tells Sher Singh:

"If you ask for my advice, I would say, 'Sell the shot-gun.' It is the cause of sin. To take the life of innocent creatures is sin."15
And it is she who suffers most for her son and ultimately dies.

The first chapter serves as introductory chapter, for the writer introduces all members of the family of Buta Singh. We come across character like Sabhrai who is the moving spirit of the family. A deeply religious woman, although illiterate, her source of knowledge is the sacred Granth Saheb. She very deeply loved her only son Sher Singh. She has a daughter, too innocent, simpleton Beena and an excessively exhibitionistic daughter-in-law Champak. Another interesting character in the novel is Shunno, a fat middle-aged woman, a domestic servant and Mundoo, a servant boy.

Wazir Chand, a magistrate, and the members of his family are also introduced in this chapter. We are told that there was a sharp contract between Buta Singh and Wazir Chand's family.

"Wazir Chand's home was very much like Buta Singh's except that it was indu instead of Sikh and not so concerned with religion and ritual. As a matter of fact the only evidence of religion in the house was a large colour print of Krishna whirling a quoits on the mantle-piece of the sitting room. Wazir Chand's wife occasionally put a garland
of flowers round it and touched the base of its frame as a mark of respect. She did the same to a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi which was kept discreetly away in the bedroom."\(^{16}\)

Madan Lal was a favorite son married at an early age and had a child too. Seeta, his sister, was a small slim, shy girl unlike her brother.

All the actions' in the first chapter reverberates of the coming tragedy and devaluation of moral values. Madan's behaviour towards Beena while forcibly taking her to the cinema and Champak's actions all lead to their clandestine, relationship at Simla, where Madan in real sense, a rake, also tried to corrupt her.

The clash between Buta Singh and Sher Singh is quite prominent from the very beginning. Their tension reveals the estranged relationship between the British and the natives. Sher Singh is revolting against the bureaucracy while Buta Singh sincerely serves the English. Sher Singh used Buta Singh's jeep for his extremist activities. It is quite ironical that the jeep given to Buta Singh for war efforts by the British government was being used for undermining that effort by his son. This simple incident is indicative of the cleavage between father and son.
Actually there is a generation gap between the two, but it is quite coincidental that both father and son are guided by sheer self-interest. Although their relationship is estranged because of the prevailing situation and condition of the nahon, there is indeed intense affection between father and sori. Still their concept and attitude towards life is different which keep them always at different poles. Their relationship is marked by extreme uneasiness and lack of communication. They are never on the same track. Their friendly family discussions always turned into an acrimonious debate.

"Sher Singh was always somewhat non-committal on political topics when talking to his father.’ I think we should be more concerned with what will happen to us,' he replied. 'We are far too concerned with other people. Our communist friends are only worried about what will happen to Russia; others think only of what will happen to Britain. Very few of us are bothered will our own future.'

Buta Singh noticed the attempt to snub him ..... 

"You can say what you like,” he said at last,” but I do believe that in this war our interests and that of the
English are identical. If they lose we lose .... The English have ruled us for over a hundred years, and I don't care what you say I believe they have treated us better than our own kings did in the past." \(^{17}\)

This conflict in ideology proves fatal in the end of the novel when after Sher Singh's arrest; Buta Singh refuses to visit his son in he cell. Sabhrai takes the initiative to advise and meet her son in the prison and ultimately she succumbs to her illness, mental as well as physical.

The role assigned to Mr. and Mrs. Taylor is marked by decency, tact and caution. Mr. Taylor very tactfully handles Buta Singh and his son Sher Singh. He felt sorry for Sher Singh's reported involvement with revolutionaries for he was interested in the welfare of Buta Singh and his family. He purposely sent for Sher Singh and while talking suggestively played with the empty cartridge cases on his table. They were the cases which Sher Singh has forgotten to collect after target practice. He even agreed to give him a license for a gun, provided he should not indulge in unlawful activities. But the irony of Sher Singh's fate was that he was deeply involved in the tragic drama of his own
making, that is, murder of Sher Singh. While Buta Singh's house is being searched, the Taylors arrange for his tea and then gave the shocking news that his son is suspected to be the murderer of a police-informer. When Sabhrai plans to visit her son in the prison, Mr. Taylor sends his own car for the respected lady. Mrs. Taylor serves Sher Singh his lunch in the prison. Still Sher Singh is brutally assaulted in the cell in order to make him admit the crime. In the end they release Sher Singh as a Christmas gift to the sick mother...

There are some interludes in the novel to divert our-attention from the serious incidents that take place. The role of Shunno and her interaction with the Peer is written quite mockingly. Mundoo's childish action to tease her leads to comic event. Finding about her curious disease she takes advice of one Muslim divine, Peer Sahib. She had no faith in either Eastern or Western medicine. Peer Sahib misleads and establishes relationship with her. Another diversion is the visit of Wazir Chand and Buta Singh's families to Simla. Champak is involved in a lengthy flirtation with Madan and Simla. The simple Beena is also tempted by Madan for a
while. It is at Simla beena learns about the illicit relationship of Madan and Champak.

In fact, Khushwant Singh has presented the affair of Shunno; with Peer Sahib as a counterpart to the illicit relationship between Madan and Champak. Madan and Champak belong to the higher class of society while Shunno and Peer Sahib represent the lower section of society. But their activities and responses are similar. V.A. Shahane is absolutely correct when he says: "Man, whether he wears rich terelene (synthetic) dress or is barely covered by tattered clothes, is basically the same—a naked, human animal. This attempt to depict and expose the "tearing off the padding of respectability" is a significant aspect of the realist in Khushwant Singh and his quest for physical reality, in all its horror, and elemental passion."\textsuperscript{18}

The relationship between a Muslim peer and a middle-aged, Hindu widow committed to religious life is, in fact, and excellent example of Khushwant Singh's irony. In the temple where God is present, the unholy alliance takes place exposing the fact that in "moments of infatuation and physical passion, neither religion nor God commands
reverence, and unholy alliances are contracted and formed in the temple of the omnipresent and omniscient God."

The climax of the novel is Sher Singh's release from jail and Buta Singh's being honored, but Sabhrai never recovers from her illness and she dies a peaceful death. As Sher Singh was held solely of suspicion, and there was no proof of his involvement in the crime, it was illegal as well as immoral to prolong his imprisonment. Madan organised a fine reception for Sher Singh. The mystical powers of Sabhrai are triumphant over the worldly powers of administration and ultimately good triumphed over the forces of violence and evil on the one hand and humanity and natural justice on the other. The novel ends on a positive "all's well that end well" note, but on a deeper level, it points to a negative resolution.

In fact Sher Singh is an odd combination of 'youthful bravado and calculated self-interest. He wished to benefit from his father's power and position and also wished to attain respectable height in his Political career. Actually he wished to get the 'best of the two worlds'-father's security and protection and applause as the hero of terrorist gang. Sher Singh is always indecisive. He rather depends on others encouragement.
It is Madan 'the guiding force' who incites him to kill the crane. In the cell he awaits for his family's decision regarding his confession. Actually Sher Singh suffers from weak nerves and therefore 'the figure of the crane flying in the dark' haunted him. Sher Singh's relationship with his wife's tempestuous Champak' betrays a peculiar inadequacy in him for which there are no explicit reasons. Perhaps this reflects his defective sensibility. Sher Singh had looked forward to a glorious political career but it lands him in prison on the charge of killing Jhimma Singh. In jail he suffered to the pressure of the police. He could not decide whether to reveal the names of his friends or to keep it a secret. At this juncture his mother comes as his saviour. He is released from jail, and gets a fine reception from Madan and his friends. Sher Singh ascribes his release to British fear of Indian nationalism. His assumption is quite ironical for he is released because of a British official's admiration for his mother. Thus his imprisonment and awaiting possible death is far from a hero. her Singh luckily gains freedom before having to prove his heroism.Khushwant Singh has created a complicated character in Sher Singh. Perhaps he has tried on the line D.H. Lawrence to create a psychological figure. Sher Singh's problems are
entirely psychological and sexual. Also—there is no evidence that he is in any sense a political idealist or a genuine nationalist hero. Actually he flirts with violence and death. Divided between the world of his father and the world of his ideal conception; he is an incomplete man.

_Delhi_, next novel by Khushwant Singh is a remarkable work of art which reveals the writer's great intellectual powers. After reading the novel the first and foremost question arises: what kind of novel is _Delhi_? For it can be read as an authentic documentary on the city of Delhi. It can also be viewed as a delectable travesty of history. It can also be enjoyed as a knowledgeable guidebook in the shape of a novel. It is definitely not a conventional novel of character and situation. _Delhi_ can be perceived as a socio-historical novel but with a difference. This literary work of Khushwant Singh has undoubtedly posed a challenge for its critical analysis. It is most difficult to describe or define its form because it can be called a documentary novel; also a historical saga; or a colourful historical pageant put in the form of a traditional novel. It can also be viewed as synthesis of different forms which make the modem fiction. Here we have to be liberal in our interpretation because of all the literary
forms, the novel is more flexible and fluid and certainly in the case of the modem novel, the usual elements of the novel-plot, character and technique-have begun to acquire a different kind of cannotation. Most of the modem novelists seem to be relying on memory, vision and even fantasy. The novel of ideas has certainly replaced the novel of plot and character or what is generally known as a well-made novel where the points like a well-marked beginning, a middle and a compelling and inevitable end are easily discernible. As Anthony Burgess, a successful critic and a modem novelist has observed: "The term novel has in fact, come to mean any imaginative prose composition long enough to be stitched rather than stapled...."20

Thus Khushwant Singh's Delhi which took more than twenty five years to complete has become any writer's envy. A highly readable book from the beginning to the end the novel sometimes seems to be a treatise on Sufism sometimes an album of sex-exploits. Sometimes it appears to be re-hashing of the mediaeval and contemporary history of Delhi. At times the novel seems to be a plea for the resurrection of Delhi's secular character in the present politics. But Mr. Singh, himself assures us
that it is not a work of propaganda. From the author's own remarks as published in The Hindustan Times, Sunday edition. January 14, 1990, on page 2, we have come to know that he meant it to be a novel and not a work of propaganda. He also asserts that he is never conscious of the purpose behind his writings in a utilitarian sense, and that once "you are conscious of a purpose of writing then you are only becoming a propagandist." What Khushwant Singh says gives us mental relief and induces us to accept Delhi as a novel, a work of art and nothing else.

Delhi, in fact, is a stupendous saga of the original and development of a place called Delhi. It is an attempt to record the evolution of a historical city through the ebb and flow of time. Basically, we can say, it is the story of its growing up. And to show this he has chosen a gigantic canvas, where on this enormous canvas he crystallises the historical action that went into the making of the great city. In the first novel Train to Pakistan the action accounts for a few days, in I Shall not Hear the Nightingale duration is of one year, that is, April 1942 to April 1943, but in Delhi the writer has tried to span several centuries from the
earliest times to the present age that accounted for in the development of Delhi. As he puts it in he foreword to the novel:

"It took me twenty-five years to piece together this story spanning several centuries of history. I put in 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 wanted to do was tell my readers what I learnt about the city roaming among its ancient ruins, its/congested bazaars, its diplomatic corps and its cocktail parties."\(^{22}\)

And further he reveals his feelings that "my only aim was to get them to know Delhi and love it as much as I do."\(^{23}\)

The above quoted passage indicates that the novel is full of love, lust, hate, violence and sex. The novel opens with the following lines: "I return to Delhi as I return to my mistress Bhagmati, when I had my fill of whoring in foreign lands."\(^{24}\) We are told that Delhi and Bhagmati are synonymous and the author is deeply attached to both of
them. Bhagmati is the central figure who is a female eunuch, harlot. He tells us that Bhagmati and Delhi have a lot in common. "Having been long misused by rough people, they have learnt to conceal their seductive charms under a mask of repulsive ugliness. It is only to their lovers among whom I count myself that they reveal their true selves." Khushwant Singh admits that the theme of the novel is to explain the strange paradox of my life-long, love-hate affair with the city and the woman. Bhagmati and Delhi, both are ugly and repulsive still the author vent to his feelings and reveals, "that although I detest living in Delhi and am ashamed of my liaison with Bhagmati, I cannot keep away from either for too long." As the story unfolds, we get the story of Delhi from different narrators who are also eye-witnesses to the rise and fall of Delhi from pre-historic times to its subsequent rise to eminence after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The novel is told in first-person narrative and the author remains the central narrator. Bhagmati and Buta Singh, who are introduced in the very first chapter, remain with the author till the end and remain eye-witness to various incidents which have taken place in Delhi since independence. The novel begins in contemporary setting and the author's
sudden appearance after a brief sojourn abroad marks a good beginning for the novel. In the very beginning the author refers to his occupation as a Journalist attached to the *Hindustan Times* and his funny experiences in the country of his birth. He also comments on the behavior of the custom officers and also exposes the method of working at these customs offices and the bureaucracy. Passing through the roads of Delhi, he shows us the scene that is catching up in Delhi: "More roads and roundabouts have had their names changed. The Windsor’s, York’s, Canings and Hardings have been replaced by the Tilaks, Patels, Azads and Nehrus. There are red flags outside a petrol station with three men chanting "Death to Petrolstationwala". Red flags outside Dr. Sen's Nursing Home. Six men yelling, "Death to Doctors". Red flag outside Food and Agriculture Ministry building. Four men in garlands sit cross-legged on the lawn. A placard in front of them says: "Third Day of Relay Hunger Strike". A procession with saffron flags goes along Parliament Street chanting: "Our religion and our country are one. The cow is our mother. Death to cow eaters."
The above quoted passage the present status of Delhi, and in broader perspective the whole of India. It is the India after independence. Author tells us that as he moves further he sees more red flags, more banners with more demands. He reads the scandals of underworld; discusses with his friends on sex, corruption and inefficiency and the starving people of Bihar. He reflects at the coffee-house talk and with a pinch of satire writes: "What's happened to the Delhiwallas? They are not even dying as they used to! Only one pyre burring and three heaps of smoldering ashes. No mourners" 29 But the satirist switches over to the pathetic condition of Delhi and like a philosopher says" That's Delhi. When life gets too much for you all you need to do is to spend on hour a Nigambodh Ghat, watch the dead being put to the flames and hear the kin wail for them. Then come home and down a couple of pegs of whisky. In Delhi, death and drink make life worth living!" 30 From the serious tone he quickly changes over to lighter vein, explaining his engagement with one Lady JHT, with whom he once again observes Delhi’s past. He unfolds the history of 'Tilpat', one of Pandav's five villages given to them by
Kauravas. After a brief sojourn with this lady, author returns to his place where Bhagmati awaits his arrival.

Bhagmati, according to Khushwant Singh, symbolises Delhi. Thus, writer gives a detailed description of Bhagmati. She is a hijda. The leader gets her full description in the following words: "Her left hand is clenched into a first with a cigarette sticking out of her fingers. She sucks noisily at the cigarette and flicks the ash on my carpet. Her hair is heavily oiled and arranged in serried waves fixed by celluloid clips shaped like butterflies. Bhagmati is the worst dressed whore in Delhi..."\(^{31}\)

Not only her complexion is black and has small-pox marks on her face, her teeth are stained with betel-leaf. The writer says - "Bhagmati is the plainest-looking whore in Delhi."\(^{32}\) Further he admits that Bhagmati "is the coarsest whore in Delhi."\(^{33}\) The writer uses all these epithets to explain that she is ugly and repulsive. And Delhi the city too is a "gangrenous accretion of noisy bazaars and mean looking hovels into the narrow, winding lanes, the stench of raw sewage may bring vomit."\(^{34}\) About people of Delhi he says that they spit phlegm, are loud mouthed and express familiarity with incestuous abuse. Both are unattractive, still
the writer has interest in them. He admits behind this repulsive background there is a past history and the rest he has discovered himself. The author explains his obsession with Bhagmati and Delhi too in the following words - "As I have said before. I have two passions in my life; my city Delhi and Bhagmati. They have two things in common; they are lots of fun. And they are sterile." In a very dramatic way Bhagmati was introduced to the author in course of a drive in the city. He founded her on the road in a most desperate condition with her hands and legs stretched out as if crucified. The author mar rates his experiences with this strange creature he had met by chance and who remained in his life permanently there after. And from here onwards began his love-hate episode. Several times he tried to get rid of her, but in vain. Whenever he thought of losing touch with her, she some how made her appearance in most unexpected manner and at most unusual times. While having a joy-ride to Mehrauli with Bhagmati in the monsoon rain he come across a piece of stone engraved with few words in Persian, which lures the author from the present to the past.
The discussion on the year 1947 develops the story of this doomed city further where we read how people faced the partition and its aftermath. One Ram Rakha, resident of Hadali in Pakistan narrates the whole episode of which he was an eye-witness. He had to leave his native village due to a particular incident which took place in the last week of August 1947. His sister was abducted on the very day of her marriage and later on she gave a statement in the court that she had embraced Islam and was staying with the so-called abductor at her own will. The family left Hadali and reached Delhi. Ram Rakha relates his days of disposition and how those days were days of extreme difficulty. He explains his affiliation with the Rashtriya Swayam Sevam Sangh (RSS): gives detailed account of the communal violence that was maligning Delhi. Mahatma Gandhi went on fast. But the people were critical. Those who had suffered criticised Gandhi. Ram Rakha gives a very authentic account of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. He narrates: "A Stout, young fellow muscles his way through the crowd, pushes aside a girl who tries to stop him, bends down as if to touch Gandhi's feet, draws a revolver from the folds of his
dhoti and before anyone can guess what he is up to pumps three bullets into the Old Man, thah, thah, thah.

Gandhi's hands remain joined as if he is bidding namaskar to the world. He says, Ram, Ram. Then he crumples down in a pool of his own blood.\textsuperscript{36}

The post-independence India saw another blood-bath narration, instead of the most popular third person in 1984 after the assassination of Smt. Indira Gandhi by a Sikh. Bhagmati comes to the rescue of the author. She informs him about the vandalism and barbarism let loose on Sikh houses, establishments and people. Both save themselves by hiding in the back-garden but Budha Singh is brutally murdered in the Gurudwara. The novel ends with a quite grim and hair-raising incident.

In fact 'Burial at Sea' is a delectable travesty of the 20th century historical personality of India, 'Jawaharlal Nehru'. The very opening lines confirm that the person concerned is not a common man for writer inform us "P or two days and nights his embalmed body lay in the Darbar Hall of the Governor's palatial residence overlooking the Arabian Sea. Raj Bhavan had been thrown open to the citizens so they could pay
homage to the man who perhaps had done more for their country than anyone else in living memory he had become a legend...."\(^{37}\) The protagonist Victor Jai Bhagwan is portrayed as a like of Nehru. Khushwant Singh himself affirmed that the character 'Victor' is patterned on Nehru. A great modernist, a great visionary and a great character 'Victor' is patterned on Nehru. A great modernist, a great visionary and a great secular, Jawaharlal Nehru, who lived for his country but was at times misunderstood and there are certain stories about his personal life with a tartaric lady Shradha Mata and as a writer he gave shape to that story. When Khushwant was quizzed to Speak weather the story was about the affair between Nehru and Shardha Mata he said- "It is fiction, its up to the reader to interpret."\(^{38}\) Nehru's fanner secretary, M.O. Mathai mentioned about creation god-woman whom Nehru was associated with, else there is not mention of any such god-women even by his biographers. Jawaharlal Nehru's own confessions about his uneasiness in his won land echo in the novella. In his autobiography Nehru writes I felt lonely and homeless, and India, to whom I had given my love and for whom I had laboured, seemed a strange and bewildering land to me. Was it my fault
that I could not enter into the spirit and ways of thinking of my countrymen?"³⁹ Further he states that he had difficulty to cope with his colleagues and he writes, it became clear to me that they viewed my activities with apprehension. It was not so much that they objected to any specific act but they disliked the general trend and direction. They had justification for this as my outlook was different."⁴⁰

Victor Jai Bhagwan too had a different outlook. Bearing, son of an affluent lawyer, Krishna Lal Matoo, who at once reminds on of Motilal Nehru, Victor was destined to get a quality education. He learnt English manners and etiquette from an English governess especially imported for his grooming. He received higher education from England and sharpened his wits with aristocratic flavour. Since early childhood Victor claimed to be a man of glorious personality. A serious minded boy who at the early age of thirteen dreamt of India as almost prosperous country in the world, free of religious and cast prejudice."⁴¹ The years that he had been away made him think more about his country. His "country and its people had become very precious to Victor. He wanted for them all 'the good things he saw in England. And he wanted to be the man who
would give these to them." Victor a modernist in thought always visualized and industrially developed India. He believed that it was more important to industrialize India, to make it economically strong. Because what freedom could there be without that? In a short span Victor became one of the richest men with textile industries, chain of sugar mills and numerous factories to produce chemicals, cement and bicycles. His last investment was in shipping at Bombay. He paid his workers high salary and built housing colonies for them. Khushwant tells us that "Money was good, but that was not why he had set up his mills; his true ambition was to make prosperity possible for every Indian."

It was the height of freedom struggle but Victor himself aloof from all political activities. He felt that he had no flair for politics. People like Nair could understand politics better and there were men like Mahatma Gandhi who were fig fug for freedom of the country. In fact since his childhood Victor was the favorite of Bapu. We are told that 'Mattoo and Bapu shared a special bond' and since his early age Mahatma Gandhi blessed Victor. "The Mahatma took the five-year old Jai Bhagwan in his lap and asked,' Beta, what do you want to be when you grow up?" The boy replied
without hesitation, 'Bapu, I want to become a Mahatma like you.' The Mahatma hugged the boy close to his chest. 'You will become a bigger man than your Bapu. May Ishwar give you a long life!'\textsuperscript{45}

Victor felt very close to Gandhi but in ideology both differed from each other. Bapu visualized India in its villages with flourishing cottage industry. He thought about the millions of weavers who make a living spinning and weaving cloth. Victor believed in industrialization of India. He thought of textile mills and steel mills, shipping and hotels. He thought of tourists and foreign exchange. Still a certain bond between the two kept them together. Victor always showed due respect to Mahatma Gandhi and he showered his love and affection on Victor. The notes both exchanges reveal their intimacy. Victor writes-'Bapu, however different our perceptions about the future of our country may be, you have been the source of my inspiration. You have the right to rebuke me.... Bapu relented ....! look upon you as my son, I don't have to say more.'\textsuperscript{46} Like his mother Bapu too asked him to abstain from the social evils of the west—wine, women and violence.
Really it is amazing to see a learned and experienced, a liberal and secular man like Victor who married off his sisters in other caste and opposed extravagance on marriage ceremony and who does not fuss on his own marriage, defy all rules and morality to become a prey of obscurantism. Actually he defied the words of Bapu who had warned him earlier not to touch wine, as it is a poison and not to succumb to the temptations towards woman. But he failed even Bapu.

His weakness for life after angina pain rekindled the fire to relive the life he had forgotten in he midst of the hectic workload. He set out in the Himalayas in search of peace. The cool ambience and tranquility of Rishikesh rose the spirit of Victor who when lured by a tantric god-women Ma Dugreswari, succumbed to her temptations. Both carried on their relationship further. Society disapproved it. Nair, his long time friend disliked it. A planned unrest erupts in the textile mill. Nair who looked after the matter also betrayed. At one of the meetings Victor reacted violently. "At the mention of Durgeshwari Victors composure snapped. He saw red and he did something completely out of character. He sprang up from his chair like a cheetah and planted a stinging-slap on the union
leader's face that sent his reeling off the dais. A roar went up in the crowd of workers.... Someone from the crowd, shouted, 'Why did you do that, Sahib? All for that manhoos sadhvi? She means more to you than us? She is evil; she will destroy you.'

Disturbed Victor plans to conduct his business from Jai Bharati, his yacht "not his heaven of refuge from people with whom he had very little in common." Now he felt that the best way to serve his country and its people was by maintaining a distance from both. Finally he decided to make Jai Bharti his permanent base. On the fateful day when Victor decided to shift himself on his yacht, he was shot deed in the midst of the crowd, a few yards away from the sea.

His will stated that he wished to "have him buried of sea, close to the spot where his yacht Jai Bharti was usually anchored between the Gateway of India and Elephanta Island."

Khushwant Singh was greatly inspired by Nehru and lauds Nehru's contribution in the progress of the country but Khushwant thinks he was a complete Englishman for "He did not really belong. But he want ahead and did more, yet he felt uneasy with his own countrymen that's why his last wish in the will was that he should be buried in the sea, at a
distance from his country; rather than on Indian soil—from which the title came." Victor always enjoyed his stay on jal Bharti for it gave him the unique feeling of being both in India and away from it. By correlating his protagonist Victor Jai Bhagwan with the sea Khushwant has beautifully tried to show the vastness of the character. The greatness of the personality stretch far and wide and it is not easy to fathom its depth. Khushwant confirms that the personality of Nehru was one of greatest liberals and Nehru's faults are interpreted in wrong ways. Khushwant admits there is nothing against Nehru in this novella and actually he has enormous respect for him. He believes that Nehru was completely a modern man caught in a backward society. "Like Victor, he was seen as an outsider who wanted to do good. His legacy of liberalism and secularism is what has made India have a greater degree of peace and stability than other third world countries." (As told to Suman Tarafdar, Hindustan Times).

In fact, 'Burial at Sea' is a tale of characters; a narrative description of the characters of the story and the narrative description of the main character, Victor Jai Bhagwan, overshadow the theme of the
novella. We come across less of, obscurantism', more the escapades of the protagonist. Khushwant Singh has tried to paint a larger portrait of Victor, very close to Nehru, and in the process character, overtakes the theme, which Khushwant had set out to present: Another important character Krishanlal Mattoo played important role in the development of Victor. It was he who transformed Jai Bhagwan Mattoo to Victor Jai Bhagwan for he himself was adept in English ways and wished him son to be the same. For his sons' aristocratic grooming he imported a missionary teacher who changed the living style of the family except Mattoo's wife. We are told that Mattoo enjoyed immense wealth and arranged lavish party for the British and Indian, rich and powerful men. Mattoo liked to display his wealth and knowledge. Governors and Princes used to be his guests. Even Mahatma Gandhi visited his house. Both the men shared a special kind of bond but Mattoo never gave up his English ways. It was at his behest and with Bapu's consent that Victor was sent to public school at Eton and later to Oxford. Valerie too knew that she had to groom a boy who would be equally British and Indian of highest order. Bapu always stressed that it was not bad to anglicize children but" don't take it so far that they are
ashamed of being Indian. Their roots must remain firmly embedded in Indian soil." All this culminated to groom and create a personality, which was modem in thought, English in life style and solely an Indian from heart. Victor believed in truth and truth was his religion. He was a liberal and secular man. But we find such a strong man falling for a tantric woman who tamed him like her pet tiger 'sheroo'. Khushwant writes - "The Ganga hurtling down the mountains, Ma Durgeshwari, trishul in hand and followed by her tiger, and Swami Dhananjay Maharaj turned the Europeanized Victor's world upside down. What he had known about his country was from his Anglicized father, seasoned by Gandhi's patriotism. The holy river, the tantric woman and the swami were the India he had not known. It brought change into a life that was beginning to bore him. He was besotted with the tantric sadhvi; that her response was full-blooded gave him a sense of well-being." Long ago when Valerie came in the house she changed the mannerism of the house and now another woman again changed the dinner table. Thus woman plays vital role "in transforming the system' of the house while the actual 'lady of the house' either Matoo's wife or Jai Bhagwan's wife both are typical Indian female
characters, very timid, God fearing, having faith in religion and social customs. Jajsher's life span in Matoo's house is very short lived for she dies giving birth to Bharti, who is the sole inheritor of Victor's huge property. The characterization of Matoo's wife is like the other female characters in Khushwant Singh's novels but it never comes near to the characterization of Sabhrai in 'I Shall not Hear the Nightingale'.

Although, Khushwant has taken up a very important theme, still the plot and structure is not very tightly knit like his early novels. As usual sex is used as a digression and to fill the novel. It actually diverts the story from the actual theme of obscurantism. Jai Bhagwan is the only character that draws our attention and sympathy and, the statements given by 'Gandhi' are quite memorable.

References

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3. Ibid.; p.204


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12. Ibid.; p.234


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24. Ibid.; p. 1
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29. Ibid.; p. 11
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