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Dealing of Love, Wedding and Belief in the Writings of Khushwant Singh

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Abstract

The purpose of this research article is to focus on how Khushwant Singh deals love, sex and marriage with much candour and audacity. Moreover he touched almost all the aspects of society like he portrayed the exploitation of Indians by the British rulers. He also commented on the swiftly spreading superstitions in India. A vivid glimpse of the society is irresistibly fleshed in the novels of Khushwant Singh. It would not be wrong to call him an event recorder and a historian more than a novelist. He turned the reality of Indian history into novels and made it readable to present before the readers. The Sikh history also a proof of Mr. Singh's being a historian. Mr. Singh writes whatever comes to his mind that is why his creative cosmos is noticeably his own.

Keywords

Sikh; Love; History; Partition; Freedom.

Khushwant Singh's prime trait is that he speaks what he feels. He is frank to the extent that he offends even his friends and icons revered by people. It does not matter to him that it endangers his opportunities in life. It is this quality that made Gandhi into a Mahatma. In Indian literary history Khushwant Singh's name is bound to evolve as one of the finest historians and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observer and social critic. Khushwant Singh debatably is India's most read and known author, columnist and journalist. Mr. Singh was born on 15th August 1915 in Hadali, now in Pakistan, he began his career as a lawyer in Pakistan but soon he left the idea of becoming a successful lawyer. He decided to take risk in the field of writing.

Mr. Singh belonged to the trade family yet he never thought of trying his hand in business or construction. He inducted thinking in the direction of writing and started his first novel *Mano-Majra*, which later became popular as *Train to Pakistan*. At first it was not received with much zeal but after a short period bibliophiles recognized Mr. Singh's intellect as a novelist. *Train to Pakistan* (Mano-Majra) won Grove Press Award in 1954. It also earned the attention of countless readers from India and abroad. *Train to Pakistan* discussed the after effects of India's independence, which brought the partition of India and Pakistan. Mr. Singh focused on the lower class people who became the main victim of partition. A huge mass of victims transferred from one place to another. This migration also caused killing, raping and looting.

The whole story of the novel revolves around one particular village Mano-Majra in the far provinces of Punjab. The rustic life there is simple and quite serene, which is regulated by the whistles of trains. But all of a sudden, the

untimely arrival of a train perturbs the peace of the village. This train brings the countless corpses from Pakistan. On the other hand Malli with his fellow culprits robs and murders Lala Ram Lal. Jagga's absence from the village draws him in the circle of suspicion. Iqbal, a communist reaches Mano-Majra but on account of being an outsider he with Jagga is also arrested in Lala Ram Lal's murder case. Malli is also arrested but eventually he is released. In the meantime Mano-Majra turns into a refugee camp. In the village some criminal minded people instigate the others to send a *Train to Pakistan* full of corpses. Jugga is released and he comes to know about the villagers so for the sake of his beloved Nooran, who is also heading to Pakistan, determines to capsize the conspiracy. He sacrifices his life and lets the train go to Pakistan untouched. The novel obviously exhibited that Mr. Singh did not approve the scene of partition. He highlighted the political errors during the partition and registered his protest against the tragedy.

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale dealt with pre-independence period when whole India was burning in the fire of slavery. India was separated into two sectors. One sector was favouring the British rule while the other was striving for the freedom. The story of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* revolves around the family of Mr. Buta Singh who is loyal to the British Raj. He is so much overwhelmed with the loyalty that he is not ready to even imagine India without British rule. On the other hand his son Sher Singh becomes the leader of an anti-British group. Sher Singh with his friends Madan and the others indulges in the murder case of a village headman, who witnesses their anti-British activities. His group vandalized the bridge too. Sher Singh's arrest disrupts the peace of Buta Singh's family. This disturbance takes the life of Sher Singh's mother Mrs. Sabharai. The divergence between a father and a son continues till the end of the novel. The main motto of Khushwant Singh in writing this novel was to highlight the hidden poltroon in the characters of so-called freedom fighters and the treasons in the service of British rule.

In *Delhi* Mr.Singh again turned towards the Indian history. This time he presented the making of *Delhi* in different eras. *Delhi* is a tour guide to Delhi, the capital of India more than a novel and the events teller is a Sikh who takes the different characters to different places of Delhi and tells the related incidents to that place. Timurid, Aurangzeb Alamgir, Nadir Shah, Hazrat Nizamuddin, Bahadur Shah Zafar and Meer Taqi Meer are the historical characters, who discuss their secret lives with the readers. The writer brought the lives of religious people also in light like Hazrat Nizamuddin and Sarmad Shah.

Mr.Singh spiced up the tasteless subject like history with the love making scenes. He desired to peep inside the private lives of Mughal kings and queens. Bhagmati, a eunuch represents Delhi and the related chapters do not let the readers get bored. Mr.Singh extends the history from Mughal to British and then to the emergency after the assassination of Mrs.Indira Gandhi. One of her Sikh security guards killed her. In revenge the people from Indira's side started killing the Sikh everywhere in India but the scene was worst in Delhi. The Sikhs were butchered mercilessly. Through this novel again Mr.Singh registered his protest against the irregularity and brought the political errors of mid eighties into the light.

The Company of Women is the life sketch of a modern individual who after parting from his wife plays with the women like a wanton child. He only wants to gratify his sexual instinct by hook or crook. Mohan Kumar graduated from America comes back to India. His father finds a suitable match for him but his married life could not last long. After two children his wife decided to take divorce from Mohan Kumar. After disconnecting the relationship from his wife he hunted several women. He hired women from respected families like a professor from Haryana and a masseuse from Goa on temporary relationship conditions. He made physical contacts with many women that he did not spare a lady sweeper, a nurse and a prostitute. This excess of sex brought the most

fatal disease to Mr.Mohan. He gets infected with HIV AIDS. This was enough for him to be humiliated and at last he committed suicide.

In *Burial at Sea* Mr.Singh again turned towards the Indian history during freedom struggle and the after independence. But this time he focused on some other kinds of freedom fighters, who did not strive physically but with economically. Victor breathed in slave India but he determined to make India economically stronger and independent. He went to England for better education where he composed the relevant information about establishing the mills. For the purpose he hired best technicians from England to stand a chain of mills and used Indian men power to run these mills. Soon he became a famous business tycoon of India.

His wife died and left a daughter Bharti, who paved the path of her father and in her puberty she started taking interest in business. After the death of his wife Victor passed a long period of his life in celibacy but towards the old age he revived his sexual instinct when he fell in love with a tantric woman, who had a dubious past. She made him experience the unbridled sex. She got pregnant and before they could take any decision some people murdered Victor. In this way this energetic machine all of a sudden stopped. According to his will he was buried under sea near his ship house in Mumbai. Mr.Singh masterfully depicted the both strata of freedom fighters.

Before Mr.Singh, many writers have treated love, sex and marriage but only Khushwant Singh could talk about love and sex with much candour and audacity. Love is the noblest gift bestowed upon the human being by God. It is the feeling of love that ties us with our relatives, friends and loved ones. But today the love is mixed with selfishness, greed and sin. That is why today the love lacks the warmth of love and greedless love. The writer has aspired to a great extent to explore the love but love cannot be discussed without sex. In *Train to Pakistan* Mr.Singh highlights the love between Juggat Singh and Nooran. On the other hand he displays the far greater love between two

communities i.e. Sikh and Muslim. Here it can easily be observed that Mr.Singh believes in the famous quotation “Love is blind”. The love does not know any hindrance of caste, colour creed and age. Almost all his novels are packed with the love affairs between the lover of different communities like Juggat-Nooran, love affair in *Train To Pakistan*, Hukum Chand-Haseena love affair in *Train To Pakistan*, Madan-Champak love affair in *I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale*, Mohan-Jessica Browne love affair in *The Company of Women*, Mohan-Yasmeen love affair in *The Company of Women*. The motto of Khushwant Singh behind delineating these love affairs is that he definitely wants to create love and amity among all the communities.

Mr.Singh does not feel shame in talking about the love affair between mature and immature. Hukum Chand in *Train to Pakistan* falls in love with an immature girl like Haseena, younger than his own daughter. In *Burial At Sea* Victor falls in love with Durgeshwari of the age of his daughter. Sex is the result of love. It comes later but remains on the top priority. Mr.Singh treated the theme of sex in almost all his novels. Sex becomes the impregnable pillar of his popularity. Mr.Singh adopted the audacity and candid style in depicting the sex. He unveiled the naked truth of society. Mr.Singh admits that sex is the basic need of human being. That is why so much sex cases like rape and the extra marital sex affairs can easily be observed in the society.

For the first time Mr.Singh discussed the extra marital affairs. In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* Champak, wife of Sher Singh starts committing adultery with her husband’s friend Madan. He is also a married man but he likes having sex with his friend’s wife Champak. When the arrows of sex hurt, a person forgets all the boundaries and crosses all the limits. Sex can make a father rape his daughter. Even a religious person does not feel shame in desecrating the holy campus of a shrine and the temple. In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* Peer Sahab commits adultery with Shanno within the premises of

the holy shrine. Mr.Singh pointed out this truth and satirized these kinds of people.

The sex can twist anyone blind. Mr. Singh's fourth novel *The Company of Women* is completely devoted to sex. Mohan Kumar before marriage enjoys sex with many women even after his marriage he does not leave enjoying sex with different women. He enjoys sex with a sweepress Dhanno, Mary Joseph a nurse, and a prostitute. In America he has had sex with Jessica Browne and Yasmeen Wanchoo. In India after divorce he starts having sex on contracts. Even the women form high-class families respond in affirmative and enjoy unbridled sex with Mohan Kumar. Is such a sexual drama not being enacted in our society? Mr.Singh just brought it in light.

So far as the marriage is concerned Mr.Singh has poignant experiences regarding it. Even his own married life has come to the breaking point many times but it is his wit that he handled the situations and survived his matrimonial life. Though Mr.Singh crossed ninety and his wife eighty he loves his wife more than anything else. According to Mr. Singh, his pen will stop if his wife stops taking breathe. Mr.Singh neither favoured divorce nor he thinks that separation is the solution of problems regarding marriage. According to him the bond of marriage is not breakable.

Though Mr.Singh has spent a long period of his life abroad yet he is a true patriot and a true Indian. Mr.Singh was born in 1915 when India was the slave of British. He saw the freedom struggle and the atrocities on Indian by the British rulers. While India got freedom Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru hoisted the Indian flag on 15th August 1947, Mr.Singh was standing fifty yards away from Lal Quilla. The tears of contentment in his eyes blurred the vision. But the tragedy of partition just after the independence again made him feel sorry and shattered. As a true patriot he did not favour the partition of India and Pakistan. Regarding this tragedy he poured his bitter views in the very first novel *Train to Pakistan*. The tragedy of partition only caused the low class

people of India and Pakistan. A huge mass of people migrated from one place to another in search of peace and love.

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale also depicts the personal lives of freedom fighters. It also contains a confrontation between two generation and pro-British and anti-British. *Delhi* is another link of this chain, which demonstrates Mr. Singh's love for the country. In *Delhi*, Mr. Singh talks about the making of Delhi in different era. He depicts the period from Mughal to the emergency. Mohan Kumar in *The Company of Women* returns to India after passing a considerable time in America like the hero of *Delhi*.

Mr. Singh adopted the Sikhism for the background of his novels. *Mano-Majra*, which later became *Train to Pakistan*, is a story of different changes in a Sikh Village during partition. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* revolves around a Sikh family and depicts the traditions and rituals of Sikh community. Mr. Singh himself belongs to the Sikh community so he found it damn easy to take the Sikh background for his novels. The hero of his three novels is an impudent Sikh, who at the crucial time acts according to the Sikh doctrines. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* depicts the vivid and limpid description of Sikh rituals and traditions.

Though Khushwant Singh is a converted Sikh yet he strictly follows the traditions of Sikhism. It is another thing that he calls himself an atheist. During the emergency after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi Sikh were being ruthlessly killed. Mr. Khushwant Singh raised this issue in his third novel *Delhi*. Before the elections in 1980 Mr. Singh supported Indira Gandhi and her family. He also favoured Sanjay Gandhi in his birth control programme. After the election when Indira Gandhi came in the power she got him nominated for the Membership of Parliament. Further she offered him the Editorship of Hindustan Times. From 1980 to 1985 Mr. Singh remained the Member of Parliament. During this period he experienced many vicissitudes of politics. So far as his novels are concerned he has pointed out the political

failures in his novels. *In Train to Pakistan*, he highlighted the political failure during partition. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* deals with the political ills before independence. Mr. Singh has memorized the Indian political history. On the other hand he has a wide approach to other religions. Sikhism is his own religion but he has studied all the other religions of India and abroad. He finds out the lacunas in the religions and utters comments on them while he suggests the readers to adopt the good aspects of any religion. According to him Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, almost all the religions have some flaws and some good things so we must follow the good things of all the religions.

Mr. Singh adopted the conventional technique to discuss these issues in his novels but at some places he became experimental. His novels initiate with the traditional technique but soon his genius comes out and he starts experimenting with the style. Since the art of novel writing developed almost all the novelists adopted the same technique to initiate the novel. But it was the beginning of nineteenth century, which produced a splendid harvest. In the Post-Victorian period novel was mixed with all other forms of literature. Without adopting traditional method of writing none can accomplish the regard of a novelist. Modern writers have to read and follow the classics. Without reading the predecessors and their method of writing, a novel cannot be initiated.

Khushwant Singh's novels are very much close to the reality. A perspicuous glimpse of the era in which the novel was written, can be observed, like *Train to Pakistan* contains the greatest tragedy (Partition) of India's history. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* deals with the theme of freedom struggle before independence. *Delhi* got us closer to the Mughal dynasties. *The Company of Women* unveiled the naked truth of high-class families and their uncontrollable sexual instincts. In *Burial at Sea*, again Mr. Singh turned to

Indian history and this time he brought those people in light who fought for the Indian economy.

Descriptive and Narrative technique presents a flamboyant picture and while reading the novel it seems some times as if we are not reading a novel but watching a film. His novels are full of historical rudiments with humour irony and satire. Mr.Singh has used simple, spicy and sometimes provocative language to emphasize the incidents. Words from the Hindi language also add stars to the story and create interest in between. Symbolized language and the characters help readers understand the central idea of the novel.

His novels are big achievement for Khushwant Singh. Through novels he earned name, fame and recognition but moreover he got the sense of fulfillment. He has been conferred many decorations and awards. Where his novels brought awards there Guru Nanak Dev University conferred an honorary Doctorate on him. In 2000 he was conferred the “Honest Man of the Year Award” by the Sulabh International Social Service Organization. His writing has won a huge mass of admirers in India and abroad. He is a close friend of many writers of International fame. Before initiating his career as a novelist Mr.Singh studied M.R.Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao yet he holds a unique place in contemporary Indian literature. M.R.Anand dealt with the exploitation of the lower class by upper class in his novels while R.K.Narayan commented on the prevailed superstition among the Indian. He created his own imaginative world ‘Malgudi’. The characters rise from the soil of Malgudi and participate in R.K.Narayan’s stories. Raja Rao worked on symbolism.

Khushwant Singh touched almost all the aspects of society like he portrayed the exploitation of Indians by the British rulers. He also commented on the swiftly spreading superstitions in India. He symbolized *Delhi* with a eunuch Bhagmati, who is seduced by different people for pleasure. Whatever he writes is influenced by the social, political and individual’s faults and lacunae. A vivid glimpse of the society is irresistibly fleshed in the novels of

Khushwant Singh. It would not be wrong to call him an event recorder and a historian more than a novelist. His novels except *The Company of Women* are based on history and the reality of Indian history's vicissitudes. He turned the reality of Indian history into novels and made it readable to present before the readers. The Sikh history also a proof of Mr. Singh's being a historian. Mr. Singh writes whatever comes to his mind that is why his creative cosmos is noticeably his own. Thus he becomes a radiant post independent Indian novelist.

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