

ISSN: 2278-9529

GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

January 2017 Vol. 6, Issue-I



Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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Khuswant Singh as a Novelist: an analysis

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Abstract:

This research paper has valuable concepts on Khushwant Singh's fictional abilities and throws light on various topics. Khushwant Singh has written many books on history, religion and Sikhs. History and fiction are today considered equally important in giving us a true picture of the past which is complete and unbiased. It is assumed that the writer of fiction as much as the historian attempts to recount what actually happened rather than to invent it. Just as the historian has a professional attitude towards the events of the past, the writer of fiction too is expected not to manipulate the subject matter merely so as to produce morally or aesthetically satisfying result. Both the historian and the novelist depend upon 'factuality' with the novelist

Keywords: Partition Massacre, violence, history, religion.

Introduction –

Khushwant Singh has written many books on history, religion and Sikhs. He has also translated into English the works from Punjabi, urdu, and hindi. His literary fame rests with *Train to Pakistan* which was one of the first novel on partition written in English. A.G Khan considers it a brilliant, brutally realistic story and examines the characters and their behavioral patterns. Khushwant Singh's portrayal of characters and events is traditional and the characters remain only two dimensional.

Analysis as a Person -

Khushwant Singh born on February 2, 1915 in Hadali in west Punjab (now a part of Pakistan) Singh was the second son of Sir Shobha. His father was associated with the building of New Delhi in the thirties. He was educated in Delhi, Lahore and London. He began his career as a lawyer and also taught at the Law college, and at Princeton University in the States – "I am product of both East and west", what he terms orio-occidental (in Khushwant Singh India). He has enjoyed deeply the joy of life and is known more for his books of jokes and his column with malice. Towards All. But people know that he is a scholar and has penned books on religion, Sikhism and history of Sikhs and Delhi. He is a man who loves life fully and deeply as is evident in his books.

Fictional Analysis -

Train to Pakistan was originally titled as Mano Majra (1956) which is the centre – stage of the novel, situated on the borders of India and Pakistan. It is a small village where Sikhs and Muslims and Hindu live peacefully unaware of the massacre elsewhere. But the train symbolizes the activities of life and death, and especially death and destruction.

I shall not Hear the Nightingale (1959) has a limited range and covers the freedom. Movement of 1942. The novel present both the violent and non – violent struggle for freedom during this period. It talks of baptism in blood and Goddess Durga or Kali.

A company of women presents only the women who come to Mohan Kumar from different parts of India as also from the USA. They appear and disappear as fast as they can, leaving behind no three dimensional portrayal. Though Singh has provided backgrounds to them, it has little or no meaning as it is what Mohan Kumar is told by these women about their life at home. It appears Singh is a little indifferent to what we is writing.

Critical Analysis -

Khushwant Singh has written many books on history, religion and Sikhs. He has also translated into English the works from Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi. His literary fame rests with Train to Pakistan which was one of the first novels on Partition written in English. A.G. Khan considers it a brilliant, brutally realistic story and examines the character of Hukumchand, Iqbal and Jugga and their behavioral patterns.

Kamal Mehta studies the impact of partition on different characters in the novel and opines that Singh chooses to narrate the disturbing impact that the community deeply felt at the social and psychological level. Rupalee Burke finds an interesting reading of exodus – the Biblical and the one at the time of partition. She makes an impressive observation that partition – exodus was a cursed event of history. In History and His story Nilak Dutta focuses on history of partition and personal stories of the characters. Suza Alexander examines how public events affect the personal lives of the small village of Mano Majra.

Characheristic Analysis -

Khushwant Singhs heroes are dommed heroes. His Juggat the ‘badmash’, a dacoit Sikh redeems himself by saving the trainload of Muslims from death. Though he does it for saving his Muslims beloved, and meets his death. Manohar Malgonkar’s novel. “A Bend in the Ganges (1964) encompasses the same period of Indian history. His protagonist Debi Dayal meets with death on train going to Lahore. Malgonkar describes the same ghastly and gory details of massacre during partition. Though in both the novels the novelists show a ray of hope as the protagonists sacrifice their lives for their love. In Malgonkar there is more to life whereas Singh portrays the tragic dimensions of partition.

In I shall not hear the Nightingale Sher Singh talks of violence but is afraid of really taking up the cause of freedom. His impulsive, immature and pseudopatriotism finds him in a jail on a suspected murder. Singh portrays in Sher Singh the weaker side of the freedom struggle. Khushwant Singh's portrayal of characters and events is traditional and the characters remain only 'two – dimensional'. It is the woman Sabhrai that ultimately takes the centre-stage in the novel and makes an interesting reading of the novel. Darshana Trivedi studies the character of Sabhrai in I shall not Hear the Nightingale that she whose heart is full of love and opines that spring will come to our barren land. Says that Sabhrai is an epitome of Indian womanhood who cares for all and waits for the Nightingale to sing.

Thematic Analysis -

This Partition of India has been one of the most traumatic experiences of our recent history. This political partition of India disturbed the Indian psyche and also its social fabric. It brought to an abrupt and a long and communally shared history. It caused one of the great human convulsions of history. It made the social sense of our nation coarse, generated a sense of vengeance and distorted the political judgments. It deranged the understanding of the moral rightness of the people.

Indian society tends to forget everything so soon. That is why partition could not be the part of our national discourse. This forgetting and forgiving nature of the society has disabled India to learn some hard lessons from its past. India has remained blind to its history. It could not develop the historical sense. It continued to face calamities and disasters, invasions and betrayals, but did not as a society try to stop them forever. Or it did not learn how to stop them occurring. Thus, it failed to take wise stock of circumstances, the communities and the other nations. India kept on geographically contracting itself over centuries. It did not do anything to stop the process. Even the partition hasn't forced us to look at this matter. India is facing the partition like situation in Kashmir and the leaders, the bureaucrats and people in general are indifferent to the problem. Prof. Bhalla rightly states that people have various sorts of memories.

If this event brought out the brutality, inhumanity, madness of mankind, it also brought to light the act of kindness, decency courage and selflessness. There were many act which were free from racial and religious prejudices. Over twelve million people exchanged their home and countries. Such a massive transfer of population took place at a very short notice when people were not yet ready for the transfer. Over a million people were killed. These massacres took place everywhere and it accompanied the movement of the people across the boundary; It often expedited it. More than 75,000 women were raped and abducted. The families were divided; homes were destroyed; crops were left to rot and villages abandoned.

Conclusion -

This research paper has various aspects of partition writings of Khushwant Singh and analyses Khushwant Singh on the basis of his views, concepts and theories. Khushwant Singh defies the usual mode of literary classification in his novels. Some of his books might appear to be primarily a historical novel with a dash of obscenity.

When people question why Khushwant Singh is obsessed with typical coarse Indian nakedness in his style, usages and observations, the only respectable/palatable answer is that this genius loves to be that only.

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