



Reflection of Contemporary Pre Independent Era by Mr Khushwant Singh: A Review

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Abstract

Mr. Khushwant Singh was not only an admired Indian author, a respected diplomat, a distinguished lawyer but also an esteemed journalist. The present contemporary conditions are reflecting separatist tendencies and Mr Khushwant Singh had perceived and written about the separatist tendencies of 1940's & 1950's in his literary works. He took his bachelor's degree in Law (LLB) from King's college, London. It had been a wonderful privilege for him to be called at the bar in London, to work as a lawyer in those days. Despite this honour bestowed upon him by the British government he chose to return to his country to practice law. He took up to serve in the Indian Foreign Service with Independence of India. In 1956, he joined the department of mass communication of UNESCO in Paris. Following these two different pathways and the experiences, he decided to unfold his learning by pursuing a career in the literary field. As a writer he claimed a special place in history with his rustic wit, unbridled sarcasm and unconventional characters. His work encompasses distinct comparisons of aspects between Indians and the western folk with alluring characters and jocularly. Mr Singh also served as a Member of Parliament in Rajya Sabha. He is also the recipient of Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan the highest civilian awards. Hence, the wide spectrum of his talent can be inferred from his characterisation of varied protagonists he brought to life through his imagination.

Key words: Indian, English, life-history, social and cultural depiction.

Introduction

The intensity and strength of his understanding of reality, points in the direction of Khushwant Singh's world of imagination . Different situations related to social phenomenon are described and emulated on paper by him. He had depicted the sociological symbol for depiction of life-like characters in his novels. He has seen the Pre-Independence era and has witnessed activities that occur with separation. He adapted himself to live with the era of technology and all this is reflected through his literary



composition, both fiction and non-fiction. His interest in human interaction resulted in the wonderful composition that echoed in his work. All this knowledge helped him in his publications which are majorly in English followed by Hindi and Punjabi. Therefore the life of our country's people was represented by him in a general perspective.

It was imperatively essential that connection that unfolded linking his literary works and society remained constant. The reflective evaluation of his literary works became important. It is not only the method by which we evaluate Mr. Singh's works but also the perspective that we encounter, by the knowledge of the artist is unique in itself. He presents a multidimensional view of his contemporary country through his literary works. Most of Khushwant Singh's literary work was done under the umbrella of psycho, socio and political environment. At the same time, his work is an art. It does not remain confined to a radical state of mind. He belongs to the category of those writers who do not remain attached to the company of a specific philosophy or a group. His novels were put in written form in co-relation of moral and ethical information. He did not use his art for the promotion of any advertisement or marketing purposes. He became an artist who worked on a progressive basis.

His loyalty towards public interest is represented in his point of view. It can be easily confirmed through a novel *Train to Pakistan*, which was published in 1956. This novel displays strong courage shown by a man against the overwhelming power of evil, violence and outrage. Positive and encouraging nature of his life experience was depicted by this novel. It also described that Khushwant Singh had a strong belief in the principles of love and mankind. Even Mr. V.A. Shahane identifies with Khushwant Singh's reality.

Khushwant Singh's Literary Contribution

Khushwant Singh is the recipient of Padma Vibhushan. This award holds the second position in terms of civilian award of our country. Singh's works were influenced by characters who have a strong footing in history, especially the Partition of India.

Secularist as a person and a writer, Singh did not believe in the caste system and the social hierarchy based on that. His works range from political commentary and contemporary satire to outstanding translations of Sikh religious texts and Urdu poetry. Some of his most famous books include 'Delhi', 'Train to Pakistan', 'A History of the Sikhs', 'Women and Men in my Lives', and many others.



Khushwant Singh reveals the hypocrisy and deceit of the cultured society. In the novel *Train to Pakistan* he focuses particularly on the twined links of friendship between two religions in Mano Majra, the fictional village at the border of India and Pakistan. To describe the then scenario, the two dominant religions that inhabited the village were Islam and the Sikhs, though the Sikh, the Muslims and the Hindus lived in harmony and amity in Mano Majra. The houses of rural area are made with mud, whose roof are flat and the stature of their courtyard walls is very low that unlocks in shrinking lanes. The folks of village respected one and all and loving called the Muslim Mullah, Chacha Immam or Bhai Meet Singh. Then, there is mention of sweepers who do not follow any particular religion. During the mid-day after the meal, the women spend their time rubbing clarified butter into each other's hair, talking about births, marriages and deaths. This is the picture of harmonious life of rural India. The social and cultural life of Mano Majra is nothing but the reflection of amalgamation. The 'Slab of Sandstone' is the pivot point of gravitation for the villagers, it is idolized as the pristine centre, the cumulative energy brings religious differences to limelight but never created any misunderstandings. From the current point of view; it is a point of earnest consideration that the people of Mano Majra are bound with the sense of unity, despite their religious differences. The unity of Mano Majra is the binding force for the people. When the son and wife of the Muslim weaver died within the span of few days of each other, the eyesight of this weaver worsened and he is unable to work, he is forced to beg in the company of a little girl named Nooran, then the villagers began to give him grocery, flour and some other eatable material, in addition to clothes which are made of castoffs. This defines their humanism as M. Tarinayya writes: "There is no feeling whatever of their giving and receiving it, an 'offering' is for they respect him as much as they love him". Mano Majra was separated in two parts in the same way in which butter is spliced through a hot knife. Unfortunately, times changed as communal riots spread across the country.

Suspicious arose among communities in Mano Majra. People did not know how to respond to the new rift rousing situation, and further decline occurred with the appointment of head constable in the village. Now, Muslims lay idle in their houses, the Sikhs were unhappy and threatened as well. With the division of village, the people related to Islamic community and people related to Sikh community are also separated in two different groups. The interaction between the two groups is outrageous many a



times. Sikhs were warned by their last Guru that the people related to Islamic religion were not loyal. Thereby, the Sikhs adapted the attitude of 'Never trust a Musalman'. Until then, the rumours and hearsay, had not divided the village.

In those days, villagers had always enjoyed age-old friendship and communal harmony. How so ever, realising the danger, the Sikhs of Mano Majra advised the Muslims to leave the village and go to the refugee camps. The Sikhs tried their best to save the Muslim population that was under threat. Everyone had expected the communal warfare to settle down.

When the Sikhs of Mano Majra advised the Muslims to leave the village for the refugee camps, Imam Baksh was hurt. Here Khushwant Singh writes: "The tears come out of Imam Baksh eyes, he blew his nose in the hem of his shirt and said, What we will do with Pakistan? We and our ancestors took birth in this country. We lived with you as your own brothers." Imam Baksh was in emotional turmoil. He was enfolded by Meet Singh into his arms and Meet Singh also started weeping. Many other villagers wept quietly. Khushwant Singh is able to draw the attention of the readers to the tenacious bonds of friendship that existed between the two religions despite the evolving violence of communal discord.

After lot of deliberations, it was decided by the villagers of Mano Majra, to ask the muslim population to leave the village, it would be appropriate in support of Muslims. Lambardar says, "It is for your own safety that I advise you to take shelter in the camp for a few days and then you can come back". The inhabitants of Mano Manjra belonging to both communities held each other into their arms and wept like children. As the Muslims, left the village a vacuum was created enforcing the entire village to become restless and spend sleepless night. They came out of their houses talking, weeping, and reassuring each other that the wave of communal violence will soon die down. Human solidarity and faith is reflected in the narration of Khushwant Singh through the Sikhs convincing Muslims to leave Mano Majra. The unique togetherness of the two religions of those times is heart rendering, particularly to observe Muslims being greeted by Sikhs by "Salam" and the Muslims reciprocating with "Sat Sri Akal". The description of Sikh Muslim unity, of the last moment of Muslim departure is the example of ethical humanism. All the villagers wept into each other's arms and cried. It is a matter of fact that due to separation our country had immersed in the pool of blood. Though, the village



Mano Majra did not witness any communal riot or any act of revenge. Even today, this village believes in the principle of humanity and mankind. Partition has uprooted the base of brotherhood, which was established centuries ago.

Conclusion

Due to his personal experience Khushwant Singh was able to write on the subjects like religion and politics in a very sensitive manner. Years later, he became the eyewitness of those horrible moments which were lived due to separation. He also became the eyewitness of terrible tragedy of anti-Sikh violence. Due to his close connection to these incidents Khushwant Singh could justify the inter weaving of religion and politics in Indian lives. In his literary works Singh starts with early life and his association with his grandmother. He wrote with regard to all influencing subjects. In his world of literary presentation his friends, family members and he himself and the various communities along with the Sikh Community gets recognition. In addition to this, he kindly wrote with regard to separation and the city of Delhi. For him, Delhi had become his home from the time he left, Lahore. His writings have been enriched by the substantial autobiographical note which is all pervasive in his fiction. In fact, two chapters in Delhi, “The Builders” and “The Dispossessed” have been fashioned through the history of his own family. Literature has always been the mirror of the society, the literary works of Khushwant Singh’s has thrown light on the entire separation and unification of India with innumerable castes, languages and religions. Unfortunately, India again stands at the threat of barriers being created.

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