
DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF KHUSWANT SINGHS WRITINGSTYLE

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Literature the word means the reflection of the society of a particular time and this is aptly true as far as the Sikh's literature is concerned. William. J. Long has said, "Literature is like a river in flood, which gradually purifies itself in two ways - the mud settles to the bottom, and the scum rises to the top."¹ It is a universal truth that behind every book is a man; behind the man is the race; and behind the race are the natural and social environments whose influence is unconsciously reflected.

According to the critics the study of any work of art can be done at three levels. First of these may be termed as aspect - specific, the second author specific and the third category constitutes of these works which focuses on the historical or thematic evolution of the literature in English. In Indian English literature the author specific studies, like Manohar Malgonkar by G.S. Amur or Khuswant Singh by V.A. Shahane, are mainly concerned with the analysis of novelist's growth as an artist with in an overall context of his fictional output and the evaluation of his skills in terms of the basic elements of the novelistic art--characterization, employment of themes narrative styles and linguistic excellence. For example, though V.A. Shahane studies *Train to Pakistan* as a "realistic epic".² He is more interested in investigating the versimilitudinal fidelity of the story with in the epic mode. Similarly is the case in *Delhi*, Khuswant Singh himself has accepted that, History provided him the skelton. He covered it with flesh and injected blood and a lot of seminal fluid into it.

The aspect-specific studies can further be divided into two categories. First is the length studies of the theme of the novel and the second group within this category, i.e., aspect-specific studies including the various elements of the work.

T.S. Eliot has laid emphasize on the role of tradition in his famous essay "Tradition and Individual Talent." And this tradition can be obtained only by those who have a

historical sense. This historical sense involves a process of awareness not only pastness of the past but also of its presence. T.S. Eliot has said :

“Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It can not be inherited and if you want, you must obtain it by great labour.”³

Khuswant Singh follows the T.S. Eliot’s path of the ‘tradition’ in *Train to Pakistan* and *Delhi*. The novelist has focused over the Sikh’s tradition through the study of the Sikh’s protagonists. But the novelist does not follow the element of impersonality in his writings. We can get a clear cut idea about the novelist’s impression in his writings. It seems visible that he writes about his own personal experiences and the predicaments faced by the Sikh community. Narasimhan discusses identity with reference to the ‘inwardness’ which a creative literature and its language reflects. He remarks :

One does not, surely, mean one ought to deal with literature from the national stand point. ...What one has in mind is a shared tradition, a community of interests, and a set of values that a people live by, all of which give a sense of identity to individual artist. He has to ‘discover’ as well ‘create’ his own identity. He does not find it readymade. Of course, in the process he discovers and creates his own national identity too. Indeed...the two are connected and not mutually exclusive.⁴

In *Nineteen Eighty four*, George Orwell makes a significant remark - “Those who control the present, control the past ... those who control the past control the present.”⁵ In Orwellian sense, the writer under consideration seems to control both the past and the present. Khuswant Singh reconstructs the past and he revives and amplifies the memory. He collects the facts takes them home and cooks and serves them in what ever style appeals to him.

Khuswant Singh is essentially a writer of adventurous tales of charismatic heroes and during outcasts who are in the very thick of epoch-making events - World war, rebellious movements, freedom struggle, Partition. In such crucial time, the need of the hour is action, valorous action and not empty words. He satires over the inhumanity, the leaders and the so called religion. They are shown to have some personal axe to grind behind such façade. In both the novels the novelist’s men are faced with a choice between loyalty and betrayal courage and cowardice, honour and dishonour, truth and, deceit, proper and improper, moral and immoral and human and inhuman.

If we compare *Train to Pakistan* and *Delhi* at different levels : characterization, plot structure, theme, technique and symbolism. We find many examples of Singh's genius mind. As for as the characterization is concerned the Sikh characters in both the novels have different approaches toward the life. In *Train to Pakistan* the main Sikh character is a 10 number budmash, named Jugga, remains busy in his small world with Nooran, A Muslim girl in the earlier part of the novel. But at the end of the novel this budmash turns out to be a good human nature person. Although he sacrifices his own life to save his beloved's life but he saves the train also which was loaded with his fellow Muslim villagers. This unconscious heroic act in the hard time of the Partition maintains his humanistic approach and dignity. But in *Delhi* Sikh characters - the Untouchable, Musaddi Lal, Lakhi Ram, the Builder the Bhai of the gurdwara and Budh Singh have a different kind of romantic element in their souls. In reality they are in love with humanity, brotherhood and equality and are in favour of one religion, in which every man has equal status and a society without the space between the riches and the poors. "Carrion Carnage" is an excellent poem in which Dr. Syed thinks of the whole humanity. The illfated masses of Bosania, the sighing somalians the fall of soviet Union, the Partition and the Operation Blue Star all gets his attention. He cries out :

Religion !

The very world is nauseating

With the stink

Of human hatred and barbarism

Then, where is God's benevolence.

But the question is, whose God.⁶

It seems very clear from the above stanza that it is the religion which is the bone of contention of all sufferings of the human beings, and Khuswant Singh has portrayed the malignant side of the religion in a very realistic manner.

On the one hand, as for as the period of actions of these two novels are concerned *Train to Pakistan* Simply covers the Partition and if aftermath period in a very realistic manner but *Delhi's* plot cover the period from the origin of the Sikhs to the present time till it became an established religion like Hindu and Muslim. It also focuses over the problems and the predicament faced by the Sikh community. The story of *Train to Pakistan* is set in a

small 'sleepy' village Mano-Majra but in *Delhi* it is set in all over Punjab and Delhi, the capital of India.

The element of realism which is the soul element of all modern fictions and Khuswant Singh has followed this tradition of realism like a true disciple of the realistic school. The tradition of realism in his writings is called 'magic realism'. "The tradition of realism" as Ian Watt observes, is grounded in the premise or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actor concerned the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms."⁷ Henry James had a different view about realism. He called it 'the solidity of specification'. In his classic essay 'The Art of Fiction' which was published in 1884, Henry James wrote that "the Supreme virtue of a novel" is "the air of reality (solidity of specification)"⁸that "the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life"⁹ and he also insists on the fact that "as the picture is reality, so the novel is history."¹⁰ However, James did not subscribe to the simplistic view of realism. It is after all not mimetic representation but means something more complex which not only lends an aesthetic quality to fiction but also helps the artist to bridge the gap between illusion and reality.

Khuswant Singh is a true humanist and, who does not create any propaganda in his novels. What is written is true and is based on the historical facts. Both these novels are the fine example of this. In Singh's fictional world it is not only the characters action which provide the life to the novel but it is the socio-political milieu which runs like blood through the veins of the novels body and give a realistic touch to his fiction. The novelist always creates a convincing situation to put his characters who move about and live in the limited region of their religion and place which immediately makes a picture of Thomas Hardy's in our minds. For example in *Tess of the D'Urberllie* he has written :

"God is in his heaven, but

All is not right with this world."¹¹

And these lines perfectly suits to both the novels and to the Sikh protagonists in Khuswant Singh's realistic fictional world. In answer to the critics "Why did he choose a Sikh as the hero in *Train Pakistan*?" They argument that he could choose any person belongs to any religion.

Perhaps it is natural in his writing that he opted, a Sikh as the hero of the novel. And in *Delhi* he does not mention the name of character most of the time. In a brief preface to the novel. Arthur Lal aptly comments - "Its intrinsic qualities as a novel grip the readers interest. Throughout the action sweeps one along. The characters are vivid and highly credible and Khuswant Singh keeps them going magnificently on two levels - in their quotidian matrix compounded of their passion of love and revenge, their tremendous sense of belonging to a village community and their insolence and heroism and then again on the wide stage set by the tornado that breaks on their lives in the shape of the cataclysmic events..."¹²

When we go through the starting of these novels we can easily get an idea about the bitterness of the novelist's attitude. John Milton in his epic poem *Paradise Lost* says that "there is bliss in ignorance"¹³ aptly suits to the situation presented in *Train to Pakistan* and *Delhi*. The revelation of the truth or reality poisons the life of the innocent Sikhs. For example : In *Train to Pakistan* the revelation of truth of the ghastly train from Pakistan poisons the peaceful environment of the village Mano-Majra. And same is the case with the Sikhs in Delhi where the teachings of the first Sikh Guru Nanak Dev gave the voice to the 'infidels'. This revelation of the truth of the inequality among the untouchables changed their life. Aristotle has said :

"Tragedy is an imitation not of a man but of man in action which is serious of certain magnitude through pity and fear, and catharsis of these emotions."¹⁴

In Aristotle's sense a tragic hero should be good, appropriate, true to life and consistent and in Khuswant Singh's fictional world the Sikh protagonist have all these elements except goodness. This way both the novels are imitation not of persons but of actions of life, of happiness and miseries faced by the Sikh community at a particular time.

Like Horace and William Wordsworth Khuswant Singh believes that it is always the duty of a poet that he should please and instruct or he may combine both these function. Khuswant Singh has done both the things he not only pleases us by portraying the sexual scenes, but also instructs, the readers to avoid the turmoils and conflicts on the society on the basis of the religion.

The issue of 'struggle of the Sikh protagonists for survival' in the novels of Khuswant Singh has a slightly different orientation from the protagonists of other novelist. The term existence in his has come to mean not only a bare existence, a state of poverty and slavery,

but also that these conditions deprive people of a sense of belonging to the land where they are born and bred. To restore the harmony of personal experience and to recreate a closely- knit community in contrast with the fragmentation of period of growing social division are perhaps the two basic aims of Singh's corpus.

The struggle of the Sikh protagonists for survival mirrors the psychological development of the Sikhs under the strife and suffering in his novels, as if it were the web and woof of life itself, particularly, life in the Punjab. Most readers have noted this central preoccupation of the novelist and some have even questioned the authenticity of his depiction. Literature of course is not a direct transcript of reality; it is invariably an idea, a point of view, a philosophy with which the writer looks at life and portrays it. It is this ideational perception of reality that makes its representation. Khuswant Singh's idea of struggle for survival of the Sikhs is that man being a social animal struggles to find a sense of home in society, state and the world at large. Struggle and suffering are writ large on the pages of Singh's fiction. We encounter on each chapter and on each page the cries of hopeless Sikh characters running after a silver ray.

Khuswant Singh says that the single 'most-prized' value of the novelists is 'loyalty' to a friend and to the group one belongs to. All the characters in Singh's fiction represents loyalty and comradeship to caste, colour creed or community – Juggat Singh, Imam Baksh, the Untouchable, Ram Rakha, Lakhi Rai, the Bulder, Budh Singh and finally Mussadi Lal. In his essay "Need for a New Religion in India" Khuswant Singh has accepted - "I was born a Sikh and reared in Sikhism. My parents were orthodox Sikhs who observed traditions of the Khalsa Panth (Unshorn hair and beards for man and carrying other emblems of the militant fraternity) ... I present this the blue print of my religion for consideration and comment to my more enlightened countrymen."¹⁵ According to Amiya the religion says that if one understand, then there will be no war and cruelty. Religion instills spirit to come together and love each other. Spread rivers of love and affections. For example, in his poem "Against all the Dehumanise" he has said :

I invite you
To give up your religion
That bars you from loving
And take up
The crusade to fight
Against all that

De-humanise.¹⁶

Khuswant Singh is best known for his trenchant secularism, his humour, and an abiding love of poetry. His comparison of social and behavioral characteristics of Westerners and Indians are laced with acid wit. Certainly it is the result of his genius that he has been awarded many times for his contribution in English for giving voice to a dumb community history in his fiction.

Thus it seems very clear that in Khuswant Singh's fictional world characterization, plot structure, theme, technique and symbolism all are projected as streams, and these streams are aimed to meet the ocean of the 'Sikhism'.

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