INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This study traces the treatment of thematic concerns in the major novels of Khushwant Singh and emphasis is laid on to analyse the pivotal themes of partition, Quit India Movement, history of India, its past and present, cultural, social and political life of Sikh’s community and their familial relationship, love and sex, sexual relationship of the hero, Mohan Kumar, in the company of women in New York, sex with his wife, Sonu, and other women are presented with enormous talent and skill. This is evident in the style of his writings. Khushwant Singh has adopted the techniques of stream of consciousness in portraying characters in a unique way.

Objectives: To motivate and create interest among students in the learning process to improve language. This analysis examines the important themes and its concerns in the major novels of Khushwant Singh in detail.

Methods: This analysis of thematic concerns in the major novels of Khushwant Singh reveals the uniqueness and style of his writing and the method of examination is clearly illustrated by him.

Findings: All Indo - Anglian writers have examined variety of themes and concerns related to their works. Khushwant Singh has examined the themes of love and sex, sexual relationship of the hero, Mohan Kumar, in the company of women, partition of India and Pakistan, and the misery of life - Hindus and Muslims, the life of Sikh’s people at Delhi, Quit India Movement and its impact on society on social, political and cultural life are portrayed immensely by the author. The events and incidents are narrated by him in simple and elusive style.

INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh’s major novels often gives us information to the readers and examined the relevant themes of partition of India and Pakistan, Quit India Movement and its impact on society, social, political and cultural life of the Sikh’s community at Delhi, love and sex, sexual relationship of the hero, Mohan Kumar with his wife Sonu, in the company of women in New York are clearly illustrated by the author. This introduction gives us Khushwant Singh as a major writer in Indian English fiction in 20th Century. This is well-established by his wonderful presentation of ideas in the form of various significant themes in each novel- Train to Pakistan, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, Delhi, and The Company of Women.

Train to Pakistan (1956)

The national movement proved to be an important event in catching the imagination of entire Indian-English writers. These events are clearly examined in the novel, Train to Pakistan, by Khushwant Singh. Train to Pakistan, differs from most of the novels as partition in respect of canvass, and unity of time, place and action. It has greater unity of the time and place. Its action centres around in the close vicinity of Manomajra and covers a period not more than a month. Perhaps this is an important event that enables him to transform the themes and concerns into a fine blend of human compassion and love.

Train to Pakistan, concentrates on a village Manomajra, the issues of peace and communal harmony and views, and the changes of communalism and bloody retaliation occurred all over the country in affecting the village, Manomajra. It shows how peace is disturbed by the fundamental forces, in join hands with the government machinery are being examined in detail.

The first novel, Train to Pakistan, deals with the period of partition. Millions of people were on flight and around one million lost their lives. Khushwant Singh observes: “By Summer of 1947, when the creation of new State of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people - Muslims, Hindus, and Sikh’s were in flight...The only remaining cases of places were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One, the village was Manomajra.”1 (TP, pp.1-2)
The train is another important symbol in the novel, *Train to Pakistan*, that stands for the routine life of Manomajra before independence. Daily life at Manomajra runs parallel with the systematic arrivals and departures of trains there: “All these have made the people in Manomajra very conscious of train… Men are in the fields….As the mid day express goes by Manomajra stops to rest….When the evening passenger from Lahore comes in every one gets to work again.” (TP, pp. 4-6)

The partition of India gave rise to the withdrawal of the Hindus from Pakistan and the Muslims from India. Khushwant Singh reveals a sound historical sense like Manohar Malgonkar. Both *Train to Pakistan* and *A Bend in the Ganges* are successfully experimented by them in presenting the personal and historical ideas and perspectives in a fictional techniques and style. The partition has given birth to two political boundaries India and Pakistan respectively. O.P Mathur remarks: “Singh’s deep love for Delhi, makes him to works for twenty years, as he says, to writes a novel of its past, a novel… portrayal of the historical times, some of the important rulers and some unknown commoners through their own words…and the other’s personality and views.” (O.P.Mathur)

*I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1942)

Khushwant Singh’s second novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* has as its theme the freedom movement of the 1942-43 period. It does not probe deep into any political thought during the period. It gives some details about Indian people’s desire for the freedom and attempt made by some young men preparing for terrorist activities to liberate the nation from the British rule.

The novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, gives us a critical analysis of Mahatma Gandhi, Satyagraha movement based on non-violence. The novel establishes the fact that life is an important force, having the unity of social, moral and spiritual contradictions which have been presented with rare knowledge and skill which is Khushwant Singh’s strong point of view often put forward by him to the readers.

The novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, is chronological in its account and continuous in its development of the plot in time. However, the characters in the novel have been presented in a traditional way. Buta Singh is a selfish and career minded magistrate, his wife Sabhrai is truly selfless, pious and heroic who sacrifices her life for her son, Sher Singh, and others in the company who protects the honour and dignity of her husband. Sher Singh is presented as Westernized Sikh youth. He fails to act heroically for national independence, despite all his radical views and thoughts. He also fails to understand and satisfy the sexual urge of his wife and he is presented as ‘incomplete’ man in the novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. The sexual urge has been presented by the novelist: “She lay-like a nude model posing for an artist; one hand between thighs covering her nakeness and other stretched away to expose her bust.” (ISNHN, p.18).

Sher Singh is released from jail as the charge of murder levelled against him could not be proved. It is here again that the spirit of help in the form of charity associated with Christianity and the spirit of prayer, and surrender to God are associated with the Guru Granth Sahib, gets victory over tyranny, deceit, double-speak, violence and crookedness. This could be treated as the remarkable feature of the novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*.

When in death bed, Sabhrai tells Sher Singh that she would not hear the nightingale implying that she is about to die and she would not be there to see the dawn of freedom which is like a Spring season, and is happy moment for the people of the country. Her son had informed that getting freedom would be just like a Spring season which is associated with the moment of happiness for the people but a deeper meaning of this simile has traces of tragedy, when it becomes clear to the reader.

Khushwant Singh is essentially religious and his *faith in true Sikhism* is the major theme and concern of his novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. It was supposed to born to promote unity between Hindus and Muslims. It lays emphasis on action against contemplation and love for all. Sabhrai is the best example who has administered love and tolerance to others. She is pious, religious, and having divinity, knowledge, submits herself completely to God and Guru Granth Sahib. She has dedicated her life for the well-being of her family and the release of her son from jail facing the charge of murder. She lays down her life, for her son, displaying a *true mother’s instinct* in the novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, till the end.

Sabhrai who has been like a “bulbul on the bough” in the household of orchard of Buta Singh is about to fly away. This is the meaning, of the significance of the novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, as it is Sabhrai who is to leave the world for good would not be able to hear the nightingale song. It had a symbolic meaning and was being associated with the dawn of freedom.

**Delhi (1990)**

*Delhi*, Khushwant Singh’s third novel which consists some stray episodes of history of the past, *Delhi*, does not follow the normal novelistic patterns and it could be treated as a tourist guide dealing with historical episodes connected mostly with the tourist places known or unknown, Muslim period ruins, domes and mosques and tour sites of Muslim ruled India. The way in which themes have been presented give rise to the fact that the writer must have written the novel *Delhi* keeping in mind of the foreign readers.

The main theme of novel, *Delhi*, examines the past history which is limited fully to portray its certain places and periods under certain rulers, which is not at all inclusive but selective. The mode, of selection of the period of history, rulers and persons in which the writer has given the history, time and space, and the shape of the novel which is the product of his knowledge to act as a successful tourist guide in difficult situation. In this attempt, immense and extensive travel experience, meeting with men and women of different countries with variety of food habits and manners has proved to be fruitful and his knowledge of English, his literary and journalistic bend of mind added an interesting flavour to the narration of this work.

In brief, it could be said with regard to *the thematic analysis* of the novel, *Delhi*, Khushwant Singh has dealt with Delhi and Bhagmati in his own typical way without caring much for the actual details of history. The author seems to have a great and
fixed idea occupying in mind with Delhi and Bhagamati and this could be seen in the following: "I have two passions in my life; my city Delhi and Bhagamati as they have two things in common; they are lots of fun. And they are sterile." 5 (Delhi, p.30)

The characters and incidents examined in the novel, Delhi, provides lots of fun to the readers. The reader is left with no choice in which the characters of the novel are pleasant, distasteful, ugly, and causing a feeling of disgust, and yet alluring. It is for this reason that one might not like Khushwant Singh for what he had said and written but he is one man whom one could not afford to ignore.

The Company of Women: (1999)

The novel, The Company of Women, deals with life of Mohan Kumar, his company of women in New York, sex with his wife, Sonu, sex with professor Sarojini Bhardwaj, Molly Gomes, Mary Joseph and Susanthika are interesting and impressive to read.

Cultural bearing on love and sex is an important event that Mohan Kumar examines and compares his life in the States where he was able to enjoy sex almost every day without any restraint but in India he was able to use all his plans to find a bed partner, but at the same time, he is aware of the socio-cultural barriers that came in the way of free sex in India. Mohan Kumar himself observers: “In America I had got all the sex I wanted, without long - term commitments. In India it was not so easy, I did not relish the idea of visiting prostitutes or looking for call girls. Even I succeeded in persuading a working woman to share my bed, there was no place I could take her to; Indians do not believe in privacy…”6 (CW, p.139).

Mohan Kumar is a sex addict and a man of perverted sensibility. Sonu, his wife is a virgin, uneducated in sex, but very possessive. He fails to establish a happy conjugal life and quarrels almost every day. His sexual experience with his wife is entirely different from what he had enjoyed in New York. They bear children, their sex is loveless, mechanical and trivial, their mutual relationship and misunderstanding of each other leads to divorce.

Mohan Kumar talks of Hinduism as a religion of fun and frolic, drinking, dancing, gambling, flirting and he keeps staring at the naked parts of the women taking bath at Haridawar. All the time, he thinks of bra, the breast and between the legs and of his new relationship with Susanthika, and loses, the reasoning power and decency when he continues to sex with her. Mohan Kumar says: “I am not a sex maniac to go after every pussy.”7 (CW, p.82).

The novel, The Company of Women, is divided into three section, the first and the last is the reminiscences and observation of his life. The second section of novel, The Company of Women, Mohan Kumar has his regular sex with different women tells upon his health and renders him sexually impotent. He tries different medical ways to get back to his vigour and vitality. He develops the symptoms of AIDS and meets the end that he deserves, meets his death. There are two narrators in the novel, the third person narrator in the first person singular number. The story of his end is narrated in the last section. Mohan Kumar says: “But now I am unwell and suddenly alone, I seek solace in memory, in thoughts of all the women, I have known.”8 (CW, p.85)

The Company of Women might be described as a literature of anti-AIDS campaign. It elaborates the feeling and sensibility of AIDS patient and its causes and symptoms. This is one novel, which could give elementary knowledge and information about the causes and symptoms of the fatal disease called AIDS. It also provides a cautious warning to the victims sensibility in a graphic way.

CONCLUSION

The method of teaching novels could be used to develop communicative skills among Engineering students where English is taught as a second language in schools, colleges and, universities in India and the use of innovative methods and its relevance which was also useful to non-native language learners and speakers.

References


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