

REFLECTIONS OF NATURE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *THE SUNSET CLUB*

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Nature symbols forms a large part of Khushwant Singh's expressionistic technique. Khushwant Singh's works are always different from others. Be it the salacious details of gossip that make way into his columns and writing, his fondness for Scotch and girls who gossip, he is a man of contrasts and has unfailingly waged a war against priggish mindsets. In *The Sunset Club*, he gave us a vivid picture of Lodhi Gardens and appreciated the monuments built by Lodhi dynasty in 1494. He calls the famous Jami Masjid, a young woman's bosom and finds a feminine charm in it. Singh described twelve months of the year in Delhi with these three friends – Pandit Preetam Sharma, Nawab Baraktullah and Sardar Boota Singh, with his poetic uniqueness. All three of them exchanged their views and discussed daily events with different opinions in the evening at the sunset hour sitting on a reserved bench in Lodhi Gardens. Singh portrays all his characters with responsive and vibrant in life with their sexual desires, fantasies and foibles. With this, he also depicted the happenings in the country as well as in the world, the elections, violence, corruptions, deaths of the celebrities and disasters. This present paper is an attempt to show the nature reflections in Khushwant Singh's *The Sunset Club* (2009).

The novel is beautifully carved in twelve months. All twelve months are portrayed with their respective nature. In the chapter "The Month of Flowers", comes the *Basant Panchami* which marks the end of winter with the advent of spring. The short spring makes a colorful entry and melts in the summer's heat by the end of February. February is Delhi's floral month. All parks and roundabouts are, as the cliché goes, a riot of colors. In the same way, the relationship of these three friends bloomed. All the trees and the flowers gather Boota's attention and he lectures about them to the other two members of the Sunset Club. Boota also talk about his fantasies and dreams that how he fantasized women when he was young and how it became tinged with ambition and envy. His dreams also changed their pattern with age.

In March, death and rebirth go hand in hand. Finally, spring turned into summer. The mulberry trees which looked like clothless umbrellas of dry sticks get green fuzz. Seeds of new life are sown. Similarly, the new government of Manmohan Singh was formed. Likewise, Amitabh Bachchan met an accident and was saved by the prayers.

In the second week of March comes *Eid*, birthday and death of Prophet Mohammed. It symbolized the oneness of births and deaths- where there is birth, death is bound to be, and they go hand in hand. After *Eid* comes the festival of colours- *Holi*, a courtship among birds and their amorous advances. "This is the time when fresh, green leaves appear upon the trees and branch and twig of plants and shrubs are bent with bloom and seed." (74)

The unpredictability of April is beautifully captured. With April, comes the April fool's Day. Boota, very cunningly fools Sharma by sending him a love letter. Sharma, reading that fake

love letter finally became a fool- an April Fool. You are not sure if winter and spring are over and summer is there. The weather not only plays games with humans but also with nature. The unpredictability of April is beautifully captured by the Sanskrit writer Bhasa in his *Avimaraka, Love's Enchanted World*:

*How enchanting is the great variety of this world!
Gone is the heat of the day as earth dresses for night;
The evening breeze of this strange world gently the body touches
Slowly she removes the sun from her forehead,
Quietly put around her neck a garland of stars
Scatters the brave throughout the sleeping city
And joins together the bodies of young lovers. (96)*

In Delhi, May can be scorchingly hot. The one thing that makes May in Delhi memorable is the flowering of laburnums. Boota takes a better look on the laburnums. In its entire golden splendor, it proclaims the glory of God. Like the scorching hot weather, heated conversations takes place between Boota and Sharma on politics.

In July, monsoon clouds over Delhi's skies. In parks and gardens, peacock fan out their tails, their wings palpitate with lust. Likewise, the most controversial issue of gay marriages was hyped. Gay marriages were given an open verdict by the Delhi High Court. Yogeshwar (first century AD) has this beautiful description of peacocks dancing:

*With tail- fans spread, and undulating wings
With whose vibrating pulse the air now sings,
Their voices lifted and their beaks stretched wide,
Treading the rhythmic dance from side to side,
Eyeing the rain cloud's dark, majestic hue,
Richer in colour than their own throats' blue
With necks upraised, to which their tails advance,
Now in the rains the screaming peacocks dance. (129-30)*

August is the season when Lord Vishnu, Preserver of Life, descends to the bottom of the ocean and goes into deep slumber. This period is called *Pralaya*- chaos. Thus, rainy season is at its height. It added to human misery. After a couple of showers Delhi's woes multiply. Boota was one out of the population who was affected. The Nobel Prize winner, Norman Borloaug, the father of the 'Green Revolution', expired. He was considered as a 'Vishnu avatar' as he saved our country from starving to death.

The sun merges with autumn, with the starting of September. The daily schedule of the three friends has to change. The madhumalti was in full bloom. Flowers have begun to appear on the chorisia tree. Ramadan, the month of fasting and feasting which began in August, continues for another three weeks in September. Kalidas, who was a keen observer of nature, described the onset of autumn lyrically:

*The autumn comes, a maiden fair
In slenderness and grace,
With nodding rice- stems in her hair,*

*And lilies in her face
In flowers of grasses she is clad
And as she moves along,
Birds greet her with their cooing glad
Like bracelets' tinkling song. (151)*

The nicest month in Delhi is October. The summer's heat and the dampness caused by monsoon rains evaporate. The skies are a cloudless blue, the sun no longer scorches and pleasant autumn breezes blow. *Karwa Chauth*, falls in this month, when Hindu and Sikh women observe a day's fast for the health and longevity of their husbands. It meant nothing to members of the Sunset Club: Sharma is a bachelor, Boota, a widower and Baig, a Muslim.

November sunshine is luminous. Fifteen days after Diwali comes November with *Guru Purab*. They openly discussed and debated about their religion. They believed Sikhism is taken from Hinduism. Its theology is based on the Upanishads. With the end of the month, autumn rapidly gives way to winter. The chilly winds blow across the city.

December starts with mist, fog, and smog. It is a sad month for the old because their blood is cold. Winters symbolized depression, death, dampness, etc. the year 2009 is called the Year of the Blue Moon because in December it had two full moon nights. It is a rare occurrence which people believe is good omen. But there was also a lunar eclipse which most people believe is a bad omen for the next year, 2010.

The final chapter, *The Sunset Hour* symbolizes the end of their conversations, their relationship and the end of 'the Sunset Club'. The only thing that persists is 'their' bond on the *Boorha Bench* with Boota, who gazes at the Bara Gumbad. It does resemble the fully rounded bosom of a young woman.

*I asked for a long life,
Only four days were granted;
Two went in hoping,
Two went in waiting. (59)*

Works Cited-

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