

MULTICULTURAL MASSIVENESS OF GENDER, CASTE AND RELIGION IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S FICTION

Bheemappa M. P.,
Assistant Professor & Head,
Dept. of English,
Government First Grade College,
Santhebennur,
Davangere District,
Karnataka- 577552

The 20th Century could be the age of the English novel with the wide variety of forms, the radical experiments of language, and style in addition, the political agenda, historical events of particular writers; all are contributed to the novel-being. Novelists began religiously and politically, conscious of fiction and of some political allegories. In addition to these, they have commented on the gender, caste, religion, the constituents of the society and social protests too. Though the Indian subcontinent thrives for 'unity in diversity', 'homogeneity and nationality' is always under threat. Indian Literatures represent the subcontinent deal with diversified culture with multiple class, caste, race, and religious identities. Some of the best studies of social life are naturally enough in the regional languages. This is true of life in the countryside, urban life in India attracts the novelists by its excitements, perversions, sophistications, violent alternations, and the areas of obscurity. The Indian novelists such as R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Khushwant Singh have shown special and keen attention towards the gender, caste, religion, and the constituents of a society. These are the dominant themes in Indian Literature. Today, the Indian English fiction has earned international reputation for quality of fiction. Indian novelists are popular now among the literary jewels of the world. Among such specialists of literature, Khushwant Singh gets a unique status in it. He is always a distinguished writer with his own way of writing in his novels.

Khushwant Singh, who passed away just some months ago at the age of ninety-nine, is one of the significant literary personalities in the Post-Colonial Indian English Literature. Perhaps, he is the most widely read and controversial writer among the writers of fiction. Though he has much revered and distinguished place as a journalist and columnist in the field of Indian English literature, he is popular as writer of fiction. He is a rare, gifted, versatile genius writer, deserves to be adequately assessed and fairly recognized at the backdrop of Indian society and history. He is known for his multi-faceted roles in his illustrious life as a Critic, Journalist, Editor, Essayist, Novelist, Translator, Diplomat, Historian, and a Politician (as a Member of Parliament) all rolled into one. Beginning as a writer of fiction, he gained many distinctions and professions throughout his long life.

He values Indian religion, culture and other constituents of the society and is deeply rooted in the soil of India. His writing has grown out of the grass roots of the social milieu, as his experience of rural India is the base of his creative endeavour. He has portrayed his fiction both as an outsider and an insider. He is a deep writer of Indian sensibility in spite of his western education and irritation at many things Indian in its various vicissitudes.

R.K.Dawan says in his book ‘Khushwant Singh: The Man and the Writer’, both Indian and Western traditions shaped his mind. Though deeply rooted in the soil and in his own culture, he was moulded by the Western education that he received in India and in England. He says,

“I am the product of the East and the West”, he declares, “I am coin the word, an Orio-Occidental.” 1

Khushwant Singh’s has written major four novels- Train to Pakistan 1956, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale 1959, Delhi a novel 1990, and The Company of Women 1999, as a fiction writer. He is that he dons the historian and sociologist garb too often to the discomfort of readers, to those who expect him to perform well based on his abilities and in a traditional way as a creative writer.

Going through his all four novels, it is evident that he is essentially a realistic and humanist, and his narratives are deceptively simple to convey even serious issues. They widen one’s awareness, all at the same time. His personal views, which are pictured Indian society of Indian history at different times in his novels satisfied. It may be evaluated his novels in context of history and society authentically throughout. With the analysis of his novels, it is clear that he has attempted to bring forward certain observations like religious acts and societal principles, which are related to caste, class, and gender. The novelist’s criticisms and comments on life and personalities aim at reaching the humanistic ideal. He is harmoniously combined with the social critic in his creative art. The iconoclastic stance or the satirical mode is a special aspect of his skilful creation. His writings are both creative as well as critical. His approach towards life in all matters is essentially liberal. He is tolerant, eclectic, and intellectually committed to pluralism, multiculturalism,

The attitude of the novelist towards characters is both as types and as individuals. They are hemmed in by their environment and traditions. He has created strong characters with full of vigorous and flesh and blood as well as weak characters without flesh and blood to project them like caricatures. The characters are functionalized as representatives of types and individuals in plots and stories in his novels. He has his own views, sentiments, and feelings and he does not mince words while giving vent to them as he is free from any deception. His skill of storytelling, his interest in genuine things and his artful frankness besides his love for both the ugly and the beautiful and his down-to-earth realism are the exquisite qualities the novelist and his mission. The perception of life is the real forte of Khushwant Singh. His writings have the art and artifice about the challenging and disturbed times in our history and apply the real microscopic view of touches to various ills of our social life.

He exposes the innate smallness of the most of the people who camouflage their petty desires under righteous idealistic facades. He manages to convince themselves about the genuineness of the purity of their pursuits and the ennobling image to create them among the creed, castes, relatives, gender, friend, and religious masses. His novels contain an underneath message, or a lament far more profound and shocking that can be discerned by a rapid, superficial reading. Of his four novels, the first three novels are based upon particular periods in the political history and on the background of Indian societies. In his novels ‘The Company of Women’ and ‘Delhi’ in particular, he has poured hidden gender disparity, diverse religions, human ethos, insanity, womanizing, hypocrisy, the aspects and passions of life to throw light on different class societies. The novels are as if “unity in diversity” concerning to caste, gender and religion. He wishes to evolve a religion, as he does not believe in the traditional religion. He believes in the essence of the religion and is very particular about his own religion. Though his parents were traditional orthodox Sikhs, all religious rituals were observed in their home. When

he was working on the translations of the Sikh scriptures, he had found so many references to the Vedas, Upanishads, and the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. His extensive study, knowledge and worldwide experience have made him to become fully acquainted with various religions and developed a cosmopolitan outlook in his all his novels too. Perhaps, he has studied all religious books of the world. Thereby, he has profusely used all religions and their rituals in his novels. He has tried to project the communal attitudes of people while describing different religions. He shows no difference of gender in delineating sex. He gets delight in exposing naked bare many sexual organs of both male and female bodies as possible, and getting as many female laid as he during the course of all novels.

His artistic stature remains the same in dealing with sex. His novels turn into a clash between and evolution of two sets of values, two ways of life: conventional, non-violent, staunch faith in religion and God and pure, ascetic, unostentatious but dignified and moral life on the one hand and the modern, gender sexually promiscuous, morally loose, hypocritical, and violent ways on the other.

As John Donne, the leader of the Metaphysical poetry says that there not possibility of soul union without the union of physical bodies. Nevertheless, unlike Donne, Khushwant Singh transmutes the personal experience into an affirmation about the nature of man and woman. Though sex between man and woman is a physical action, it is definitely related to (gender) human psyche, and personality as a whole. Sex is bliss, an integral and indispensable part of life for both genders. The relationship between male and female is something that cannot be explained, ignored or treated in haphazard manner.

Even to the ancient Indian mind, sex was neither immoral nor moral, but it was amoral to man and woman. Discussions of sex and sexual activities of male and female sexual organs were rampant in ancient sculptures and scriptures. Even today, talking about sex seems to be offence and immoral. Talking on sex is as if having physical sex. Nevertheless, a blend of the sexual and the religions is undeniably a special feature of his novels. It is highly impossible to read or even to imagine his novels without sex between them. If there is no sex in the fiction of Khushwant Singh, it is almost dull and null to keep the subject for any respects. However, excessive focus on sexual morality has relegated the background some praiseworthy qualities in his characters. For instance, for love/sex shake, Hukhum Chand released Jugga and in spite of his life for Nooran, Jugga cut off the rope to pass the train to Pakistan. Another example for this is Mohan Kumar, a self respecting man never behaves with a sexual motif with any female staff either in his office or to seduce friends' wives.

Vinod Mehta, the Outlook's Editor-in-Chief expresses about Singh's opinion on sex in the chapter of 'The Company of Women'. As in his argument, Singh says that Indians have sex more often in their brains and not where it should be in their heads. Sex is an elemental passion and integral part of human life. All human relationship is based on the desire to have sex with man or woman. It is human to have desire for sex and when it is not fulfilled, it comes out in other forms. That is why celibacy does not work. In his novel 'The Company of Women', it is noticed that the desire to have multiple partners is also normal and married men and women commit adultery. It is the same in society of all the time and all the land. Many people have multiple partners and many married men and women commit adultery secretly or at least in their mind - happy married life is a façade.

The close study of Khushwant Singh's novels has given to have a conclusion that he has tried spiritualizing sex and no evidence to prove that he has attained through supra-consciousness through sex. So to say, Khushwant Singh has proved in his novels that sex plays a vital role in

the life men or women. Sex accentuates from his one novel to next novel and culminates to the peak flux in his fourth novel, 'The Company of Women'. Nevertheless, with his artist's ability to create reality that lies beyond the solid seeming wall of reality, endows his work with multiple meanings. His novels explore psyche and deal not only with human body, but also with human being (man) through sex. In the words of Bhagbath Nayak, it is possible to see attitude of Khushwant Singh towards love or sex similar to that of Osho Rajanish's attitude, he writes,

His attitude to love or sex is subjective and has enough experience to realize love's many moods- from cynical to the idealistic and ecstatic to Osho Rajanish's philosophy. 2

Perhaps, for his bold, excessive use and freelance treatment of sex, many critics have misunderstood him. Some critics are very liberal and generous in praising his writings, while some others have criticized him and his writings as a novelist, who has no inner vision and qualities of head and heart. However, he has possessed some established qualities, which carve out a place for him always in the modern Indo-Anglican writing.

Khushwant Singh, who hails from the Punjabi-Urdu-Hindi region, is decidedly different in using the language and style of that from other Indian English writers. He is an ardent lover of Urdu and Hindi languages and introduced richness and bewildering variety of those languages to English speaking readers. He seemed to have the opinion that English language is a hybrid language, enriched by every language it were exposed to into contact with, including some ten thousand words from Indian languages.

Thereby, he might have advocated a free use and adoption of English for our own purposes through our mother tongues. His use of language and style is realistic or naturalistic, down-to-earth worldliness idiom, transposed from Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi to English. The deviation from the norms of native speakers of English is abundant in his language and style, and it is not always consequential to differences of caste, religion, social stratification, and related to speech patterns. Such patterns are literal English translations of Indian typical modes.

His tendency to Indianize English, and to translate expressions word for word without caring for the sense often leads to bathos. Perhaps, he does this in order to give his Indian ring. In this synthesis lies an extraordinary vigour and urbanity of his style and the visionary gleam of his skill as a creative realistic writer of great passion and power. Commenting on the realism of Khushwant Singh, in the chapter- 'Mind and Will: Non Fictional Prose', this point has been argued by V.A. Shahane as-

'I think he occupies a special position in his adherence to, and interpretation of, Realism. His creative faculty is preoccupied, not so much with individual as an isolated entity or with society in the mass, as with the main issue of maintaining the balance between them. The far sighted realist must try to keep balance between the claims of sociological presentation and the virtues of psychological analysis. Singh's realism, thus becomes is part of moral universe. It is tinged with and mellowed by his deep humanistic faith;...' 3

There is an element of pedestrian prose in his style, but this is an inevitable concomitant of his realistic approach and use of language. There are various categories of contextualization of the Indianness of Indian English: cultural and social patterns of individuals and groups and differences of caste and religion contribute to specific forms and modes. The sex, age, education, religion, culture, and social position of the individual concerned are factors that mould his form of expression. In spite of his disbelief in the superficialities of religion, Khushwant Singh is

essentially religious and his faith in true Sikhism is his major creative impulse behind his novels. On the other hand, he has a wide approach to other religions also. The novelist's vast study and learning experience about the major religions of the world, like; Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, has developed his own personal religion. This has been outlined in his article "Need for a New Religion in India". He has written other several novels like "Religion", "Opium of Masses", and "Religion versus Morality".

Citation and Reference

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