

**POST-COLONIAL LITERATURE TREATMENT OF [HYSTERICAL]
HISTORICAL FLUX IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S
'DELHI A NOVEL '**

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Khushwant Singh (Feb 2, 1915 --) is now at the age of ninety-nine, at threshold of celebrating his hundredth birthday anniversary. He is one of the great and significant literary personalities in the Post-Colonial Indian English Literature. Perhaps he is the most widely read and controversial writer. He has much revered as a journalist and columnist in the field of Indian English literature and distinguished among the men of letters with an international reputation. He is a rare, gifted, versatile writer who deserves to be adequately assessed and fairly recognized in the Post-Colonial Indian English Literature at the backdrop of Indian society and history.

He was very successful with his earlier two novels- 'Train To Pakistan' (1956) and 'I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale' (1959). 'DELHI' is his third historical, produced it after a long period of his second novel 'I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale'. The masterpiece 'DELHI a novel' is corollary to his earlier novels. He takes more than twenty-five years to complete and publish this in 1990. He writes his earlier two novels with historical background of aftermath Indian Independence and freedom movement respectively. However, unlike in DELHI, he writes his earlier novels in narrow range of historical facts on a smaller scale, the canvas is not as big as it is in DELHI. He gives an enormous canvas, the magnitude of action and the massive scale with epic dimensions to DELHI. It is an ample proof and devotion to consider it as a magnum opus. It depicts history of the eternal capital city of India Delhi, which is also the history of India, which is the main theme of the novel.

Delhi, the city, is a place of power forever. Since ancient times, it has been the main centre of historical activities, known by in some other names. Indians believe that the site of Indraprastha, a legendary capital of the Pandavas in the Indian epic, Mahabharata records Delhi was the centre at the time of Mahabharata war. It was ruled by Kings, Emperors, Queens, Maharajas, Sultans, and even the Western colonies like the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and others.

It is being ruled now by so called democratic administration. It served as capital of several kingdoms and empires. In ancient period, it was ruled by like Mouryas, Guptas, Rajaputs; Sultanas during the medieval period; and the Europeans in the later period. The Sultans almost invaded, ransacked, rebuilt several times, particularly during the medieval period.

Therefore, today what we see city of Delhi, is a cluster of many capital cities scattered across the city's dimensions. However, it remains the seat of power as its permanent place. It is

an eternal capital city of India. One of the leading Indian English novelists, Singh takes an extraordinary zeal to depict the history of the city, Delhi combining with episodes and anecdotes in his novel, DELHI, a great masterpiece and modern epic. This is what the novelist puts his words through the Sikh guide, who tells to Bhagmati,

‘After I had memorized the names of few dynasties and emperors and the years when they ruled, all I had to do was to pick up anecdotes to spice my stories’.¹

Singh’s interest is much in re-enacting the past of Delhi. However, he has much more interest in a queer blending of history, romance, and sex of the time.

He uses historical events and documentary evidence for his framework to excavate the sub-text- the hidden portions of history of the city Delhi and India. He assimilates other concocted, fantastic, and private lurid stories to conjure his historical facts. Singh re-visions history that subverts the official view and offers a critique of the conventional historiography. He records the major historical events that endow Delhi, a mystic and an aura in the annals of history over a period of six hundred years. He illuminates some of the significant periods and episodes beginning with reigns of the rulers of thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

By focusing on six centuries ranging from Ghiasuddin Balban to the assassination of Indira Gandhi leading to the massacre of Sikhs, Singh comes across many people, emperors, eunuchs, poets, prostitutes, saints, soldiers. His narration implodes with tales, which recount in the first of emperors, poets, saints, sahibs, untouchables and a myriad of people who participate in and witness to the major historical forces that make Delhi to the present state. He throws light on their personal lives and on the times in which they lived. It celebrates the city of Delhi, its glory, its mystique, and its cosmopolitanism. It is a collection of accounts, fictional mostly, of the rulers of city Delhi. He loves it a lot. His love for the city reminds the words of Dr. Johnson, “When man is tired of London, he is tired of life”. The same thing is in the mind of Singh as when man is tired of Delhi, he is tired of life. He narrates the story and history Delhi, the city where he spent most of his life. For it, he lives in Delhi even today. The novel is undoubtedly a large book, having in all twenty-one chapters, of which, nine chapters are on historical facts, in which seven are monologues. There are ten long plots in this great epic.

If the reader is unfamiliar with the history of India definitely will be confused and even bewildered with the novel. However, anyone who reads this novel, he really falls in love with Delhi. It is an arduous task for any writer of historical fiction to make the historical figures sound and look authentic, but Singh makes all efforts to enliven the dead at this. He uses historical events and documentary evidence for his framework to excavate the sub text- the hidden portions of history. He assimilates other stories- other than history; concocted, fantastic, voyeuristic, even private lurid tales those put the official records in question. His narrative strategy is fascinatingly varies until the end. The historical characters set the stage, on which the imaginary characters move about.

In the gradual unwinding of the novel, we watch the drama of love and passion, laughter and tears of a set of puny figures, which history does not care to remember. In Foreword to the paperback edition, Khushwant Singh writes,

I put in it all I had me as a writer; love, lust, sex, hate, vendetta and violence- and above, tears.²

He narrates the chapters like Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah and Meer Taqi Meer in the voice of the person concerned, and they read like diaries. Mostly, its narration is in the first person as he

constructs it from records chronicled by eyewitnesses, occasionally with detachment. The story of the novel moves forward on two levels- the author-narrator Bhagmati episodes take us along with the present times, in between these episodes the focuses of the camera turns back into the past. However, in one sweep, from the beginning to end, Singh covers six-centuries of the rolling history of Delhi. The concrete visible ruins of the city Delhi speak of Muslim rule.

There are eleven historical and non-historical persons- Musaddi Lal, Timur, Jaita Rangreta, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, Nadir, Meer Taqi, Alice Aldwell, Nihal, Bahaddur Shah Son of a builder of Delhi, Rama Rakha son of Sai Dita, a refugee from west peek. Out of eleven are makers as well as narrators of the history of Delhi- Timur, Jaita Rangreta, Aurangzeb, Nadir, Bahaddur Shah, the remaining six characters are improvisations of the author, their role makes as the makers of minimal history.

Nine historical chapters, seven are monologues of ordinary persons like Musaddi Lal, Jaita Rangreta, Bahadur Shah Jafar, Meer Taqi, Alice Aldwell, Nihal Singh and the people who narrate the vents of the early twentieth century. Singh writes every alternate chapter on his sweet heart Bhagmati. He tries to make some kind of connection of the history account with the previous inter chapters of Bhagmati. The inter chapters, alternating commonly with a different chapter to describe either history or society of the time- Delhi-Bhagmati; Lady J.H.T-Bhagmati; Musaddi Lal-Bhagmati; the Timurid-Bhagmati; the Untouchables-Bhagmati; Aurangzeb alamgir-Bhagmati; Nadir Shah- Bhagmati; Meer Taqi Meer-Bhagmati; 1857-Bhagmati; the Builders-Bhagmati; the Dispossessed-Bhagmati. The chapters on Bhagmati run out of ideas of connectivity very soon.

The character of Bhagmati resembles Tiresias, a blind priest in Sophocles' "Oedipus", the king. The only difference is that Tiresias is blind. Singh pictures Bhagmati with the city Delhi. It assumes itself multiple identities as a site, text, and persona. Bhagmati, the eunuch whore is a metaphor for the city Delhi and for the history simultaneously. Her character epitomizes reconciliation between the antithetical elements, reconciliation to one's situation psychological, social or economic.

The novel accounts the history of Delhi from the eyes of an old Sikh; named Mr. Singh. The old Sikh guide finds Bhagmati and Delhi the same. The novelist beautifully parallels the old Sikh's passionate romance with both.

As I have said before I have two passions in my life; my city Delhi and Bhagmati. They have two things in common; they are lots of fun. And they are sterile".³

His passionate romance with Bhagmati is a representation of Delhi, which beautifully parallels. She is the central character of the novel. She (the author considers her as female) is a eunuch (hermaphrodite). She plays a pivotal role, functions as a fictional parallel to the subject of the novel. The novel embraces a large number of autonomous, dissonant voices un-intruded by the anonymous narrator, a Sikh. The invasions and possessions reveal through time, space and history. The novelist selects the events and characters for delineation on the basis his personal prediction and the extent of the inspiration provided to him by them. It is not a history but a lesson for those who read the history. History is the best appreciated whom we live through it and this is what exactly the book does. O.P. Mathur writes the opinion of Michel Zeraffa to tell how history and society intermingle in the novel.

Michel Zeraffa writes that with the novel, society enters into history and history enters into society. The words can be applied to 'Delhi.'⁴

These words aptly apply to the novel 'Delhi' in a way, not meant by the writer. Singh provides the history of contemporaneity a gloss both is veiling and illuminating. It seems to assume more importance than the historical material itself. In brief, 'Delhi' is an assessment and re-interpretation of the past by the present for its own purposes.

Singh's deep love for Delhi makes him to work for twenty plus years. The real history begins with living of the past Delhi with the times of Balban and of Sufi saint, Nizamuddin Aliya. He writes on Delhi's past, a novel Sufi genesis, a portrayal of the historical times, some of the important rulers and some unknown commoners through their own words, and the whole suffused with the author's personality and views as if a remarkable tour de force. He says himself it may read like a 'fucking man's guide to Delhi'. The novelist illuminates the past of some significant periods of over 600 years of the city, Delhi. He begins with the reign of Balban, continues with the thirteenth century rulers, fourteenth century rulers. He describes in detail the invasion of Timur, the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, the invasion of Nadir Shah and its aftermath.

Then, he goes on to put forth the revolt of 1857, some events of modern Indian partition of Bengal, the shifting of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. His delineation of the rise of Mahatma Gandhi, the Kalifat Movement, the activities of terrorist revolutionaries, the round table conference, the major events leading to the communal riots, the assassinations of Mahatma Gandhi, the terrorist activities in the Punjab, and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 are very artistic.

Among nine historical chapters, seven are largely monologues of ordinary men. Singh uses interior monologue as the special technique. He wittily sketches the past, although he skips over large, significant areas of the history of Delhi before Balban, all the Hindu rulers and Muslim rulers- the gradual rise of the East India Company, the Quit India Movement, the Indian independence, the partition, the Chinese War, the two Pakistan Wars, Kashmir problem, Emergency Period, the murderous activities of Bindran Wale and the Sikh terrorists.

The narration consists of a few important strategies. The bulk of the material of history consists of the ways of lives and attitudes of the common people. The main theme is history, which confines to portrayal of Delhi in certain period of history under certain rulers. The history is selective but all-inclusive. The selection of history is strictly superficial, personal and whimsical. The chosen history, events and personages are only a cover for the message to give for the future and the lesson to learn from the past. Singh gives the history, time and space into a novel form. It is output of his knowledge, vast travel experience, meeting with men and women of diverse nations with varied habits and manners. He weaves into a gripping story with sundry jottings on historical periods, personages and manners, surroundings and historical monuments.

The historical figures turn into three-dimensional and speak for themselves. He tries to group the innate feelings and essential strengths and weaknesses of the rulers, who mould the fate of Delhi and India at large. However, the novelist acts as a detached observer. The novelist uses a special kind of narrative technique of interior monologue and the narration alternates between the past and the present, including autobiographical element, the use of Urdu couplets and translation of English to Hindi phrases with expression of obscenity and crudity by adding spicy tales with the historical facts. His re-vision of historical events and documentary is evident, which assimilate with other stories- concocted, fantastic, voyeuristic and even private lurid stories. 'Delhi' builds up the assumptions, cultural moorings, sexual taboos, and fetishes. It has a large number of autonomous and dissonant voices. In the novel, the inter-chapters other than the chapters alternatively on Bhagmati are both historical chapters and or chapters on ordinary persons.

Sometimes they run out of ideas of connectivity. The entire novel rotates around Bhagmati with mostly the past and the present Delhi. The past glows the present and the present peeps into the past. Thus, the novelist treats history superficially and makes all readers to have interest in it. Such are the chapters on Lady J.H.T., Musaddi Lal, Timur, untouchables, Aurangzeb Alamgir, Nadir Shah, the year 1857, the Builders, the dispossessed. This first VVIP visitor is a famous archaeologist and cousin of the Queen of the time, whom Singh conducts as a tourist guide; she takes interest in the archaeological sites and some of the old sites. He tells her about Delhi ‘Ruins proclaim the past splendour of an ancient monument’. Here, the novel is a tourist guide version of history.

To assess the novel in a better way, it is good to go through those chapters in brief. Though the character Lady J.H.T. seems to be insignificant to the progress of the novel, but the chapter on LADY J.H.T. (Lady Jane Hoity-Toity) is significant to know about the Singh guide. The novel begins on a strikingly personal note of the author’s arrival at Palam Air Port in Delhi and develops into a lively string of dispersed meditations- loose sallies of mind, which partly reflective and partly whimsical.

MUSADDI LAL:

Of the historical chapters, seven are monologues of ordinary men. Historical personages- Timur, Aurangzeb, and Nadir Shah explain in their monologues with their driving forces and impulses of their actions. These trios are historical personages; whereas Musaddi Lal, Nihal Singh, and Jaita Rangretta are common personages of the society, who make rational assessment of social and political situations of the time.

Musaddi Lal is a fictional character to reveal the traditional times of the Indian society. Though Musaddi Lal is a fictitious character of Khushwant Singh, he is the real example of the traditional times of Delhi viewed at the life of the new convert to Muslim along with his wife as testimony to the then-fast-changing society of Delhi. His best efforts to assimilate into the just emerging new society and his half-successful attempts to this end speak volumes of trying times. He presents the predicament of Musaddi Lal in comic and ironic manners. He belongs neither to the Hindus nor to the Mussalmans. He celebrates all festivals of Hindus and Muslims alike. The name of his son ‘Kamal’ is also a Muslim name if the second vowel ‘a’ sound is elongated. He says,

“If anyone asked me whether we were Hindus or Mussalmans, we would reply we both”.⁵

Singh delineates a unique picture of Musaddi Lal in the light of secularism. Musaddi Lal gives details of his lineage in the reign of Balban by recoding the events of his days upon the earth. Singh narrates imaginatively a realistic picture of the Hindus in service of the Muslim rulers. This is also symbolic of Delhi and Bhagmati, who treat ill, ravish and leave alone to care for them. Whatever Musaddi Lal says about himself is shockingly true. His truthful experience despicable plight may see himself own words;

“Whether we were Hindus or Muslimans, we would reply we were both.
Nizamuddin is our umbrella against the burning sun of Muslim bigotry
and the down pour of Hindu concept.”⁶

Hindus disowned him and his own wife shunned him. The Muslims exploited and disdained his company. Indeed, he was like a hijda who neither one thing nor another, but everyone could be misused. S K Dubey writes about Musaddi Lal as,

“To me it appears that Singh through Musaddi Lal has worked on a popular suspicion which often equates Kayasthas with Muslims. This particular community has lined largely on earning through their brain and pen. Musaddi Lal records the same after he faces humiliation on his having a Muslim name.”⁷

Through him, there is even a clear picture of Balban. According to Musaddi Lal, Balban is like a great terrorist. Balban is a terror for his subjects. He makes people urinate with fear. He has a terrible temper to execute anyone who as much as raises his eyes to look at him. He keeps two huge Negroes beside him hack off the heads of people. Balban has reports that saint Nizamuddin is treating Hindus and Muslims alike. Singh brings out the question of Hindus and Muslims discord and suggests that for Muslims saints this is not question at all, as they shower their blessing on all alike, irrespective of castes. Saint Nizamuddin himself tells that he does not make any distinction between Hindus and Muslims. He considers all as the children of God. He claims the unity with God. This philosophy suits best to the multi-religions Indian society. It is not the rigidity, but liberalism, which is the need of the present society.

THE TIMURID:

Timur is very significant in delineating the historical facts of Delhi among the historical characters. The novelist gives a new angle to the treatment of some characters like Timur, Aurangzeb and Nadir. They reveal their interior monologues about their real intention for invading India and ascending to the throne of Delhi. The episodes on the Mangolian King Timur and Nadir Shah of Iran reveal the chillingly devastation killings of Hindus in millions by the alien kings as they invaded Delhi and plundered it of all its gold.

Cruelty and inhumanity of a magnitude known to the people of our times casually practices upon the Delhi population by their troops. They are ruthless rulers and invaders. The novelist makes them to speak themselves about their fights, plunders, mass-killing and offering huge wealth. The trios do all in the name of Islam, to bring infidels to the path of religion and to do well to them. They bare their real intention for invading India/ Delhi. They make to concede that greed for power and wealth together with religious fanaticism and goaded to undertake a long and arduous with journey to gain victory over India before Balban.

Hindus will attempt to regain some their prestige in different ways. An example of this is the inscription Sri Vishvakarme Prasade Richida on the Qutab Minar. When Alluddin Khilji comes of the throne of Delhi, he sets about despoiling the Hindus kingdoms of the South. His General Malik Kafur extends his dimensions right up to the seas. He brings tremendous wealth into Delhi; gives women to Muslims as reward for service. All invaders on India use religion an excuse to do so. Similarly, Timur justifies his invasion by saying that it is a holy task enjoys upon him by Allah. He motivates his troops also by invoking their religious zeal. He summons all his nobles openly as

“We told them that object in undertaking the invasion of Hinduism was to bring infidels to the path of true religion and purify the country from the filth of polytheism and idolatry.”⁸

Timur truly believes that the hands of Allah sanctify his act of invasion. His army also believes in it, and so they are able to fight with tremendous zeal and emerge victorious. Superior military tactics also contribute towards their success. Even so, the people are not willing to take things lying down.

After their King Mahammad Bin Tughalaq has been defeated, the citizens show much courage. They refuse to pay the indemnity Timur imposes upon them. For this defiance, they pay dearly. Timur orders a brutal massacre. For ten days, there is merciless killing and looting all around.

It aptly suggests that behind the façade of holy wars, there lies the question of personal ambitions and interests who take precedence always. It is also clear that most of the rulers and the people, irrespective of their religious affiliation, are simply men of their times only. Nevertheless, the real fact is that Timur has the expression of smugness. Singh views Timur at the perspective of devastation caused during his invasion. He acknowledges his lust to power. It is no wonder a book of history, which views Timur from another perspective and enlists the devastation caused by him during his invasion. To the fact that, Singh recaptures realistically the horrors caused by the marauding forces of Timur who had killed more than a half of one lakh people.

THE UNTOUCHABLES:

Singh drags even ordinary people to put forth their positions during the Muslim rule and to explore the history and society of Delhi. One feels amused at the autobiographical version of an untouchable. ‘The Untouchables’ brings to light some of the lesser known aspects of Sikh religion. In this chapter “The Untouchables,” Jaita Rangretta tells his own story on the plight of untouchables in the society during those days of Jahangir’s reign. The narrator is Jaita Rangretta, an untouchable, who lives in Rikaganj. This is similar to the lower castes adopting Christianity later on. There is a commercial aspect to becoming a Sikh as well.

When Jaita Rangretta’s father dies, the Guru’s agent sends for him. They tell that he has to pay a certain amount of money for his father’s soul and for the accession of the new Guru. Jaita Rangretta does not have any money because he has spent everything he has in the feast that follows his father’s death. Therefore, he has to borrow from a rich moneylender to pay up. Therefore, he has to pay the Guru’s agent every year. Jaita Rangretta does not mind this very much. For now, he is not a mere untouchable, but also a Sikh of Guru Nanak. The novelist has not flinched in writing about this somewhat demeaning aspect about his own community. This amply reveals his objectivity as a writer. Jaita Rangretta is a fine example of his untouchable clan.

As a writer, there is a maturity in Singh’s perception, for he has bias in favour of the Sikhs in the story, “When Sikh meets Sikh”. Nevertheless, here, all bias sheds aside to reveal a historical fact. Everybody believes that an avatar will soon come to save the people. This is a typical Hindu belief that when kalyug reaches a climax God would send a saviour. Instead, they capture Guru Tegh Bahadur also. Jaita Rangretta awaits some miracle, but they execute Guru soon and order that his naked body to expose for the public gaze. Enraged at this behaviour, Jaita Rangretta takes it upon himself to do something. There is a saying “God helps those who help themselves”, so it is with Jaita Rangretta. When he embarks upon the mission to kidnap the Guru’s mortal remains, a furious dust storm arises. Soon day turns into night. Everybody shuts himself indoors. Jaita Rangretta is able to carry the Guru’s body out of the Kotwali and gives him a decent funeral. Soon thereafter, the storm vanishes as mysteriously as it appears. This re-establishes a faith and sense of self worth in Jaita Rangretta. Religious tolerance, poverty and inequality lead to the internal revolts.

What is true then is true to today as well as Jaita Rangretta became a Sikh in order to establish a feeling of self worth. He is an example to reveal the plight of the people on the lowest rung of the social ladder and their king’s indifference towards them. Ensuring social equality among their

subjects is never a concern of the ruler. The situation is not very different today either. He recalls his father having told him about the name of the king who had died. He recounts:

....We poor untouchables to do with kings! I remember my babu saying.

‘They are all the same to us. One goes, another comes, zulum goes on’.⁹

He reflects on Shahajahan, Shah called himself the king of the world. He had killed his brothers’ families and ascended the throne. He liked women like his father, Jahangiri, his grandfather, great grandfather. Jaita Rangretta reflects on him, as

‘At least I am something--a Sikh of Guru Nanak. I do not know what it means but it is better than being nothing but a Rangretta untouchable.’¹⁰

Here the novelist exposes religious hypocrisy and exploitation of the people in the society, particularly untouchables. Here is sentimental exploitation to such people and makes to understand. People find some refuge and consolation in every faith and community that their ancestors had seen through and what they had observed. This seems to be trivial thinking and yet important from the concerned person’s point of view the novelist captures imaginatively. Whenever, Rangretta’s mind agitates at his plight as an untouchable in the society, Khushwant Singh gives anecdotal history in the description of Rangretta who puts a bird’s eye view of how Aurangzeb ascends the throne of Delhi.

AURANGZEB ALAMGIR:

Aurangzeb Alamgir was a great emperor of Hindustan. Singh gives an extraordinary touch for the delineation of the history of Delhi in dealing with the character of Aurangzeb. He ably visualizes Aurangzeb Alamgir as the penitent and God-fearing. They face mighty dynasty of Aurangzeb pushes Delhi into the hands of weak rulers. The wheels of juggernaut of oppression and victimization have rolled and Delhi as a whole has suffered. He has ambition to wade through slaughter to the throne and his frantic orthodoxy and desire to spread Islam by sword. He is a highly complex and multi-faceted personality.

The novelist allots him to speak in his defiance. He speaks of some pertinent reality about kingship to prove his point for the bitter rivalries in families of kings among the kinship. He finds no bridge of affection spans the abyss that separates a monarch from his sons; no bonds of affection exist between the sons of kings. Even the Babar’s rule from 1526 to the time of his descendents ruled the country show the kind of history about kinship. He remains largely shrouded in mystery misunderstanding, in the annals of history of Delhi and India.

It is strange that he believes that since Allah has given him birth in the dynasty of kings, it is his duty to serve humanity and spread all over Islam. He orders his commanders- Mir Jumla, Shaista Khan and others to extend the domain of Islam to the furthest corners of Hindustan. It is certain that one wonders at his concept of serving community. The Mughal army gains victory over several kingdoms. Nevertheless, the duty of a monarch is not merely to extend the realm of his empire, but to keep subjects happy and to treating them as equal.

He demolishes many temples and raises mosques upon their ruins. He forbids drinking alcohol and forces prostitutes and dancing girls to marry or leave his empire. The Muslim people are happy with this. In everything they do. Really it is a death, the leveller (in the words of Milton) the final hour of reckoning that makes a man look back and ponder over his past deeds. Nevertheless, he seems to have repentance for the acts what he extols himself earlier.

‘....I have sinned terribly and I do not know what punishment awaits me.....’¹¹

The Muslim rulers live in ease and do nothing to evolve a better administration and superior military strength. They do not learn to treat all citizens as equal irrespective of religion, which will have gone a long way towards fostering unity amongst the people. If they have done all this, the history of India will have been different.

NADIR SHAH:

Nadir Shah is another Muslim ruler from Iran who changes drastically the picture of Delhi in his own views and attitudes. The character of Nadir Shah moves in the same path of Timur's character. As Timur and his men acquire untold wealth and numerous slaves for ten days, there is merciless killing and looting around. A similar scenario repeats in the chapter of 'Nadir Shah'. With the full of mighty personality Aurangzeb forces to push Delhi into the hands of weak rulers. He invades Hindustan in order to rid of infidels and restore Islam to its rightful place,

'but.....We will not allow an Islamic kingdom to be despoiled by heathens.... We would soon be taking the road to Delhi to put the House of Mughals in order and to restore the kingdom of Hindustan to Islam.'¹²

It forces the invasion of Nadir Shah to suffer his plundering it. After the plunder of Nadir Shah, Delhi becomes a wasteland where gangs of Rohollas, Marathas, Jats and Sikhs prey upon the people. It is strange that both Timur and Nadir invade India in the name of Islam. This happens at hands of the current rulers of India who are themselves Muslims, and the upholders of Islam. Clearly, they use religion as a tool for acquiring untold wealth and riches. Nadir Shah does absolutely nothing to crush the Marathas. Rather, by diluting the strength of Marathas, he indirectly empowers the Marathas. All this causes the citizen to suffer further misery. He has secret lust for wealth hidden under the garb of religion. His motive force is really avarice and not religion, through he tries to hide his greed under a religion garb. He is opposed to both Hindus and Muslims alike and he himself makes no distinction between the two communities when he orders a general massacre. During his time, the killings are wide, regular, and systematic. He tells that his soldiers continue to kill until their hands are tired regarding the killings to the infidels under their control and to strike awe. He recounts

"We had no idea how many had been slaughtered except that for six hours thousands of our brave soldiers had done nothing but killing"¹³

Both Nadir and Timur are like two faces of the same coin for the ill fate of the city Delhi. The conquest results in a huge haul of wealth of Gold and silver and precious stones of looted into their treasury as water flows into seas. The loot and plunder of Nadir succinctly states in his own words:

We had them flogged in front of their kinsmen. The floors of their homes were dug up and their women stripped naked.Gold and silver and precious stones flowed into our treasury as the waters of the Oxus flow into the sea.¹⁴

He has full of lust for both power and money, which has brought him to Delhi/India. He wants Delhiwalas to be grateful to him and his ilk. He makes his own defiance. On Nadir's horde pillaging and looting Delhi, Meer observes. Meer's observations refer to the divesting Delhi, his own shattered heart as the woman he loved and admired in Agra had proved false to him and taken a fancy for another lover and the tragedy for him was that he still desired her. S.K.Dubey tells about love of Meer,

Meer makes some telling remarks on love. ‘Love is an affliction which spares no one, neither the old nor the young, neither married nor single’.
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Sometimes, he appears to be good to some people. Some of his statements about honest men and loving women refer to Hakeem Alavi Khan like

“a sharp-tongued person and saucy Noor Bai. 16

As to the Hakeem, Nadir calls him having made a blunt speech to them on their explanation that the havoc they had made caused in Delhi is because they are people of Delhi who first lay hands on their soldiers. Singh feels sorry for what misfortune has occurred to his beloved city Delhi: Sikhs, Marathas, thieves, pickpockets, mendicants, and rulers- all preyed on Delhiwalas. Happy is who has no wealth; poverty is the only wealth. To know better, a poignant picture of Delhi of the post-Nadir Shah period can see through the words of Meer. In the post-Nadir Shah period, Delhi is neither the same after the Iranians slain its soul, kings, noblemen, and their hirelings come like flocks of vultures to peck at corpse. The tale of devastation of Delhi in the reign of Nadir’s successor, Almad Shah Abdali, the Afghan is also very pathetic one. Afghan ruffians break down doors, tie up those find inside, and burn them alive or cut off their heads. They strip off clothes and make people to wander naked in the streets.

MEER TAQI MEER:

Meer Taqi Meer represents equally both the history and society of the city of that time. He is a great Urdu poet during the time. His name is as Taqvi or Taqi. Perhaps the novelist writes one of the fine chapters on him. He is the son of Sainly Meer Mohammed Ali. History is made pungent and piquant, not the dust dreary reconstruction of a pedant but warm breathing excitingly alive.

As the novelist evokes both the history and history persons as narrators of their respective periods of history, five are narrators as well as makers of the history of Delhi. The remaining six are improvisations of the novelist and their roles as makers of minimal history. Out of these six only Meer is a historical figure, being one of the most celebrated poets of Urdu, but he is only a witness, not a maker of any history. His character presents as neither a maker nor a notable victim of history but presents largely for as the improvisation of the novelist. Meer refers to the rulers, benefactors, Urdu poets, Muslim saints and invaders of his time and the Sikhs and the Marathas as well. S.K.Dubey talks on Meer for his monologues.

The novelist has stuffed the tales of Meer with lively anecdotes, historical periods, of the rule of his benefactor kings, vandalism of invaders, ruination of the beautiful city of Delhi, his life of love and dejection, dotted with pride and prejudice, with a telling effectand in the process producing very good pieces of literature.¹⁷

Bahadur speaks out about himself and misfortune that befell on him together with his exile. Only his beloved Zeenath Mahal stays by his side. She remains their connection in the camel litter of misery and their comrade in the desert of affection. It is evident that he brings out the poignancy. Meer gets suffering from poverty, which forces him, faces often hunger and starvation.

He considers the poverty as a feeling of ecstasy. Neither love nor poetry bring him any instead, he feels it as anguish. His father puts forth a different manifestation of love. His father asks him to love his only companion. It is love that maintains the universe. His father’s different image on love is thus:

All that you see in the world is a different manifestation of love. Fire is the heat of love, earth its foundation, air its restlessness, not its dream state, day its wakefulness”.¹⁸

Though these are the words of his father, these beautiful quotes are from the deep heart of the novelist, which form really a brilliant piece of literature. This is beauty and of the novelist to mirror his powerful and beautiful writing. He creates poetry in prose of the novel. A head and heart of a woman betrays Meer, which makes him poorer, desolate and dejected. When he talks of the poets and kings of his time, he talks of a songster Masood whom he humiliates at a Mehfil, which leads him to Begum Sahiba and from this meeting starts his care as a poet and lover. Begum Sahiba is a designing and masterful woman. She has her way in everything. In old Nawah Rais, she has the husband she wants; she has a part time lover she wants; she is determined to be his patron and his mistress.

The love scene involving Meer and Begum have full of descriptive details as if a mini Kamasutra. In the words of S K Dubey:

“...the love scenes involving Meer and Begum. The descriptive details may match a mini Kamasutra, sketching the sketchy indulgence of an in satisfied married woman with a married man”.¹⁹

Singh exposes the illegal, amoral relationships as he exposed in the novel, ‘I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale’. However, in this novel, it is in a different angle. In this, the woman Begum who has become at once as if Meer’s lover, companion, nurse and mother, discards him like a pair of worn-out slippers or clothes. She torments him fully when she turns her attention to yet another rhymester. That woman makes him and destroys him. She is both the preserver and destroyer on his part. That is in brief is the life story of Meer as the poet and lover. His poetic style, sexual exploits with her in Agra and his desolation after. The descriptions contain how she deserts him are some beautiful pieces of literature and lessons in sex indulgence, deceit and flattery. Singh comprehends imaginatively a wonderful piece of Meer’s solitary with feelings and thoughts of men. Singh wonderfully creates this, what any common person observes the plight of Delhi.

‘1857’:

The chapter on 1857 in the novel is like referring to a particular history of India, in this, three non-historical persons, which reveal a realistic picture of the time. The year 1857 is the year of “the first of Indian Independence”. Delhi too finds itself in a new situation during that time. For a change, the roles of victims and perpetrators of oppression take up by a new set of people. In the episodes of Alice Aldwell, Bahadur Shah Zafar, and Nihal Singh, it clearly proves that what is ultimately significant is the manifested inherent evil in man. During the period, all sections of the society including Europeans have suffered.

The chapter ‘1857’ is one the longest episodes in the novel, running to more than seventy-five pages with alternative voices hear those of Alice Aldwell, Bahadur Shah Zafar, and Nihal Singh. Their narratives provide a panorama of the time by synthesizing of the great entities with non-entities.

Alice Aldwell is one of the six characters who are the improvisations of the novelist as makers of minimal history. She is a close witness of, and a peripheral character to the tumultuous events terminating in the banishment of Bahadur in the historical annals of nineteenth century India. This episode of Alice Aldwell reveals her as a devious woman, somewhat like Begum Sahib of Meer. Alice Aldwell is an Anglo-Indian woman who comes from Kolkotta around the time of

1857 mutiny and fervently hides the facts that she is only half-British. She is extremely contemptuous of Eurasians and Indians, and shares an equal relationship with them.

This is ironical because she escapes with her children the death after she acknowledges her Indian roots and gets converted to Islam. During the revolt of 1857, her daughters and she take refuge in Mizra Abdullah's home. He asks them to convert to Islam to ensure their safety. Her daughters and she do so. Later, they transport them to another house. There, his friends and he make love to her all night long. Here, we are evident that that Indians' fascination for what skin. However, either the Indian women towards Alice or other English women are generally reverential. Alice forces her husband to move to Calcutta from Delhi. She does not want to live with the Eurasians, suspecting that the English gentry will start thinking about as one of the Eurasians.

The novelist talks ironically about the national awakening against the British rulers in 1857 ventures to explain the clandestine love affairs of Alice with Mr. George Alkins and sketches the some real sex pieces related to Englishmen's lovemaking. When she is only 26 and does not know a man for more than a year and Mr. George Alkins does not know the first thing about love. They get down to business after supper. No sooner does he put his thing in than he is finished. He works himself up for the second bout.

That time he is very rough; he bites her breasts, digs his nails into her poor bottom and rams away as hard as he can. He glues her mouth to his, runs her tongue in his mouth and works on him until both of them are like animals; biting, clawing, drawing blood. They almost kill each other in the final act. The novelist matches Mr. George Alkins' manliness and the velocity of Alice as a master painter of sexy scenes. He takes an abiding interest in vulgarity by choosing abusive Hindi phrases for literal translation to enliven his narration. This is a typical Indian English usage of the time.

Eg: The words of the Sikh guide,

If you are pregnant you have to show your belly to the mid-wife. If you are going to make love you have to bare your body,"-disrobed her and led her to my bed. ²⁰

The words of Alice Aldwell,

The natives have a saying: A poor man's wife is every one's sister-in-law. ²¹

He seems to be a bundle of contradictions. We, Indians regard the English as superior and so their mutual relationship has always been lopsided. This also exemplified by the awe in which Nihal Singh holds Hodson Sahib. Their relationship is as representative of the relation between Indian soldiers and their British officers. The Indian holds their British officers are great esteem to have blind faith in them.

The slave mentality of Indians is evident. They are easily brainwashed and easily led. They regard Nicholas Sahib with so much reverence that some Sikhs go so far as to believe that he is an incarnation of one of their Gurus. They begin calling themselves 'Nikalsainis', whereas the English officers do not really care for their Indian subordinates. When Hodson sahib takes stock of the number of casualties incurred during the revolt, he only counts the number of goras and horses wounded or died. They do not think even to count the perished Indian soldiers. The British are also able to exploit the antagonistic relationship between the Indians themselves to their advantage during the revolt. To cite this, the Sikhs think that they are to fight the Hindus on the rebel side. After the suppression of the revolt, the English favour the Hindus and discriminate against the

Muslims. The kind of exploitation serves to further cause, a rift in the mutual relationship between the different communities of India.

Nihal Singh seems to be often as no specific counterpart. The historical British officer, Hodson Sahib recruits him who commands native as well as the British soldiers for quelling the 1857 uprising mutiny. He is typical but non-historical sturdy Sikh soldier. He admires the British for their cool courage, self-assurance, gallantry and justness. Moreover, he is happy to fight against the descendents of the Mughals who have been unjustly cruel to the revered Gurus of the Sikhs. Only the British understood too well the importance of religion in India. They are quick to exploit this to suit their own purposes. They enlist Indians in their army to fight with fellow Indians by preying upon their own religious statements. The British army recruits the Sikhs in and tells that they are to fight the Mussulmans. As Nihal Singh recounts the words of his mother when he was child:

“When I was a child Mai told me of Aurangzeb, king of Dilli, who had cut off the head of our Guru...”²²

The novelist develops the theme of anti-Muslim feelings among the Sikhs in what Nihal recounts. The Sikhs are told that their Guru has informed Aurangzeb that the Sahibs will come from the side of the rising Sun and with the help of Sikhs over through his dynasty. Nihal Singh has not heard of such prophesy. Still, he believes in it because he knows that the Sahibs are wise people. Nihal Singh feels and regrets at the good generals who lead the Sikhs. He tells that if they lead the Sikhs instead of traitors, they would have marched up to London town and fucked their mothers. The novelist pictures Nihal in a better light when he shows him as an angel for nationalist woman, Anwar Bai. She is a resident of Chowri Bazar who gets punishment for daring to challenge the British soldiers. She asks the British officer, Hobson to find his way.

Hobson orders Nihal to shoot her, however Nihal manages to release her calling her as his mother what moves him religiosity of the society. This surprises her who showers numerous blessings on him. In return, Nihal touches her feet and requests to forgive for treated her badly and for the hard word used at her. The novelist makes this change of heart as the expressive of a faithful Sikh character in accordance with the basic tenants of the Sikh faith in moments of crisis. Nihal Singh is a very good example in this context of the real Sikh society. They use the Sikhs to fight the Muslim rebels. The British enlist Pathan, Biloches and Punjabi Muslims in order to fight the Hindu rebels. Religion triggers off the revolt.

“But what right had he to order our Hindus and Muslim soldiers to put cartridges smeared with the fact of cows and pigs in their mouths?”²³

In this way, the Hindus and Muslims unite against the British. The rebels also use religion to provoke the Indian soldiers to against their officers. To the Muslim soldiers they send Muslim emissaries with the Quran and beg them to jihad against the pig-eating firangi. They send Brahamins carrying the Ganga water in brass pots to convince the Sikhs to murder the cow-eating maleechas. There is another Sikh character, Buda Singh. Singh presents him as a butt of mockery. As he lacks in intelligence and common sense, he is something of a Shakespearean character. Generally, he is an object of both sympathy and laughter who evokes our pity in his gruesome end.

THE BUILDERS:

The novelist puts his personal perception of men and events, particularly connected with the blue star operation and anti-Sikh riots. During that time, the novelist makes his narrative history. This is a special inclusion of the novelist to provide a panorama of Delhi in modern times.

Since Khushwant Singh's father Sobha Singh is a builder in Delhi, he describes the chapter "The Builders" very beautifully and interestingly. It describes the controversy between Edwin Lutyen and Baker-architects of New Delhi. There is also about Viceroy and the beginning nationalist movement. In fact, we can see the live period of the British in New Delhi.

The novelist himself is the narrator of the events who reveals his self in this chapter claiming rightly himself as one of the descendents of the builders of New Delhi. In the last two sections, he deals with the 20th century only the building up of the city. He shows the interesting relationship between Sujan Singh and his son Sobha Singh, the relationship between the Indians and the English.

It is common in an Indian society teaching of a father to the sons about their ancestral profession. Sujan Singh does the same. He is anybody in India engages in the project of building New Delhi as the new capital of India after 1911 when the capital of India is shifted from Calcutta to by Lord Irwin. The novelist bares his personal perception of men and events with his autobiographical touch connecting with the Operation Blue Star, anti-Sikh riots. He tries to have an overview of the certain fragments of historical time returning to the time. Mahatma Gandhi and other Congress leaders are also demanding self-rule. The Muslim Moplahs rise against Hindu moneylenders. Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru call for a boycott the visit of the Prince of Wales. Reading promptly jails them. Then he sends the army to crush the Moplahs. He is not able to stem the rising tide of Indian Nationalism.

The Congress sweeps the polls in the 1923 elections and Motilal becomes the main spokesperson in the Central Assembly. The new Viceroy, Lord Irwin is friendly with the Nationalist leaders. It believes that the English and the Indians will now work together as partners. However, the Nationalists are themselves a divided lot. Some of them are willing to co-operate with the English. Others want to drive them out of India; by force if necessary.

THE DISPOSSESSED:

This chapter depicts not only aftermath of Independence but also of later times of 1970s and 1980s. As regards the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the novelist himself takes on the task of a historian. This chapter is an important to complete the fragmentary of the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims that culminates in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. This also depicts the growth of the militant Hindu organization, the R.S.S. that exploits the young boys like Ram Rakha. Ram Rakha is a refugee from the same village as the builder's son. He is purely a fictional character not a historical one. He plays a fairly active and vital role in killing Muslims and Mahatma Gandhi for his pro-Muslim bias.

Having loses his young sister to Muslim abductors; he yearns to drive it out on Mahatma Gandhi and the Muslims in Delhi. He joins the R.S.S. cadres to carry out constant reconnaissance (survey) of the Birla House where Mahatma Gandhi lives, fasts, and holds his daily prayers. His heartfelt grief at the death of Mahatma Gandhi is unexpectedly reversal of expectations from the committed ideology of the kind Ram Rakha had become through his association with hardliners. Singh expresses effectively his anti-extremist views in a Hindu fanatic's events leading to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

The actual murder shakes his very being and he sheds off his extremism in one violent effort and waits for Mahatma Gandhi himself directly responsible for the murder. In the caricature of Mahatma Gandhi and in the fictionalization of his assassination, Singh points out the corrupting influence of evil of bigotry and violence on the young minds as seen in the person of Mahatma

Gandhi's assassination. This is what shows Nathuran Goodse, the ultimate and undying victory of Mahatma Gandhi over violence and the sustenance of the voice of sanity. In fact, the novelist describes the Muslim barbarity, the flight of Sikhs from Pakistan and their horrible flight in 'Delhi', the R.S.S. members and their hate for Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru; finally, the shooting of Mahatma Gandhi who keeps on insisting on the Hindu-Sikh unity. The R.S.S. indoctrinates the boys who have suffered in some manner due to the Muslims.

Then, they are motivated to indulge in terrorist activities against Muslims. All this causes a deep divide between the two communities. This breakdown of mutual relationship between the two main two communities of India extends to the breakdown of relationship between the Sikhs and the Hindus in the last chapter, "Bhagmati". This culminates in the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the mass killing of in Delhi. This chapter analyzes the political views and the novel ends on a sad note. It indicates that the communalism has come to stay in India and soon India will comprise of a seething mass of different communities perpetually at loggerheads with each other. The separatist movement in different parts of India today, is a testimony to this tragic fact. This has occurred due to the breakdown of mutual relationship among the people our country who no longer regards themselves as Indians. Rather they identify themselves based on their particular caste, community, religion, sect and even sub-sect. In the last chapter of the novel, Singh makes to illustrate the message of love and communal harmony effectively, which communicates much more in earlier episodes. He awakens effectively the distant, vanished ages to depict the interaction between man and social environment in the broadest manner. It is an artistic vindication of historical reality. In fact, the novel is a landmark achievement and a milestone in the corpus of Indo-Anglican fiction. DELHI is a novel of society and historical facts with a difference in the special narrative framework of Khushwant. It is not wholly autobiographical but has a group of characters around whom the events cluster. It is almost as a series of video cassettes of selected episodes from the past prepared one of our contemporaries with a narration of events in the narrator's life also. It is a veiled enquiry into the politics of modern India, what is the nerve centre and capital city of India that is Delhi.

The novel makes a fine balance among literary, social, and historical aspects. The novelist not only narrates simply something about Delhi, but he records also something that is special about it. It is not only likes and dislikes but the very seat of power has chosen the city as its permanent place. Although the southern India attracts the rulers by its varied spices, Delhi remains the seat of power. There come many foreign rulers and plunder the city, demolish all beautiful buildings and constructions. Singh turns all the rulers on their heads. In his 'A Note from the Author' Khushwant Singh writes,

'History provided me with the skeleton. I covered it with flesh and injected blood and a lot of seminal fluid into it'.²⁴

The novel is not only the book of history and society, but in addition combining all factors-humour, love, lust, sex, religion, irony, sarcasm and what not to call it a fine fiction. The forms and types of farting are interesting in the sense of humour. As usual in his other novels, the novelist's delineation on farting introduces with sex. True to his 'sex' humour, Singh describes the narrator as carrying on an affair with a hijda, after every foray into history. The eunuch represents the Indian society in some ways. She stands for the best in the Indian tradition. Throughout the novel religion and not-religions, God and not Gods, faith and not faiths are at the root of the values-system. Since there is no unity in its form, to understand that there is no corresponding focus on a single theme. The city, Delhi emerges ultimately as sterile, a dying city, a stale diet of past glory,

fawning flatterers' city, questionable, unlovable, ungrateful and cowardly city. Definitely, 'Delhi' is a human document. Various critics view it as an authentic documentary, a detective travesty of history, and as a knowledgeable guidebook in the shape of a novel. O.P.Mathur in his "A Gloss on History" calls it as

Mind and Will: non-fictional prose.²⁵

'Delhi' is an inscription of the repressed. The novel is a lust book with a different in its supreme excellence with the artistic mingling of the fact and the fiction. It serves as sustained balance, nowhere distort the facts or spoil the fiction. On its gigantic canvas, the novel crystallizes a long continuum of time and a remarkable magnitude of historical action the goes into the making of the great city. The technical excellence of the novel lies in its dexterous use of narrative stance and in its technical aspects forever.

As one goes through the book, one feels as if he is watching a colourful movie with different shades, turns, and different phases of the life of the city, its glory and shame, joys and sorrows. As in movies, Singh uses the flashback technique quite effectively with the highest degrees of perfection. His literary talent is versatile. His tendency is to accept the world as it emerges out of his varied experience of life and his positive approach to problems of his existence. The novel depicts not only the historical scenario of Delhi but it is also the history of India. It is not a history lesson but a lesson for those who have read the history. He tackles the subjects of religion, politics of the society and history. This is one of the best books in modern English Literature.

He puts bare the Indian society with its contradictions, balances, caste, communalism, strife of races and ethnics, the spirit of unity and diversity. Alternating past with present and present with past, the narrator and his mistress Bhagmati, the eunuch, Singh follows a recurring pattern. In the process, he makes a veiled inquiry into the modern political history, which gravitates around Delhi, the capital of India. The history, personages and anecdotes give lots of fun, pleasant, distasteful, ugly, repulsive and yet alluring.

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