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## **THE NOVELS OF MANOHR MALGONKAR AND KHUSHWANT SINGH: REWRITING HISTORY**

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### **Abstract**

Indian English has always been responsive to the changes in material reality and theoretical perspectives that have impacted and governed its study the time of its inception. Historical novels are seen as an introduction to history. The historical events Present article "The novels of Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh: Rewriting History" explores how historical novels interact with the public through the mixing of fact and fantasy. Historical novels have the power to reach for the neglected aspects of history by the proper historians. The historical event of great significance inspired a host of sensitive and creative writers to express their concern through the literary medium of fiction of English. Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh has made Indian history and consciousness intelligible in a more vivid and striking manner. The history - fiction interface, practiced by them is fascinating and culturally significant. In Indian literary history Khushwant Singh's name is bound to evolve as one of the finest historians and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observer and social critic. Malgonkar's military experience helped him to present the history through the novels in a very different way. They in their novels examine the impact of these political ideas of these people in the context of the Indian national movement. In this article my endeavour is to find how they put impact on Indian people.

### **Key-Words**

History, Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, Indian Literature.

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Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh as an artist take the opportunity to glorify the Indian history. The history-fiction interface, practiced by them is fascinating and culturally significant. They wanted to provide charismatic mass leaders and visionaries like Nana Sahib, Rani Laxmi, Shivaji, Mahatma Gandhi and others by whom the root and branch solution is provided to the historical and political India. They in their novels examine the impact of these historical and political ideas of these people in the context of the Indian national movement.

Khushwant's biggest attribute is that he speaks what he feels. He is honest to the extent that he offends even his friends and icons revered by people. It does not matter to him that it jeopardizes his chances in life. It is this quality that made Gandhi into a Mahatma. In Indian literary history Khushwant Singh's name is bound to evolve as one of the finest historians and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observer and social critic. He is attributed with freethinking. Khushwant Singh's comparisons of social and behavioral characteristics of Indians and Westerners are the examples of his acid wit. He brought history to our doorsteps. Khushwant Singh is very truthful about himself. Singh says:

"My concern is not with my outward appearance, my untidy turban, unkempt beard or my glazed look. (I have been told that my eyes are those of a lustful bud mash) but what lies behind the physical the real me compounded of conflicting emotions like love and hate, general irritability and occasional equipoise, angry denunciation and tolerance of another's point of view, rigid adherence to self prescribed regimen and accommodation of others'

Khushwant Singh had no intention of becoming a writer, and he did not have any illusion about his capacity to handle words. He had actually trained to be a lawyer. However, Khushwant Singh's poor academic record deterred him from taking up the pen. Writing was for those who had a brilliant academic record, and not for someone like him who had barely scraped through his exams. It took him several years to overcome this feeling of inferiority. He was able to do so only

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after he heard stories read out by men with great academic distinction, and read Indian novelists who had become successful, like: Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan. This led him to conclude that one does not have to be a good student to be a good storyteller. And finally he gained confidence to venture into the field of writing. The opportunity came to him after the independence of India and the Partition.

Khushwant Singh's discovery of his own talent should serve as an inspiration to all budding writers who have doubts about their own abilities. The British had decided to pull out, but after the division of India. Lahore was to become a part of Pakistan. Violence had broken out in 1946. Hindus and Sikhs were being massacred brutally in northwestern Punjab, Lahore and Amritsar. By the middle of 1947 it was evident that Hindus and Sikhs would have to leave Pakistan. Singh was reluctant to leave; but the mutual hatred between the two communities had escalated to a great extent. Khushwant Singh decided to leave Lahore temporarily (entrusting his home to Mansur) until the violence subsided. Keeping in tune with his literary aspirations Singh made his home a virtual meeting place of journalists. He had brought several cases of premium scotch with him from Canada. Scotch had become scarce in post-war England. As a result, his parties were immensely popular. Eminent journalists like: Kingsley Martin, Harold Evans, William Clarke, David Astor; writers like: C.P. Snow, Prof. C.E.M. Joad; and poets: Auden, Louis MacNeice, and Dylan Thomas; all frequented his place. He was later to write an essay entitled, "*Ungentle into the Good Night: Dylan Thomas*". This was a part of his book, *Need for a New Religion in India and Other Essays*. At this time his first collection of short stories, *The Mark of Vishnu* based mostly on his experiences in Lahore and Ottawa was published by the Saturn Press. It received good reviews everywhere. At this point Khushwant Singh began seriously toying with the idea of taking up writing as a full-time career. Singh took a hard decision and resigned in 1951. He gave up the privileges of diplomatic life, invitations to the Buckingham Palace, embassy receptions, and unlimited supply of duty-free liquor, and the like; in favour of an uncertain future. He did not consult any one, not even his wife because at that point of time the communication channels between the two had almost broken down.

Khushwant Singh sent his wife, two children and servants to India. This scenario proved useful to provide the background to the story, "*The Sardarji and the Starlet*". This story is based on a true incident that involved his classmate of a Government College. Khushwant Singh has also written an essay on him entitled "*N. Iqbal Singh*" in his book, *Women and Men in My Life*. He soon realized that he would have to specialize in some subject in order to make a distinct name for himself in the literary world. He decided to take up the study of The Sikhs. He also wrote *The Sikhs*, a book about the history of his people. In this book, Khushwant Singh made the controversial prediction that by the next century the Sikhs would merge back into the Hindu community. By now, Singh had run through his savings and since none of his three books had earned him much, he decided to return home.

In the summer of 1951, Khushwant Singh was back to square one, in Delhi, living in his father's house and dependent upon his generosity. After a short period at Princeton and Hawaii, Singh began to teach Indian Religious and Contemporary Indian Politics at Swarthmore College.

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These lectures were later published under the title, *Vision of India*. His stint at Swarthmore laid the foundation for the pattern of life that Khushwant Singh follows to this day. It was here that he developed his legendary respect for time. He began to eat little, drink more and became a stickler for time. Khushwant Singh follows a strict regimen in his daily life to this day. This is a diametrically opposed to his image as a merry Sardar who is also a drunkard and a womanizer. He gets up around 4 a.m. prepares tea for himself and his guards. Then read *The Hindustan Times*, listen to music on the transistor. The rest of the day is spent in reading other paper, book (he read one book everyday), letter (he make it a point to answer each one to them), writing review translating book and poetry, working upon his column, and books. In the evening a swim provides additional exercise.

This is allowed by some reading, some T.V. and then his quota of three scotches, an early dinner and bed by 10 p.m. Guests are invariable asked to leave by 9 p.m. The credit or keeping to this regimen goes to his wife as well. She makes sure that guests, howsoever distinguished, do not overstay their welcome. The routine varies somewhat when he is socializing, or is out of Delhi. While Singh was still at Swarthmore he was invited to take over as the editor of *The Illustrated Weekly* of India. He had been offered the position earlier as well, but he had been unable to take it up. At that time he had been committed to the Rockefeller Foundation. This time round he had no such compulsions. Today Khushwant Singh is the most well-known author, columnist and journalist of India with an international readership. What makes Khushwant Singh's travelogues special is his total lack of inhibition. He tells it all as he saw it, missing out nothing whether it was are buffed pass at a girl, a joke at his expense or a lecherous intention that came to nothing.

"*I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGLE*" by Singh explores rather a despicable side of India's history- that of servile Indian government servants in the British regime. How unbelievably the Indian civil servants of that time would degrade themselves stopping short of nothing to be in the good books of the British. The novel depicts the British themselves as bemused by such Indians at their beck. Buta Singh typifies those oily Indians awaiting even that slight nod of approval from the British Raj. While the ending of the novel is dominated by the mother Sabhrai trying to save her family from falling apart, the opening chapters of a Sarus Crane chasing the killers of its mate gives the reader gooseflesh. A startlingly written character of Champak is unanticipated. She is the sexually demanding wife of Sher Singh who is growing tired of her incessant sexual needs. She incites his desire by massaging his legs and then talking vulgar, imagined things that happened to her during the day to arouse him to perform. Another interesting character is of Madan Lal, Sher Singh's friend and comrade against the British. *The Company of Women* may be regarded as "the millennium's last Great Indian Lascivious Novel" giving the "voyeuristic view of male and female anatomy and titillating accounts of the innumerable sexual encounters of his protagonist'. The author's narrative skill is so superb that a reader feels like watching a blue film rather than reading a fictional novel. The novel begins with its hero Mohan Kumar, a successful Delhi's Businessman, breaking off with his wife and his everlasting "lusty" efforts to set up a more flexible arrangement for appeasement of his physical needs. The initial endeavor begins at his home with the sweeper's and extends to the wide world of lonely women beyond the neighbourhood to the

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Princeton, having most bizarre of his "triumph" in one night encounter with a devout Muslim woman from Pakistan. The novel chronologically presents the most sensuous pictures of the nine women with whom, the hero beds, including his wife. Of the eight on the description, one each is African-American, Kashmiri Pandit, Muslim, Dalit Hindu, Hindu, Brahmin, Tamilian Christian, Goan Roman Catholic, Sri Lankan Buddhist and an unnamed women of easy virtue in Bombay. Singh seems to have extending the slogan that the love and sex know no caste, class and community bar. In order to explore the novels of Khushwant Singh, it is first necessary to understand his life and his ideas on fiction and his major concerns. The story entitled "*Paradise*" begins with the cause revealed by the heroine Margaret Bloom why she felt bound to go to India. It was, perhaps, the same reason that compels the people from every corner of the world, to come to India, particularly Europeans, to find peace. Margaret Bloom gives the real account of the relationship between her parents. Her father was a big-built man while her mother was small and extremely attractive, with golden brown hair, dark blue eyes and boobs to die for. She asked to herself why she agreed to marry her father, who was a coarse man. He was never able to understand. He was the chief sales manager of a large, Jewish-owned department store; she the personal secretary of a member of the Board of Directors who wanted her to be his mistress. The man hounded her, so she told him where to get off and became the secretary of another member of the Board. She also agreed to marry her father who had been making passes at her for a long time. European women, come to India impelled by different purposes. Some of them are drawn by the prodigious variety of the Indian life, the others come for a better knowledge of India's Geography, art and culture. Still others come to India in search of Peace of Mind and Soul. They are attracted by the Indian saints who, they believe, have the power to unravel to them the mystery of life and to offer them the light of truth. It is an indisputable fact that Khushwant Singh has excelled almost all other Indian English short story writers in artistry. All his stories have a rounded perfection. "*The Portrait of a Lady*", "*The Fawn*" and "*A Love Affair in London*", "*A Punjab Pastoral*" with their rich suggestion can stand comparison with any story of the masters in this field.

Manohar Malgonkar's *Distant Drum* is his first novel where he uses all those devices which make a novel readable. He beautifully portrays the feelings that arise from the conflicts of personal and regimental loyalties. The novelist uses technical devices such as sex, horror, poetry, adultery, suicide, sensational and melodramatic scenes to make it an interesting novel.

His second novel *Combat of Shadows* (1962) presents a story of the wretched life of the labourers of tea-plantations in Assam. But he reverts the thing soon to conflicting cultures. Henry Winton develops fondness for Ruby, a beautiful Anglo-Indian girl. Her ambition is to enjoy the real status of an English woman. She has really craving for an Indo-Anglian boy, Jugal Kishore, leader of the labourers, but he actually loves Gauri. Through the story of the conflict of the Master and the labourers of the British tea-company the novelist has succeeded to analyze the forces- ses, money and fame on the one hand and on the other, treatment of characters on cross cultures basis.

*The Princes* exposes the princely courts degenerated into centres of love, intrigues and luxuries. He describes those people who lead reformist movements against monopoly of power and corrupt politics. The novelist presents a character like Kanak Chand who is no different that

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Jugal Kishore and Lala Bishnu Sarandeo of his earlier two novels. Here the novelist indicates the possibility of the conflict between kingship and liberal humanism, traditional and modernity. Therefore there is conflict between the attitudes of the father of those of the son, the Maharaja and Abhay.

Malgonkar's next novel *A Bend in the Ganges* depicts particularly Gandhian era but there are also conflicting cultures which make the novel more interesting. The novelist has created two characters- Devi Dayal and Gian who in course of their actions differ from each other. The novelist successfully describes Sundari's love and Shafi's religious fanaticism. Through the diverse feelings of the Hindu and the Muslims the novelist is able to make threadbare analysis of Hindu Muslim cultures.

*The Devil's Wind* is a full account of the historical events. The novelist recreates images of priests, Pandits and Mullas. Through his imagery he exposes the prejudices of different communities- Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. His other fictional works serve as espionage thrillers- *Spy in Amber* (1971) and *Bandicoot Run* (1982). *Spy in Amber* as Malgonkar admits, owes much to the initiative and talent of his daughter, Suniti Malgonkar. The novel is about a Tibetan Monastery and the Chinese designs on its fabulous wealth. It also describes the concern of monks to dispatch it to a safer place in India. *Shalimar*, published in 1968, and *Open-Season* (1978) are the film scripts.

*Bandicoot Run* is about a file missing from the Army Head quarters in New Delhi. The C.I.A wants to get hold of the file but it is sold to Pakistan through unexpected intrigues and rivalry in the corridors of power. It is a highly suspenseful story of a spy tunnel that runs all the way from the innermost sanctums of the Indian Army Headquarters to the inter services intelligence office in Pakistan. In this novel one finds a general accusing his colleague of charges that are false.

*The Sea-Hawk* is more a biography than a novel. It is about India's military glory. It describes fascinating life and battle of Kanhoji Angrey, and admiral who offered formidable opposition to his enemies.

*The Men Who Killed Gandhi* published 1981 investigates the murder of Mahatma Gandhi in its totality. But it is a fictionalized version of the event. Malgonkar succeeds in telling it in a most engrossing manner. He is a prolific writer with a number of novels, some books of history and collection of short stories. He is a novelist with an accomplished technique.

## Conclusion

Khushwant Singh's novel drew me nearer to his characters and incidents than anything else I have read in English on the theme. Malgonkar appeared to be writing a kind of measured, stately prose that the times Literary Supplement compliments him on, and his narrative lacked any strong attachment to his characters. He gave the impression of being detached and impersonal in his observation, description and narration of incidents. Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh has made Indian history and consciousness intelligible to in a more vivid and striking manner. The image of India that he presents is colourfully memorable.

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