Historical Narratives in Khushwant Singh's Literary Writings

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Abstract: ***He was known as a man who revelled in contradictions: An agnostic who authored esteemed tomes on religion; a self-professed hedonist who led a remarkably disciplined and hard-working life; someone who took very little in public life seriously, least of all himself, but who'd had the courage to stand up for his beliefs, returning his Padma Bhushan in protest of Operation Blue Star; a celebrated ladies' man who through his life had cared deeply about the education of the girl child, and had championed his female colleagues, entrusting them with senior portfolios throughout his career; indeed (to paraphrase Kipling) a man who could walk with kings and priPopularly, known as the 'Dirty Old Man Of Indian Journalism', Khushwant Singh was and will always be a writer, a columnist, and an author who inspires honesty and veracity in generations after him. He would have seen one more year of his life, had he been alive but he remains so in his verses, prose, and stories nonetheless.me ministers, but who never forgot his earthy roots, bawdy sense of humour or common touch. Khushwant Singh admitted that scholars superior to him had written on Sikh history and religion, but he was, as the historians Eleanor Nesbitt and Dr Priya Atwal reminded us, justly proud of his 2 volume History of the Sikhs and biography of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He is best selling author of over 80 books and two Weekly columns syndicated in over 40 English publications. India Today describes him "The Capital's best known living monument." In the year 1999, when Sikhs celebrated the 300th year of Khalsa at Anandpur sahib. It is estimated that about that million people visited the city at the time. To the delight of millions of Sikhs, he was honoured with "Order of (Nishaan-e-Khalsa), the highest decorum bestowed upon by the Sikhs community. His works range from political commentary and contemporary satire to outstanding translations of Sikh religious texts and Urdu poetry.***

Key Words: Train to Pakistan, Journalism, Historical insight, Kasauli, Contractor, Sikhs, Print media, Padma Vibhushan, Operation Blue Star, Delhi riots, communal violence, derailed democracy, religious hypocrisy, individual freedom, social equality, Illustrated Weekly of India.

Objectives:

- To briefly assess the historical narratives of K singh's novels
- To understand his writings as a source for 'Oral history'
- To locate the democratic progression in contemporary India
- To bring out his crucial contribution to Indian journalism too….

Khushwant Singh [02-02-1915 to 24-03-2014], one of the best -known Indian writers of all times, was born in 1915 in Hadali (now in Pakistan). The celebrated author wanted to be remembered as someone who made people smile and wrote his own epitaph in which he described himself as one "who spared neither man nor God". Born into a well-off family, he initially practised law in Lahore. But partition was the trigger for him to change professions. "I loathed the law. I thought I can't waste my entire life living off other people's quarrels," he had said. He changed his career from a lawyer to a journalist and also got into politics, but remembered for his word craft and ability to navigate the circumstances. Singh, nicknamed "King Leer" for his legendary roving eye, was a household name who wrote more than 100 books and countless newspaper columns, He was educated at the Government College, Lahore and at King's College, Cambridge University, and the Inner Temple in London. He practiced law at the Lahore High Court for several years before joining the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in 1947. He began a distinguished career as a journalist with the All India Radio in 1951. Since then he has been founder-editor of Yojana (1951-1953), editor of the Illustrated weekly of India (1979-1989), chief editor of New Delhi (1979-1980), and editor of the Hindustan times (1980-1983). His Saturday column "With Malice Towards One and All" in the Hindustan times is by far one of the most popular columns of the day. According to the Library of Congress, "Khushwant Singh's name is bound to go down in Indian literary history as one of the finest historians and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observer and social critic." In July 2000, he was conferred the "Honest Man of the Year Award" by the Sulabh International Social Service Organization for his courage and honesty in his "brilliant incisive writing." At the award ceremony, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh described him as a "humourous writer and incorrigible believer in human goodness with a devil-may-care attitude and a courageous mind." The Indian external affairs minister said that the secret of Khushwant Singh's success lay in his learning and discipline behind the "veneer of superficiality." Khushwant Singh's work included both fiction and nonfiction. He mainly wrote in English language. Among his major books included 'Train To Pakistan' (first Published in

1956) which won him international acclaim and Groove Press Award in 1954. The book depicts the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. His second major work included Essays on India's Emergency by the name 'Why I Supported the Emergency' (Published in 2004). His third major work was 'Delhi: A Novel. He also wrote 'I shall Not Hear the Nightingal' (Published in 1959). 'The Portrait of a Lady: Collected Stories' was in the form of a short story collection. He also authored other books such as 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh' and 'Fall of Sikh Kingdom.' Apart from these, he wrote and published a classic two-volume book on Sikh History by the name 'A history of Sikhs' (Published in 1963). His other famous works included 'Truth, Love and a little Malice' in the form of an autobiography and published in 2002, 'Sex, Scotch and Scholarship' and' In the Company of Women' (Published in 1999). Significantly, he wrote his last book at the age of 98 titled The Good, The Bad and the Ridiculous.' Actually, he co-wrote the book with Humra Qureshi.

Born to Sir Sobha Singh, a prominent builder, and Veeran Bai at Hadali in Punjab's Khushab district (now in Pakistan). During those times, most births and deaths were not recorded. Therefore, his father simply wrote February 2, 1915, while he was admitting Khushwant Singh to Modern School in Delhi. Although his beloved grandmother, Lakshmi Bai said he was born in August, prompting Singh to later "set his birthday" to August 15. His grandmother had given him the name Khushal Singh and his pet name was "Shalee". He chose Khushwant as his first name to rhyme with that of Bhagwant, his elder brother. He believed that his new name was "self-manufactured and meaningless." Singh was born in the Muslim-majority village of Hadali in what is now the Punjab province of Pakistan. His family was involved in trade and large construction contracts for the New Delhi designed by Sir Edward Lutyens in the 1920s and 30s.

K. Singh received his early education at Modern School in Delhi. For higher education, he attended Government College in Lahore, St Stephen's College in Delhi, and King's College in London. Singh was married to Kawal Malik who was a childhood friend of his and they had two children. He declared himself as an agnostic and never said prayers. He was never a bookish boy and managed to scrape by with the minimum of work. After St Stephen's college, Delhi, he went to Government College, Lahore, where he gained a third-class degree. Singh then tried for a place at King's College London, since it sounded grander than University College or the London School of Economics, and in 1934 embarked on the sea journey to take it up. He also enrolled at the Inner Temple and was called to the bar. A move to enter the Indian civil service proved unsuccessful, and so he went back to Lahore, where he pursued a less than brilliant legal career at the high court. This was evident in his 2011 work titled Agnostic Khushwant: There is no God. Khushwant Singh was against all organised religions. According to him, "One can be a saintly person without believing in God and a detestable villain despite believing in him. In my personalised religion, there is no God!" Singh had further said that he did not believe in rebirth or reincarnation of man and the day of judgment, heaven or hell. He believed in the concept that death is final.

In 1947 he joined India's ministry of external affairs and served as press officer in Ottawa and London. However, his relationship with politicians and bureaucrats was always an uneasy one. At the same time he was researching and writing on Sikh history, art and religion, and his two-volume History of the Sikhs, published in the early 1960s, became a standard work. He also wrote passionately about the environment and lovingly about flowers and birds: a cat-lover and rambler, he was also a dedicated birdwatcher, and a friend of the naturalist and conservationist, Peter Scott. When partition came, Singh was a witness to people being killed on both sides of the India-Pakistan border. Train to Pakistan reflects his accuracy and honesty, and was made into a 1998 Hindi film directed by Pamela Rooks. I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959), Delhi: A Novel (1990) and The Company of Women (1999) remain landmarks in Indo-English fiction, while the title of his autobiography, Truth, Love and a Little Malice (2002), is exactly to the point. With Humra Quraishi he produced Absolute Khushwant: The Low-down on Life, Death and Most Things In-between (2010) and a book of biographical profiles, The Good, the Bad and the Ridiculous (2013). In his final novel, The Sunset Club (2010), a group of octogenarians discourse on politics, philosophy and the pleasures of the flesh. He worked as a lawyer for several years but the work did not give him satisfaction. He then served in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) as an information officer of the Indian government in Toronto, Canada. After that, he had also worked as Press Attaché and Public Officer for the Indian High Commission in the cities: London and Ottawa.

Khushwant Singh's monumental work, 'Delhi: A novel,' is, in the sense of the passage above, a novel about ghosts: of those who lie buried in beautiful stone mausoleums, of those who were thrown into unmarked graves, of those who were burnt on the ghats of the Yamuna and of those who became carrion for the city's vultures. It is a novel about all the blood that has been shed in the triangular region of the North Indian plain demarcated by the ridge in the West and the South and the river in the East. It is a lament for an endless sequence of murders of brother by brother and for betrayals of lovers and fathers. It is a celebration of the seasons and the trees and the flowers, and of the life led in this city by the river through the generations. It is an old man's admonition to the young, a free spirit's "up yours" to blinkered puritans, and a writer's querulous and occasionally

exuberant attempt to speak truth not just to the powers of the time when the book was written, but to power across time. The framing narrative of Delhi is a desultory first-person account of the day-to-day life of a Sikh man whose first name we are never told. He is in his fifties when we first meet him, sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s, and lives by himself with a "cook-bearer" who waits on him, and a mentally unstable Sikh chowkidar called Budh Singh. Mr Singh, the narrator, makes a living as a freelance writer and occasional tourist guide, and thrives on the unending supply of free Scotch and bored sexual partners made available by Delhi's two hundred diplomatic missions. He is a member of a presumably informal group called the "old cock network" which appears to act as a clearinghouse of fornicatory opportunities. Immensely knowledgeable about the monuments of Delhi and clearly in love with the city he calls home, Singh is a sensitive sort whose sensitivity does not prevent him from taking his pleasure where he might find it: When we first meet him he has just returned from a trip overseas and is showing Lady Jane Hoity-Toity, a very minor English royal, around archaeological sites in the vicinity of Delhi in the hope that he will eventually get to sleep with her. It is an easy life in the postcolonial capital in the early years of the republic for a professional scrounger like Singh. Opening the picnic basket packed for her by her host, the President of India, Lady Jane tells Singh: "Help yourself to anything you like—Scotch, champagne, beer, gin—all on your old President."

Khushwant Singh wrote of the book in the foreword to the paperback edition that "I put in it all I had in me as writer: love, lust, sex, hate, vendetta and violence—and above all, tears." He goes on to reveal his real motive in writing the book: "My only aim," he writes, "was to get [my readers] to know Delhi and love it as much as I do." It remains to be seen if anyone will, in the future, love Delhi as much as the author of this stupendous work did, or bring all of Singh's erudition, zest for life and remarkable spiritual depth to bear in expressing that love. But, while we wait for the next such person to appear, let us pause for a moment to wonder how a city as degraded, dirty, deceitful and downright hostile as Delhi can inspire such love, and what the nature of this love might be. An out-and-out bestseller in India when it was first published, Delhihas rarely been acknowledged as an ambitious and powerful literary work. Despite being one of perhaps only two Indian English novels, along with Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines, to grapple with the 1984 riots directly, Khushwant Singh's magnum opus has received little serious critical attention. Even Amitav Ghosh, while explicitly bemoaning the absence of literary responses to the 1984 riots, omitted to mention Khushwant Singh's novel. This regrettable omission occurs in Ghosh's essay "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi" where the writer describes his personal encounter with the happenings in Delhi in November 1984. He also explains that the primary literary concern that underlay his own response to the 1984 riots, The Shadow Lines, comes from his reading of the essay "Literature and War" by the Bosnian writer Dzevad Karahasan who says: "The decision to perceive literally everything as an aesthetic phenomenon—completely sidestepping questions about goodness and truth—is an artistic decision." The reference here is to the depiction of violence and Karahasan is particularly critical of "people who observe and experience the most horrendous suffering of their neighbors as a mere aesthetic excitement." The concerns engendered by his reading of this essay pushed Ghosh to move descriptions of violence offstage and focus on the lives of people affected by it instead. But Khushwant Singh had already shown, in the novel Delhi that was published around the same time as The Shadow Lines, and some years before Ghosh's essay, that it is possible to depict violence in a way that forces us to confront questions of goodness and truth.

His book, 'The End of India' forces us to confront the absolute corruption of religion that has made us among the most brutal people on earth. It was during British rule that Hindu nationalism took birth. The most powerful movement, the Arya Samaj, began under the leadership of Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883). His call 'Back to the Vedas' received wide response, particularly in northern India. Amongst the Arya Samaj converts was the Punjabi Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) who was both an ardent Hindu and a leader of the Indian National Congress. So was Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) of Maharashtra who revived the cult of Ganapati and coined the slogan 'Swaraj is our birthright'. In due course of time, Hindu militant organizations took birth. The most important of these was the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940) in Nagpur. He propagated the cause of a Hindu rashtra, a Hindu state. He was anti-Muslim and also anti-Gandhi, because the Mahatma strove for equal rights for all religions. Hedgewar was succeeded by M.S. Golwalkar, who was followed by Balasaheb Deoras. Together, these leaders, all charismatic and all unashamedly communal, strengthened the organization through fascist propaganda, strict discipline and targeted social work among the Hindus during calamities like earthquakes and famines and during Partition. By 1990, the RSS had over one million members, who included, among others, Atal Behari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti—the last three charged with the destruction of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992—and Narendra Modi, the present poster boy of the Hindu right who presided over the pogrom in Gujarat. "The RSS was, and is, anti-Muslim, anti-Christian and anti-left. It could be dismissed as a lunatic group as long as it remained on the fringes of mainstream politics. Not any more. Its political offshoot, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, today's Bharatiya Janata Party, had only two MPs in the Lok Sabha in 1984, but by 1991 it had 117. Today, with its allies, it rules the country."

There are now several other Hindu organizations as, if not more, militant than the RSS. There is the Shiv Sena led by the rabble-rouser Bal Thackerey, an admirer of Adolf Hitler. He started with a movement called 'Maharashtra for Maharashtrians' aimed at ousting South Indians from Bombay. His mission soon changed to ousting Muslims from India. In the 1990s he spread his tentacles across the country and boasts of his 'sainiks' taking the leading part in destroying the mosque in Ayodhya. Perhaps as a reward he has his quota of ministers in the central government. Besides the Shiv Sena, there are the more mischievous Bajrang Dal and the Vishva Hindu Parishad, currently leading the agitation to build a Ramjanmabhoomi temple on the exact site where the now-destroyed Babri Masjid stood—no matter what the government or the courts of law have to say. This is typical. Most members of the extended Sangh parivar regard themselves above the law of the land. They have arrogated to themselves the right to decide the fate of one billion Indians.

Partition literature fills a long shelf. There is early fiction by survivors and spectators: realist narratives (Singh's "Train to Pakistan"), feminist epics (Yashpal's "This Is Not That Dawn"), stripped-down, nightmarish short stories (Saadat Hasan Manto's "Black Margins"). In the nineteen-eighties came a new flourishing, with now canonical novels by Salman Rushdie ("Midnight's Children"), Amitav Ghosh ("Shadow Lines"), and Bapsi Sidhwa ("Ice Candy Man"). Certain tropes and tendencies repeat. There is a reliance on coming-of-age stories, in which the loss of the nation's innocence maps neatly onto a character's; twins illustrate a conjoined fate; a dead woman personifies the fractured motherland. (These tropes are so alluring that a recent American young-adult novel about Partition, Veera Hiranandani's "The Night Diary," combined all of them, in a coming-of-age story about a twin born to a mother who dies in childbirth.) A tidy word, "Partition." Amid what the Punjabis call the raula—the "uproar"—the region convulsed with violence, Hindus and Sikhs on one side, Muslims on the other. Entire villages were massacred. Neighbors turned on each other. It's estimated that a million people were killed, and that seventy-five thousand women and girls were abducted and raped, a third of them under the age of twelve. Millions of refugees fled in one of the largest and most rapid migrations in history. "Blood trains" crisscrossed the fresh border, carrying silent cargo—passengers slaughtered during the journey. Cities transformed into open-air refugee camps, like the one in Delhi to which my grandmother escaped in the night, alone with her children, feeding the baby opium, the story goes, so he would not cry. Bhisham Sahni's "Tamas," a 1973 Hindi novel set in that period, brings such a camp to life. The exhausted refugees are greeted by a functionary of the Relief Committee with the unpropitious nickname Statistics Babu. "I want figures, only figures, nothing but figures," he instructs. The refugees mill around him, unhearing. They weep, stare blankly. They repeat, in exasperating detail, every step of their journeys. "Why don't you understand?" Statistics Babu pleads. "I am not here to listen to the whole 'Ramayana.' Give me figures—how many dead, how many wounded, how much loss of property and goods. That is all."

Train to Pakistan is a 1956 historical novel by Khushwant Singh. Set during the 1947 partition of India that created the nations of Pakistan and India, it focuses on the way partition impacted the people on the ground. Focusing on the lives of ordinary citizens as they were torn from their homes, Train to Pakistan brings a human dimension to one of the bloodiest periods in the history of the two countries. Before the 1947 partition, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs lived side by side, despite occasional conflict and violence. Partition set such religious and cultural differences in stone and families were forced to abandon their homes, moving to areas that were deemed safe for those of their religious belief. However, the resettlement process itself was filled with danger as extremist elements sought to take advantage of the chaos. These ad hoc evacuations took place on foot, via cart, and on crowded trains. As these refugees attempted to escape the violence, they would soon become caught up in the ongoing civil war between Hindus and Muslims. Although many refugees sought safety in the countryside, far away from the center of the violence, rural areas were filled with danger as well, as tribal gangs targeted refugees. In all, it is estimated that almost ten million people were relocated during the conflict. Of those, more than a million were killed in the violence that erupted during the resettlement process. Through this all, the trains continued to run, shuttling refugees along a dangerous path. The trains became targets themselves, as both sides in the civil war saw them as an effective way of killing large numbers of refugees. They became known as ghost trains, or funeral trains.

Many villages, such as 'Mano Majra' where the majority of the novel takes place, relied on supply trains, and the trains' arrivals and departures structured daily life in the villages. As the war progressed, the trains became more and more irregular, and were often filled with more refugees than the small villages could handle. As the chaos in the center of the country increasingly reached the rural villages, fear crept into the villages and touched every aspect of their lives. In Mano Majra, life was still fairly peaceful, and the village was religiously diverse with a population of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. For hundreds of years, the village existed in a spirit of cooperation, and the people relied on each other for their survival. The religious conflict taking place in the urban centers seemed a million miles away until the arrival of the first ghost train. The train carries many corpses, and the villagers were overcome with horror. A second train arrives soon afterwards, and with it more

changes for the village. They are soon ordered by soldiers to help bury the dead before the start of monsoon season. Soon, the fragile peace among religions in the village is broken as the Muslim citizens in the village are ordered to evacuate. Stripped of their belongings, families that have lived in Mano Majra for generations are exiled with only the possessions they can carry. Although the Muslims suffer the brunt of the soldiers' authority, the soldiers have plans for the Sikh and Hindu populations as well. An attack is planned on the next train to Pakistan, and the Hindu and Sikh citizens are drafted into it. The soldiers will strafe the train with gunfire, and when people flee the train the villagers will attack them and finish them off. The horror of this plan is emphasized when the villagers realize that this next train will not be carrying Muslim citizens, but people from their village. They are being ordered to attack their own friends and neighbors. One man, a Sikh thief named Jugga, is horrified to realize that his bride-to be, a Muslim woman, will be on the train as well. In the face of this violent attack, the citizens of Mano Majra are forced to confront the beginnings of ethnic cleansing in their nation. Jugga, a man who has been complicit in violence in the past, is forced to decide if this is the time to take a stand, or if violence is now inevitable. The crisis of faith he experiences as he struggles to rise above the current climate of hatred and stand up for his friends and neighbors is the crux of Train to Pakistan. "Train to Pakistan remains one of the seminal works dealing with the partition of India and explores themes of love, religion, and alliance. Singh paints a picture of a village where no one is either pure evil or pure good. Jugga—a deeply flawed man—represents the idea that during periods of religious and political conflict, people can choose to walk a different path, even if the cost is high."

"The partition of India was one of the most dreadful times in recent Indian history. Since the 1950s, it has time and again been depicted in various media. However, while most of those focussed mainly on the socio-political causes and effects, the Train to Pakistan is a novel which has captured the essential human trauma and suffering in the face of such a terror and crisis. The novel commences with a description of Mano Majra, a little village with Muslim and Sikh population that suddenly becomes a part of the border between Indian and Pakistan. An idyllic and peaceful village, Mano Majra resorted to love and harmony even at the face of all odds till external forces came and disrupted all the harmony. The odds start when a train filled with dead bodies of Sikhs and Hindus arrive in Mano Majra. Riots and strikes reached a high with the Sikhs and Hindus being on one side and the Muslims on the other. Torn between them and their vested interests are two people—Juggut and Iqbal, the former being a criminal and the latter being a western educated fellow on a mission to reform the society. Also underlying it is a love story that transcends all religion and odds. Regarded as one of the most heart-rending testimonials of the partition of 1947, the Train to Pakistan is an ideal novel for those who wish to learn more about India's past and are looking for more than the socio-political scenario behind the partition." Khushwant Singh is careful to maintain a balanced view, pointing out that the evil of violence was in the nature of man and that the socio-religious concept of 'community' served abstract functions like moral exoneration or condemnation. Kushwant Singh makes it quite clear that on the score of massacres no side was less guilty than another. Thus, while the two communities in Mano Majra pledge their mutual distrust, Jugga and the Muslim girl Nooran pledge their love. While at the lowest end of the moral scale are the parasites of partition who massacre for pleasure and plunder (people like Malli and his dacoits who at the beginning of Train to Pakistan murder the moneylender of Mano Majra and at the end plan to reap a harvest of Muslim death). At the opposite end of the scale; of course, is Malli's enemy Jugga, without whom Khushwant Singh's view would lack a morally-redeeming aspect.

Kushwant Singh was said to wake up at 4 am each day and write his columns by hand. His works range from political commentary and contemporary satire to outstanding translations of Sikh religious texts and Urdu poetry. Despite the name, his column "With Malice Towards One and All", regularly contains secular exhortations and messages of peace. In addition, he was one of the last remaining writers to have personally known most of the stalwart writers and poets of Urdu and Punjabi languages, and profiles his recently deceased contemporaries in his column. One of the most striking aspects of his weekly writings was his outright honesty; he would openly admit to his weaknesses and mistakes, along with an acceptance of his declining health and physical abilities in more recent times. Khushwant Singh has worldwide readership. He has written for almost all the major national and international newspapers in India and abroad. He has numerous TV and radio appearances at home and Internationally. He has had an extraordinary career as a writer. A book, "A history of Sikhs" by him remains to this day a well-researched and scholarly work. It is a classic two-volume book on Sikh History and is used as reference by many scholars. He has written several novels, both fiction and nonfiction, which have been translated into many languages. Khushwant's "Train to Pakistan" won him international acclaim and Grove Press Award in 1954. He brought history to our doorstep both for Punjabi and non-punjabi speaking people. He wrote the book "Maharaja Ranjit Singh" explaining his secular rule. He also wrote "Fall of Sikh kingdom". His translation of Japji, Hymns of Nanak and the Guru shows his spiritual side. From Mind to Supermind. A commentary on Bhagwat Geeta, testifies his secular nature. Another book declaring Love in four

languages, along with Sharda Kaushki, presents a selection of finest poems in English, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. He was a man for many people in many languages. He has translated Amrita Pritam's poems "Pinjar" (Skeleton) into English. A self-proclaimed agnostic, lover of fine scotch whiskey and admirer of female beauty, he nonetheless leads a very disciplined life. One of the most striking aspects of his weekly writings is his outright honesty; he will openly admit to his weaknesses and mistakes, along with an acceptance of his declining health and physical abilities in more recent times.

Though his mother tongue was Punjabi and his cultural language was Urdu – Kushwant Singh loved the Urdu poets and knew the Persian script – he chose to write in English, and soaked himself in Punjabi, Urdu and English and other European literature. Intellectually independent, he never took himself too seriously, and despite his Sikh background was an unrepentant agnostic. He made quite a success out of poking fun at pomposity, self-righteousness, religiosity and his country's myriad gods. He wrote he had done everything he wanted to do. "I would like to be remembered as someone who made people smile. “I wrote my own epitaph: 'Here lies one who spared neither man nor God; Waste not your tears on him, he was a sod; Writing nasty things he regarded as great fun; Thank the Lord he is dead, this son of a gun." For his service to the country, Khushwant Singh was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974, but he returned it 10 years later in protest against the siege of the Golden Temple by the Indian Army in Operation Blue Star. He was later awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2007. The author and journalist Khushwant Singh, held a particular place in Indian life as a critic of the establishment and a challenger of hypocrisy. His ability to view matters from an outsider's perspective came out of the partition of the subcontinent in 1947: he belonged to a Sikh family, with roots in what became Pakistan, and the division into two countries led to his abandoning law and diplomacy for writing, as well as providing the subject-matter of his best-known novel, Train to Pakistan. One of India’s best-known authors and journalists, Khushwant Singh elevated English writing in India with uninhibited wit and humour and was equally facile with his pen on serious issues like partition in the classic 'Train to Pakistan'. He ruled the literary pages with his satirical take on contemporary issues but attracted controversy over what his critics called his obsession with writing on sex. Easily switching roles between author, commentator and journalist, Singh wrote on diverse issues such as poetry and politics. “He was an outstanding editor of his time," said Vinod Mehta, author and editorial chairman of the English news weekly ‘Outlook.’ “He knew how to strike a great rapport with his readers. He was a brave and courageous man who risked his life and took on Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the leader of a Sikh religious group."

Some of the interesting facts about Kushwant Singh reported in ‘Hindustan Times’ Newspaper as: “He once described what it takes to be a writer: “Sometimes you will sit for hours staring at a blank sheet of paper. You will have to have the determination not to get up till the sheet is filled with writing.” Singh had said that his belief in India’s political system was disturbed once he noticed the after-effects of the anti-Sikh riots that broke out in the country after Indira Gandhi’s assassination. Kushwant Singh advocated good diplomatic relations between India and Israel and not displease Arab nations where Indians worked. On his visit to Israel Singh was impressed by their progress. Khushwant Singh was against all organised religions. According to him, “One can be a saintly person without believing in God and a detestable villain despite believing in him. In my personalised religion, there is no God!” Singh had further said that he did not believe in rebirth or reincarnation of man and the day of judgment, heaven or hell. He believed in the concept that death is final. In his book, “Not a Nice Man to Know,” he wrote that his ancestors had land in Shahpur district of Punjab and that they had worked on constructing railway lines in Punjab, including the Kalka-Shimla railway line. Sobha Singh’s first contract in Delhi was to level the land for Dilli Durbar. It was said that he controlled so much land in the city that he was called “aadhi Dilli ka malik (owner of half of Dilli)”. His father went on to construct some of the capital’s iconic buildings, such as South Block, the All India House, Scindia House, Regal Building and a number of blocks in Connaught Place. Sobha Singh was knighted by the British. Also, Malik was among the most prominent Indian engineers. He, too, was knighted for his services. Like Khushwant’s kin, there were many others who left their homes in Punjab and came to Delhi looking for opportunities in the new capital. Baisakha Singh was the contractor for North Block and also some of the official and private residences. Narain Singh was part of the team that made arrangements for the Coronation Durbar and laid the roads. Dharam Singh got the contract to supply stone for the project from the quarries in Dholpur, Agra and other places. Lachhman Das, who was from Sindh, worked on the Council House, which later became the Parliament.

Khushwant Singh and Column writing: Khushwant Singh adopted journalism just to enter the literary world. Later he proved himself the benchmark in the field of journalism. Khushwant Singh’s columns have been regarded as opinion writing in journalism. As a journalist, he knew the pulses of his readers and so he could bring the circulation of Illustrated Weekly higher in nine years from 1969 and 1978. His journey as a journalist started from the short story ‘Karma’ and that established his career as a successful journalist for 70 years. Khushwant Singh had worked with all major newspapers or publications such as The Yojna, The New York Times, The Tribune, The Observer, The Illustrated Weekly of India, The Guardian, Sunday, Hindustan

Times, Evening News, The Statesman, Outlook, India Today and Holiday. Khushwant Singh's active participation in journalism started from 1950. His take over as the editor of Illustrated Weekly gave him new direction as the journalist with acid wit. In the words of V. S Naipaul: "An Appetizing way of writing .... It's his own brand of Patriotism" (Outlook Interview). There would not be an exaggeration in saying that his writings had an impact to change the image of the nation. India used to be believed as the country of the poor and snake charmers. During his tenure as the editor of The Hindustan Times, his popular and controversial column "With malice Towards One and All" gained larger public favour. Even though he was close to the Gandhi family he opposed Operation Blue Star by returning Padma Bhushan. He openly rejected the idea of Khalistan that put his life in danger. Khushwant Singh honestly wrote in appreciating Christian Missionaries for their efforts to uplift the quality of education and public welfare. In his book Truth, Love and Little Malice he candidly states, "I got fulfillment out of journalism and creative writing. It was only then that I really began to relish the bounties of nature as my just reward for the work I had put in." Khushwant Singh's columns had power to connect the readers to the news with convincing powers.

Khushwant Singh expressed his intention of joining as a journalist in the preface to a collection of columns called Khushwant Singh's Editor's Page (1981): "Under its first two Indian editors(The Illustrated Weekly) became a vehicle of Indian culture devoting most of its pages to art, sculpture, classical dance and pretty pictures of flowers, birds, and dancing belles. It did not touch controversial subjects, was strictly apolitical and asexual save occasional blurred reproductions of Khajuraho or Konark. It earned a well-deserved reputation for dull respectability. I changed all that. What was a four-wheeled Victoria taking well-draped ladies out to eat the Indian air? I made a noisy, rumbustious, jet-propelled vehicle of information, controversy and amusement? I tore up the unwritten norms of gentility, both visual and linguistic. . . . And slowly the circulation built up, till the Illustrated did become a weekly habit of the English-reading pseudo-elite of the country. It became the most widely read journal in Asia (barring Japan) because it reflected all the contending points of view on every conceivable subject: politics, economics, religion, and the arts." Khushwant Singh covered all major subjects in his columns such as nationalism, communalism, politics, political ideology, politicians, celebrities, secularism, emergency, international relations, neighboring countries, gender issues, marital issues, social issues, Impotency, education system, economic inequality, Theology, theory of karma, Our Future, non-violence, philosophy and knowledge. Dr. R. K Dhawan observes Khushwant Singh's acid wit, satire and honesty as "Khushwant Singh wants to shock and provoke existing norms of Victorian morality, which he must have been discomforted by in his younger days."

The Khushwant Singh Literary Festival is a labor of love. And a festival with a purpose. To promote the legacy of Khushwant Singh (KS), author, scholar, journalist and iconoclast, by discussing the values he stood for, and addressing his concerns. Some of which are equal opportunities for women worldwide; the preservation of the environment; Indo-Pakistan friendship; and disseminating the values of democracy, tolerance, compassion in a world that is increasingly more polarised. KSLF is a meeting of minds to celebrate ideas that can change the lives of all connected with these issues. KSLF is also dedicated to the Indian soldier. Khushwant Singh had a deep and abiding love for the country, with its amazing diversity of faiths, languages and cultures, all of which we try to reflect in the KSLF. KSLF is organised entirely by volunteers. And friends of Khushwant Singh and the organisers who contribute in money and kind. Every donation goes a long way in creating a world with values. Over the years, the KSLF has been able to attract a galaxy of authors, thinkers and celebrities. Starting with just a couple of hundred, the audience has increased to over 1,000 a session, coming from all over India, even from abroad. KSLF has put Kasauli on the literary map of the country. KSLF will be held online this year. Even running a litfest digitally requires a great deal of effort and considerable funding. May we, therefore, appeal to the supporters of KSLF and admirers of Khushwant Singh to donate whatever they can.

As David Davidar writes, "There are very few people in this world that I would have liked to meet and Mr. Khushwant Singh was one of them. Unfortunately, I never got that chance. I got to know him through his books, through his writings, his interactions with various people and his interviews. We never had a one-on-one; I never got to pick his brain and I never got to experience his generosity, his charm, his brilliance and his chatter in person. India's legendary writer, journalist, politician and lawyer might have been titled the 'dirty old man', but to me he was the novelist who gave me one of my favourite books, the thought- provoking, 'Train to Pakistan.' To know him better and more intimately, I thought it was best to ask those who were close to him to talk about the moments they had shared with him, so that we could get a better understanding of the friend, the father, the mentor, and the large-hearted man that Khushwant Singh was…" David recalls his time with K.Singh as a memorable one and muses that "I first met Khushwant Singh when we were both part of the same team that founded Penguin India in 1985. I was in my mid-twenties and this was my first job in publishing while he was already a superstar, having edited India's most successful magazine, 'The Illustrated Weekly of India', as well as 'The Hindustan Times' and several other publications, besides

being the author of several bestselling books and India's most widely read columns. None of these made the slightest difference to the way he treated me despite my lack of experience and the almost fifty-year difference in age between us. It was a measure of the man—he treated everyone the same—with kindness and a lack of pomposity."

Singh died of natural causes on 20 March 2014 at his Delhi residence, at the age of 99. The President, Vice-President and Prime Minister of India all issued messages honouring Singh. He was cremated at Lodhi Crematorium in Delhi and during his lifetime, Khushwant Singh was keen on burial because he believed that with a burial we give back to the earth what we have taken. He had requested the management of the Bahá'í Faith if he could be buried in their cemetery. After initial agreement, they had proposed some conditions which were unacceptable to Singh, and hence the idea was later abandoned. According to his wishes, some of his ashes were brought and scattered in Hadali. In 1943 he had already written his own obituary, included in his collection of short stories Posthumous. Under the headline "Sardar Khushwant Singh Dead", the text reads: "We regret to announce the sudden death of Sardar Khushwant Singh at 6 pm last evening. He leaves behind a young widow, two infant children and a large number of friends and admirers. Amongst those who called at the late sardar's residence were the PA to the chief justice, several ministers, and judges of the high court."

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