

A Critical Estimate of Khuswant Singh's Fiction

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Abstract – Khuswant Singh is one of the finest historian and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observe and social critic. His reputation as a writer of Indo English fiction rests upon his novels like “train to Pakistan, I shall not Hear the Nightingale, Delhi, The company of women and burial at sea.” He has written short stories as “The voice of God.” A Bride for the sahib” and Blank Jasmine.” No doubt, Khuswant Singh is a convenient write in the sense that he does not compel a wider reading.

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It is not denying the fact that Khuswant Singh prolific writer his reputation as a writer rests upon his novel like Train to Pakistan. In Train to Pakistan, he dwells on the impact of partition on a small village on the Indo-Pak borders. Train to Pakistan is a tale of horro and terror. The depressing aspect of the novel is the division of the nation.

It is an emotional hang over of all those people who belong to our generation rather than to our generation of those who could be held responsible for it. What we feel is that the division of the nation on religious line. Pakistan is to be a Nation of the Muslim and India of the Hindus and the Sikhs. The partition attitude does not surprise us. What surprises us most is the violent attitude of both the Muslims and Hindus towards each other. It is the process of alienation that goes on across the broders of the two countries-India and Pakistan even today. These aspects have been delineates in detail in this novel. The swift tempo of the narrative skill keeps the interest of the readers alive all along.

This novel, basically, is led against the background of mass destruction. The destructi9on is not only senseless but also ruthless. Indedd this is very powerful novel with its title take from a border town where a rail line crosses from India to Pakistan. In the very beginning, Sikhs and Muslims seemed to be a mixed community. This is so much so that their relationship is never disturbed by violence. It is this that is caught up in the mass hysteria as when the ghost trains of slain Sikh approaches. Fanaticism loses supreme, Sikhs come out to kill their former neighbors as the train carrying them to Pakistan. Rumours of such happening, generated by whatever sources, bring devastation with lives of both the communities.

Khuswant Singh's story builds up a contrast between the ruling classes, on one hand, and the effectualness of the educated ones. The ruling classes are furnished with the power of violent peasants – they are an easy

prey to the irrational forces. Early in the story, it is given to us that somebody murders a Hindu moneylender, the only educated man of the town. That somebody is none but juggut Singh, a passionate Sikh farmer with a bad police record. He is the main suspect though he has no role in it. He is imprisoned along with an innocent Eqbal on the suspicion of Muslim league agent. With these two persons in jail, trains roll into town carrying cargoes of dead. The agitation for reprisal takes shape, Hukum Chand, the government commissioner fails to prevent this rather heinous plot against the fleeing out of this emotional cataclysm but juggut Singh does wonders, it is he who is the remarkable character of this novel for his unmistakable gestures of sacrifice in the whole episode. He does it out of an emotional urgency, compulsiveness that consequents upon the feelings of love. We know that he is in deep and imperishable love with a Muslim girl. It is out of this that he foils the plotters and allows the train to move on his body. We become aware of the writer's intention because of historical proximity with the incident. But more than what a matter of importance to us, is the Fanaticism that brought this heinous crime. The novel reads like an unfeigning fable. It is a story of deep disenchantment with the power of law, reason and intellect – they seem to sink immediately like a house of cards before elemental human passions for which fanaticism alone could be held responsible. The philosophy of Mr. Singh is articulated by what goes into the mind of Eq bal. Eqbal is a young redical who out of desperation, drifts off into a reckless, drugged sleep at the night of the Train's passing. One cannot easily forget what he says out of utter disillusionment.

“If you look at thing as they are. There does not seem to be a code either of man or of God on which one can pattern ones conducts..... in such circumstances what can you do but cultivate an utter indifference to all values? Nothing matters.”[1] Obviously, here Registration of deep anguish that arises out of the sense of frustration with anything

that matters in life. It is this that characterizes the second Novel; I shall not hear the Nightingale. Yet the story is rather wooden. Here ironies are rather heavy handed and over whelming. On the whole, the novel takes a dimmer rather a remote view of human compassion. The title of the book counts upon Sher Singh's reply to his mother.

"What will you get if the English leave this country."

He replies "Spring will come to our barren land.....
Once more the Nightingale will sing." [2]

The craft of Khushwant Singh's stories is highly motivated and intended. Naturally, the function of irony and wit towards securing effect of caricature is seriously limited. His short stories are replete with aesthetic interest only on account of their open and declared artistic intensions. As for non-fictional work of Khushwant Singh, he is admired by all. He used to write this to make the society aware of mal-practices. However, what is important for us is the socio-cultural and political criticisms, the novels have put forward to the readers at large. He hurls pinching satires to find out the remedies for the society.

REFERENCES

1. Train to Pakistan p. 181. Penguin Books India-2009
2. I shall not Hear the Nightingale P. 89 Penguin Book 2005

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