



DECOLONIZATION AND HUMANITY BEYOND BORDERS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF KHUSHWANT SINGH

Dr. R. ARULNAYAGAM

Assistant Professor of English,
Government Arts College (Autonomous)
(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University)
Kumbakonam - 612 002, Tamil Nadu,
rajasundaramarulnayagam@gmail.com

APA Citation:

Arulnayagam.R, (2023). DECOLONIZATION AND HUMANITY BEYOND BORDERS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF KHUSHWANT SINGH, *Journal of Indian Languages and Indian literature in English*, 01(01), 67-73

Submission Date: 20/08/2023

Acceptance Date: 15/09/2023

Abstract

The last official colonial agenda and the first step towards methodized decolonization drawn and materialised by British supremacy that cursed the lives of millions is India's partition in 1947. The event of partition made space for basically two types of literary approaches: in the first phase, writers concentrated on the depiction of overwhelming violence and incredible confusion and in the second, came a revised form of narrative, a contrapuntal mode of conceiving partition and its various receptions apart from the metanarratives. The second body of writings celebrates a subversive critical engagement concentrated on the cosmopolitan modes of diasporic existence and attempts to bridge the boundaries of transnational, cultural, and religious disparities. The partition constitutes a field of transformation and a reverse discourse that became the condition of multiple possibilities. It also created a framework for the resurgence of nationalism and a global positionality of Indian diaspora. The paper investigates a theoretical as well as the very personal fight and plight of the protagonists to survive in changing realities. The article envisions a gateway to rise from racial apartheid and reconcile towards empathetic partition possibilities.

Keywords: Khushwant singh, partition, nationalism, culture, India, Pakistan

Indian novel writing is a living and developing literary genre in English. It is richer in content, broader in reach, and varied in range. Before the Declaration of Independence, their subject matter was unavoidably political. Even so, after Independence, there was a notable change in their emphasis. Human relationships, social problems, gender equations, and other vital issues such as war futility have become the novelist's primary concern. The Partition of India is considered the most lethal event in humankind's history in India and the world. Without a doubt, the partition remains a memorable occurrence due to its historical importance in the creation of India and Pakistan's sovereignty and its

long-term effect of horror and horrific emotional duress. Individuals, who had never been out of their bound wards for a very long time together, were unexpectedly constrained to pick a country. It is felt that history books on the partition incident do not vividly and passionately document the agony, trauma, and sufferings of those who were forced to split from their families, friends, and neighbours.

Historical books additionally neglected to show the developing wistfulness for spots of the individuals who had lived for ages, the agony of those people who got taken out from their places of worship, and the frightening encounters of those innumerable individuals who boarded trains and figured they would be able to fulfil their dream. But unfortunately, no one survives. The literature on the tragedy of partition, especially in a novel, is so realistic that we feel those unfortunate people who passed through the partition's trauma. The novelists who have dealt with this horrific event have also attempted to discuss other human destiny concerns, touching on universal issues beyond the partition's bloodbath. In his novel *The Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh became the first Indian writer to write in English about the horrors and holocaust of partition with great artistic care. It is not partitioned, indicative of the novelist's attraction and attention, but most probably of the novelist's bitterness and sympathy. He had the strange sensation of being both a participant and a distant observer of the action. The subcontinent's partition has spawned a wealth of literature that brings us closer to the people's pain and suffering. Reading historical novels in which history is written as fiction is fascinating.

The story attempts to recreate a memorable time in Indian history through a fictional path, but the essence is hardly lost. Politics and how significant events shape individual lives and how individuals respond to these issues have always been of concern to the literary invention since the Greek and Roman epics and the Mahabharata and, no doubt, beforehand. Orwell wrote, "There is no such thing as genuinely non-Political literature".¹ It will probably be true if the term "political" is used widely. However, some of the writing focuses on politics in the context of Government and social organization. I plan to analyze three novels set in twentieth-century India to assess the authors' message, especially their attitudes toward political ideals, as expressed through the characters' behaviour or inaction in the face of large-scale events that will alter their lives. Khushwant Singh writes many books on political issues, including *My Bleeding Punjab*, *Punjab's Tragic Tale*, *Tragedy of Punjab*, *Operation Blue Star*, and *After* (with Kuldeep Nayar), *Indira Gandhi Returns*, and others. He has also written several articles dealing with specific political subjects like: "Freedom Movement – I and II," "My Years in Parliament," "Khalistan," "Men Who Rule Us," etc. He also wrote about them as he was close to many significant political figures. A few of these articles are "Nehru," "Nehru and Prime Minister," "Gandhi India," "Zali Singh Giani," and "Mountbatten." articles. From these writings, it is evident that he does not subscribe to any particular political creed. Instead, he is an unbiased chronicler of the truth. So, despite leanings towards a specific political personality, he does not hesitate to point out the individual's drawbacks and weaknesses.

The situation arises as he did in Indira Gandhi's case during operating *Bluestar*. He is not a sycophant and is always fearless in expressing his beliefs, regardless of the consequences. In the explanations, Khushwant Singh put his agony as he witnessed each incident he described. The scenes are not part of fiction, but Singh's feelings are very genuine and vivid. He describes the pre-planned manner in which the Sikhs are murdered in his essay, "Indira Gandhi's assassination and his aftermath." Most looters and killers were shantytowns or villages whose agricultural land was acquired to provide housing to Delhi's increased population, sweepers, cobblers, day-labourers shantytown beggars. Its main objective was looting. Khushwant Singh is a humanist in nature. He cannot keep himself from being emotional to relate to the suffering people. His personal experiences and feeling have much to do with

the magnificent presentation of the events mentioned. He chose not to write about partition or Delhi but because the subjects moved him profoundly, and he was obliged to write about them.

Khushwant Singh attempts to educate the readers, starting with the Train to Pakistan to Delhi, about the horrendous implications of connecting religion with politics. People and politicians are sincerely encouraged to refrain from using religion as an instrument. Religion is the only topic that men and women can either split or write about, so politicians often use it. The root cause of all issues of economic inequality is sidelined in this focus on religion. The people in charge may not be able to confront this issue deliberately. Serious decisions were not taken to improve the living conditions of the majority of the populace. The masses' frustration quickly culminates into violence at the slightest provocation, as during communal flare-ups. This study demonstrates that these first three novels are diametrically different regarding their narrative structure and content. Train to Pakistan, the first book, is well-planned and provides a distinct start, middle, and end. It is an uncomplicated and fast story with an unexpected and violent climax and an appropriate heartwarming end. He describes the effect of the division on the lives of the Mano Majra. I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale is the second novel distinct from its earlier novel. It shows the lives of the household members of Buta Singh against the backdrop of the Quit India movement. The novel is a little hazardous and hasn't got a tight structure. It doesn't keep the reader's full attention or curiosity, so it slows down many times. The narrative contains so many digressions that undermine the main story.

The climax is also relatively dull, and one can expect it quickly. The conclusion, perhaps funny, seems relatively flat and doesn't improve the novel. Delhi is a very different individual in the third book, the magnum opus. Here Singh follows a pattern reminiscent of Indian mythological tales, in which the sutradhar mentions other stories that have been put together into a single fabric. However, the only thing the narrator in Delhi has in common with a sutradhar is that he is the common link between the semi-historical chapters. Otherwise, all the chapters have their narrators. The novel has been structured so that each historical chapter alternates with a chapter depicting modern-day Delhi. Khushwant Singh experiments with a new and unusual narrative structure in this book. From Ghiasuddin Balban's age to the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the novel's common thread is the impact of faith, politics, and violence in shaping the city of Delhi. Train to Pakistan was originally titled Mano Majra (1956), the novel's center stage, situated on India and Pakistan's borders. It is a small village where Sikhs and Muslims live peacefully, unaware of the massacre elsewhere. But the Train symbolizes the activities of life and death, and especially death, and Khushwant Singh gives graphic destruction: The fact is, both sides were killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured.

Both raped. From Calcutta, the riots spread north and east and west: to Noakhali in East Bengal, where Muslims massacred Hindus, to Bihar, where Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs roamed Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar.² A careful analysis of the novel depicts that it is both a grim and pathetic tale of individuals and communities caught in the swirl of partition. The novel implies that the disintegration of Mano Majra and its harmony is not the collapse of a nation but the breakdown and falling apart of humanity. The novel remains a remarkable study of objectivity because the novelist does not act in a partisan way. He blames neither the Hindus nor the Muslims for the tragedy and is firm to believe that the partition is not a partition of territory but a partition of the people's hearts and souls. Manohar Malgaonkar in A Bend in the Ganges presents a different version of the division's anatomy, which he traces back to the British's religious hostilities. Though the novel is about partition yet, it analyses in a significant way the possible causes that led to the separation of the country. Malgaonkar believes that the British's divide and rule

policy divided the people's hearts and made them fight with each other on a communal, religious, and regional basis.

The novel is political in content, and the bend symbolically represents a change that violence and terrorism gave to India's political future. The novel's present analysis reveals the political leadership responsible for India's partition and the chaos and turmoil it unleashed on the people. The novel reflects that displacement and suffering due to the partition had demoralized the refugees. The novel's plot depicts the tragic consequences of political immaturity and the young protagonist's debasement of human values and actions. The sense of humanity in Jugga ultimately prevails in the novel, which is what the novelist signals to the readers. The trauma of the train massacre and the woeful plight of the refugees in India. The novel is full of didacticism and hope, and at the same time, it is evident in the political framework and intentions. The novel states much bloodshed, looting, and killing in Punjab. None could be specifically blamed or regarded as blameless. But the novels undeniably illustrate the Government's utter failure in handling the refugee problem and the mischievous role played by the politicians who exploited people's emotions for their ends. The joy of the partition in the novel is attached to the Muslim community and frustration and fear. The story points out that those who opposed the idea of the partition were relegated to isolation and desolation.

At the same time, it presents ordinary people's remarks on the nature of the political situation and the role of politics in their lives, forcing them to accept the unacceptable. The novel emphasizes the urgency and inevitability of reconciliation and the younger generation's expectations to move ahead while defeating the partition disasters. The joy of the partition in the novel is attached to the Muslim community and frustration and fear in Hindus. The novel points out that those who opposed the idea of the partition were relegated to isolation and desolation. At the same time, it presents ordinary people's remarks on the nature of the political situation and the role of politics in their lives, forcing them to accept the unacceptable. The novel emphasizes the urgency and inevitability of reconciliation and the younger generation's expectations to move ahead while defeating the partition disasters. Thus, *Train to Pakistan* presents a reality show of the tribulations the people underwent on account of the violence let loose by a spurt of sudden communal occurrences. The novelist feels that politics was responsible for human slaughter from all sides, and any particular side could not be made accountable for an ugly series of events. His novel approach has remained objective because all have tried to expose human nature and its capability to perpetrate cruelty and barbarism on its creed.

The presentation of broad and extensive socio-political situations is the essence of the novel's narrative design. Although it is a story of two families, it goes far beyond the family tale's limits in presenting the phases and changes in that period's social and political atmospheres and their motivations. Thus, the novel's narrative design has historical and contemporary events rooted deep in the characters and the situations. However, the novel's theme and substance are dominated by dialogue and disruptions of individual, social and political concerns. The implication arises from the differences between them and the interaction of the characters. The tension arises from the differences between the novelist's desire to make a poetic communication about life and his actual performance in depicting India's bare physical reality. The symbol, theme, political ideal, and natural treatment benefit the novel's social and political situations. The form and structure of the novel are conventional. It follows the pattern of 19th-century narrative fiction. Its presentation, plot construction, character portraiture, nature description, setting, situation, climax, and sequence of events are similar to that of 19th-century English novels. Hence some critics categorized this novel as Singh's finest novel. A lingering sadness envelops the end of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, which is not merely the result of the good woman's death, Sabhrai. It is the novelist's strident awareness of a world passing, a set of values getting eroded, and a "brave new world"

(with a new connotation of 'brave') emerging in which people like Sabhrai and all that they uphold amid trying and unnerving situations will become either stranger, out of place or extinct. Her death is marked by as much dignity as was her life, and her life was the embodiment of lifesustaining virtues.

The novel's title suggests the author's brooding, melancholy vision. It can be interpreted in two ways: i) as Sabhrai's lament that she will not witness the country's Independence, and ii) as the death of beauty and goodness of the nightingale symbolized by Sabhrai. Thus, the book's deceptively structured surface contains underneath a message or a lament far more profound and shocking that can be discerned by a rapid, superficial reading of the novel. This novel would have reached great heights. While *Train to Pakistan* is a powerful exposition of one of the most moving and violent events of contemporary Indian history, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* treats Indian nationalism in a most detached and critical manner.⁵ *Delhi* is another powerful and famous novel by Khuswant Singh. It is a veiled inquiry into the politics of modern India, whose nerve centre is in Delhi. This study reveals traumatic political problems which are lying before us. It seems to answer such issues looming large before us—communalism, extremism, regionalism, and violence. Though *Delhi* gives historical gloss to some critical periods, episodes beginning with the reign of Ghasuddin Balban thirteenth century to the reigns of other rulers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the invasion of Timur, the reign of Shahjahan, Aurangzeb, the invasion of Nadir Shah, and its aftermath, the revolt 1857 and some of the political events of modern India like the partition of Bengal, the shifting capital from Calcutta to Delhi, the rise of Mahatma Gandhi, the Khilafat Movement the activities of terrorist revolutionaries, the Round Table Conference, the major events leading to the communal riots, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the terrorist activities in Punjab and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984.

Moreover, it highlights the political problems of modern India. The important thing is to be noted here its message of contemporary relevance - the quality and fraternity of man - love and peace are emerging as positive virtues from repulsive and senseless bloodshed in both medieval and modern times. The study of *Delhi* reflects that it is not an ordinary novel, not a lament sung over lost empires. It is a celebration of the unique power of culture and civilization.²⁴¹ The power to ensure the survival of finer values of life and, above all, the ability to ensure that when all is lost, an awareness of that loss remains. It is the testimony it provides a haunting sense of that loss. *Delhi*, a semi-historical novel, shows how past events have shaped the minds and psyche of Indians through the centuries and led to today's political situation. The researcher found out that Khushwant Singh has adroitly depicted the exploitation of the rulers' religious sentiments of different communities for their selfish purposes.

Today politicians are doing the same. One wonders why the people do not take lessons from history and stop being pawns in the hands of leaders who do not care one way or another but are merely interested in fulfilling their ends. Khushwant Singh has attempted to throw light upon this in *Delhi*. The last chapter of this novel is an anguished cry of a sensitive individual who is immensely pained by all the senseless killings triggered in the name of religion. He has probably written so feelingly to get somehow people to realize the futility of turning religion (which should be an intensely private affair) into a political issue. The one strong political view that emerges from the novel is the horrific results of linking religion with politics. The next most crucial aspect of this novel is the absence of able and just leaders in the country through the ages. And lastly, the existence of corruption from the earliest times to the present day. So Singh is a keen spectator of past and present corrupt life. India had always tried to demonstrate its superiority by destroying places of worship that belonged to the people following a religion other than their own. For instance, the Turks had demolished twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples. Hindus would attempt to regain some of their prestige in different ways. An example of this is

the inscription Sri Visvakarma Prasade Rachida on the Qutub Minar. When Allauddin Khilji came upon the throne of Delhi, he set about despoiling the Hindu kingdoms of the South. His General, Malik Kafur, extended his dominions to the seas. Tremendous wealth was brought into Delhi. Hindu women were given away to Muslims as a reward for service. Numerous Hindu temples were destroyed. The atmosphere became so vitiated that even Hindus like Mussadi Lal, who had adopted Muslim ways, found life 'extremely difficult. Such partisan actions by successive rulers were largely responsible for fostering antagonism between the different communities. Kings, irrespective of their relationships, also followed such a discriminatory policy. 'Ghiasuddin' Tughlaq had married a Hindu princess. His son was also married into a Hindu noble family.

To conclude, it can be said that the partition of the Indian subcontinent was one of the most remarkable traumatic experiences in our recent history. The violence unleashed by a few fanatics' hooligan actions and the vengeance that the ordinary Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs wreaked on each other sent our social sense, distorted our political judgments, and deranged our understanding of moral righteousness. Should the partition be forgotten? Has it any relevance to us today? We must not forget the partition because it has now become history. We must remember that it did happen, and it can happen again. That is why the people who clamour for an independent Kashmir, Khalistan, or Nagaland should remember what happened in the past when some of them asked for a separate Muslim state. My fellow Sikhs should realize that the worst enemies of Khalsa Panth are the Khalistanis and of the Nagar are those who ask for an independent Nagaland. Reminding ourselves of what happened in 1947 and realizing its recurrence possibilities, we should resolve that we will never let it happen again. It is established that the detailed study of Khushwant Singh's novels provides proof that the common concern of a compassionate writer, who had the first-hand experience of the partition of this subcontinent, inspired him to give powerful expression in the above-mentioned fictional works. All these novels depict the inhuman quality, brutality and holocaust witnessed during partition in his fictional discourse. He also describes the agony and the plight of dislocated people who had been the victims of the more giant religious and political game. There is almost identical concern about the organized and random violence during the freedom struggle and the aftermath of the partition.

His description of all characters' traumatic experiences is heart-rendering, touching, and realistic, inspiring mega T.V. Serials like *Buniad* and *Humlog*. The writers belong to India and are from families directly affected by the partition. He has witnessed inhuman brutality and violence during partition, partition, and after separation. His fictional works selected for the present study bring out vivid effects of partition. Still, his treatment of theme and choice of characters, setting, and style differ so that his version of partition can easily be categorized. The human dimension of the division of the subcontinent is well represented in these three novels. The study sincerely attempts to bring out the totality of the experience often missed by the historian. The writers reaffirm his faith in humanistic values and deplore communal and divisive politics. The writers under discussion have rightly emphasized the significance of communal harmony, common cultural heritage, peace, and prosperity. He rightly believes that communal unity in the Indian subcontinent will herald a new era of peace. He also believes that the loss of communal harmony is something that can never be compensated. Their fictional discourse makes it quite clear that no country can make progress until and unless it has a very sound communal harmony among its citizens, irrespective of their different cast, creed, and colour. In fact partition of India has divided the Muslims more than the Hindus and the other communities. Even today, Muslims are scattered in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The leaders advocating for partition had very high ambitions for the prosperity that partition would make, but it has never been fulfilled.

WORK CITED

George Orwell, "The Prevention of Literature" in *The Orwell Reader* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1956), p.373.

Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, p.1

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (Bombay, 1962), p.336.

Singh, Khushwant. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. Bombay: IBH, 1973, p.151

5. R.K. Dhawan, *Three Contemporary Novelists*, p.19.

Muruganandham, V., and L. Rajesh. "Women: The Subjects To Subjugation-Feministic Perspective In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance Of Loss*." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 17.4 (2022).

Mahendran, T. "THE NATURE OF MYTH AND SOCIETY IN THE SELECT PLAYS OF GIRISH KARNAD." *Journal of Indian Languages and Indian Literature in English* (2023).

Sharmila, V. "PSYCHE OF THE BLACK IN THE NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON." *Journal of Indian languages and Indian literature in English* 1.10 (2023): 80-87.

Sharmila, V. "JOURNAL OF INDIAN LANGUAGES AND INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH." *Journal of Indian languages and Indian literature in English* 1.1 (2020): 00-00.

Pari, S. "SATIRE in the WORKS of KHUSHWANT SINGH." *Journal of Indian Languages and Indian Literature in English*, no. 7, 2023, pp. 62–66

Pari, S ; The Egocentric And Self-Obsessed Women In The Novels Of Khushwant, and Singh. "THE EGOCENTRIC and SELF-OBSESSED WOMEN in the NOVELS of KHUSHWANT SINGH." *Journal of Indian Languages and Indian Literature in English*, vol. 1, no. 8, 2023, pp. 68–74,

Gomathy, R., and V. Radhakrishnan. "Implementation of metacognitive strategies in CLIL classrooms among the first-year engineering students-a study." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 18.1 (2022): 1109-1116.

Dr.V.Radhakrishnan. "DIASPORIC ELEMENTS in the NOVELS of BHARATI MUKHERJEE." *Journal of Indian Languages and Indian Literature in English*, 15 May 2023, jilile.in/diasporic.html. Accessed 17 Nov. 2023.