

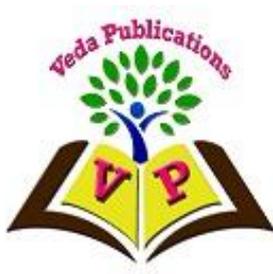


## A STUDY OF MORALITY, TEACHINGS AND GAIETY IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S WORKS

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### ABSTRACT



Khushwant Singh is one of the most renowned prose writers of India who has given many proverbial maxims and fictional masterpieces on post colonial themes and a columnist on varied topics in reputed newspapers. His keen-insight, focused attitude provides a reflection on issues of identity crisis, loss of tradition, effects of colonialism and other issues and hence he has become a true icon of secularism in this communally sensitive society. This paper covers his selective essays and columns published in various newspapers. Symptomatic of how the characters are bound by superstition, hypocrisy and suffering. He also provides sound solutions to negate these problems.

**Keywords:** *Secularism, Communal, Partition, Emotions.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh is one of the most acclaimed writers. He was born in 1915 in Hadali, Punjab (now in Pakistan). He has done it all, He studied law at St. Stephen's College and King's College, London, then he joined the Indian Foreign Service, he was appointed journalist in the All India Radio, in Mass Communications. He has keenness and forcefulness and penetration in thought, expression, or intellect, which makes him aware of what the reader wants. He is an author of a number of great works like *Train to Pakistan* (1956), *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959), *Delhi* (1989) *Many Faces of Communalism*, *A History of Sikhs*. Being essentially a journalist he has the knack of speaking about his own mind. He stands at the summit of India's finest writers today.

## DISCUSSION

He has built a rapport with his readers by his candid and unique style; he is one of the finest historians and social critic. He also has an unbridled spirit which is quantified by his concavity. His scathing attack on terrorism in Punjab for separate statehood (secession), his criticism of the State machinery during Delhi Sikh riots (1984) have brought him acclaim. Thus through these works he portrays that man should be free from all kinds of barriers whether man-made or otherwise. In his 'The Company of Women', Khushwant Singh portrays a man with all his elemental and carnal passions. Mohan Kumar, the protagonist of the story returns to India after completing his education in the States. His father gets him married to a girl of a wealthy businessman. Mohan Kumar's ill-tempered wife dislikes her father-in-law being along with them in their house. After two children, Mohan Kumar's life becomes unbearable and he gets divorce from his wife and decides to reinvent his life. Convinced that lust is the foundation of love, he advertises for live-in companions and begins a journey of sexual life with various women, starting with Sarojini Bharadwaj. Khushwant Singh brings out an uninhibited and erotic account of Mohan Kumar's sexual life. The author says that if a married man or woman gets the chance to be unfaithful they make use of it, particularly if the situation is not to be known to others. Similarly, Mohan Kumar tries to find a live-in companion after

the divorce from his wife. Singh also says that Indians discuss a lot about true love which is the basis of any marriage. But the matrimonial columns look for caste, fair skin, money and whether the bride is a virgin which shows the hypocritical attitude of the people. Lala Achint Ram was keen to have an 'American returned' highly educated boy as his son-in-law to add respect and sophistication to his wealth. Mohan Kumar does not want to involve himself with any particular woman; he says, 'As soon as I sensed a feel getting emotionally involved in me, I dropped her'. This shows that he is interested only in lust like most of his American counterparts and does not restrict with one woman.

At the core Khushwant Singh is a comic writer. He uses his sense of humour, wit and satire to create scenes inducing laughter. Even his gentle and serious stories are pleasant and interesting. For example, in *Karma*, we laugh at Mohan Lal's pitiable condition caused by his Anglicized snobbery. He felt proud of his English. It is superior to Indian culture in his view. He is an anglophile and is proud of his Oxford background and perfect English accent. He travels in the first class compartment while his wife, a genuine Indian Woman, travels in a ladies compartment in the same train. He feels happy to see two English soldiers coming to his compartment. But they come in and throw out Mohan Lal's luggage on the platform. When Mohan Lal protested it, he too is beaten and thrown out of the compartment. It is a funny incident. In *Kusum* we smile at the behavior of the hawker. When Kusum dashed the cart of oranges driven by a young hawker, she scolded him that he was a blind. The naughty hawker closed one eye and said that he was blind but with one eye. Then, the children's comments of Gunga Ram's superstitious views are comic in *The Mark of Vishnu*. Gunga Ram put the saucer of milk before the snake and bowed his head before him for prayer and forgiveness in putting it in a time. It is also humorous that the teacher falls from his chair when the cobra comes out of the tin.

In *Man*, How the government of India Run! The writer says that the officials of the Government office do not work but just show that they work hard. Similarly the surprising behavior of the Insurance Agent in *Insurance Agent*, irony in *Voice of God* and



the animal love of the author's grandmother in *The Portrait of Lady* etc. are quite comic elements found in these stories. The short stories of Khushwant Singh are satirical, For example, in *Man*, How the Government of India Runs; Khushwant Singh attacks the clerk in a government office. It is mentioned that one gets success only by winning favour of the boss and doing things for him. In the story, Sundar Singh does not work in his office at all but shows that he is very tired. He ironically says that he has to work hard otherwise 'How the Government of India would run'. In *The Voice of God*, he satirizes the faulty election procedure in democratic India. Similarly in *Karma* the snobbery of the Anglicized is satirized. In addition to, in *The Mark of Vishnu*, Khuswant Singh laughs at the superstitions of the Indians.

One more recurrent theme of Khushwant Singh is love and sex. According to Khushwant Singh, love and sex are essential aspects of life. His story, *The Rape and Black Jasmine* deals with sex. The other story *Kusum* is coloured with the element of sex. Kusum is dark, short and ordinary girl. No man even looks at her. She too knows it and remains secluded and does not use cosmetics. One day she dashes her bicycle against the cart of a hawker. When she argues with him, he makes obscene gestures to her. This kindles the emotions of sex in Kusum and she starts using cosmetics in order to look smart.

In Khushwant Singh's *Absolute Khushwant*, The low-down on life, Death and most things in-between. He talks about the inevitability of death. He says "You may or may not doubt the existence of God; you can't doubt the certainty of death". At 95, I do think of death. I think of death very often but I don't lose sleep over it. I think of those gone; keep wondering where they are. Where have they gone? Where will they be? I don't know the answers: where you go, what happens next. To quote Omar Khayyam,

"Into this Universe and Why not knowing  
Nor whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing..."

and,

"There was a Door to which I found no Key  
There was a Veil through which I could not see  
Some little Talk awhile of Me and Thee  
There seemed—and then no more of Thee  
and Me."

He says that all his contemporaries have passed away and that he does not want to be bed-ridden and in a vegetative state and so does not want to be dependent on his daughter Mala. He says that if at all death comes, it should come swiftly and without much pain, Till then he wants to make the most of it, till the last sixty seconds of his life he wants to "RUN". He believes in these lines of Tennyson:

"Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea...  
Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness or farewell,  
When I embark."

He believes in the Jain philosophy that death ought to be celebrated. Earlier, whenever he was upset or low, He used to go to the cremation grounds. It had a cleansing effect, and worked like a therapy for him. In fact, He'd written his own epitaph years ago:

"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."

#### HIS TEACHINGS

First and foremost is good health. If you do not enjoy good health, you can never be happy. Any ailment, however trivial, will deduct something from your happiness.

Second, a healthy bank balance. It need not run into crores, but it should be enough to provide for comforts, and there should be something to spare for recreation—eating out, going to the movies, travel and holidays in the hills or by the sea. Shortage of money can be demoralizing. Living on credit or borrowing is demeaning and lowers one in one's own eyes.

Third, your own home. Rented places can never give you the comfort or security of a home that is yours for keeps. If it has garden space, all the better. Plant your own trees and flowers, see them grow and blossom, and cultivate a sense of kinship with them.

Fourth, an understanding companion, be it your spouse or a friend. If you have too many



misunderstandings, it robs you of your peace of mind. It is better to be divorced than to be quarrelling all the time.

Fifth, stop envying those who have done better than you in life—risen higher, made more money, or earned more fame. Envy can be corroding; avoid comparing yourself with others.

Sixth, do not allow people to descend on you for gupshup. By the time you get rid of them, you will feel exhausted and poisoned by their gossip-mongering.

Seventh, cultivate a hobby or two that will fulfill you—gardening, reading, writing, painting, playing or listening to music. Going to clubs or parties to get free drinks, or to meet celebrities, is a criminal waste of time. It's important to concentrate on something that keeps you occupied meaningfully. I have family members and friends who spend their entire day caring for stray dogs, giving them food and medicines. There are others who run mobile clinics, treating sick people and animals free of charge.

Eighth, every morning and evening devote 15 minutes to introspection. In the mornings, 10 minutes should be spent in keeping the mind absolutely still, and five- listing the things you have to do that day. In the evenings, five minutes should be set aside to keep the mind still and 10 to go over the tasks you had intended to do.

Ninth, don't lose your temper. Try not to be short-tempered, or vengeful. Even when a friend has been rude, just move on.

Above all, when the time comes to go, one should go like a man without any regret or grievance against anyone. Iqbal said it beautifully in a couplet in Persian: "You ask me about the signs of a man of faith? When death comes to him, he has a smile on his lips."

## CONCLUSION

The study of Khushwant Singh reveals that he has a multifaceted personality; He is an uninhibited and erotic writer, and a superb craftsman. The writer is an admixture of originality, simplicity and variety. He wants to teach and make Indians aware and fight for their rights, he paints a very vivid picture of the real India which is not very hunky-dory. His way of presentation is very artistic. The language is colloquial. The crux of the story is in

the end and praiseworthy. The use of wit, irony and satire adds to the flavor of the stories.

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