

RESEARCH ARTICLE



TRANSNATIONAL CONFLICTS IN THE FICTIONAL WORKS OF KHUSHWANT SINGH

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ABSTRACT

The paper concentrates on the various perspectives of post colonial Indian English Literature through the works of Kushwant Singh. Issues of identity, loss of tradition, effects of colonialism and other issues will be discussed through the short stories and novels of Kushwant Singh. It focuses on how the characters are bound by superstition, hypocrisy, suffering due to language and how they show their typical Indian ness in spite of them trying to ape the culture of the colonisers. The paper will also discuss about the problems and consequences of decolonization. By examining these themes it is possible to see a more complete picture of the complexities and the gradation of identity in the post colonial world.

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After Indian independence, Indian English Literature made a great development due to the socio-political changes which recollected the days of the British rule and the freedom struggle and there was fervour among the Indians to find out their own identities. This search for identity could very well be seen in the works of the writers of Indian English Literature.

Writers of the 1930s played a vital role in fiction writing about the social and political issues of the age of Indian nationalism. Writers of that generation like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Raja Rao, who had lived in the Europe, had written about the society and culture of India. They represented the colonial impact as a plot in their stories. The events of 1930s and 1940s were the themes of the novels of that period. In 'The Serpent and the Rope', 'Kanthapura' and 'The Cat and Shakespeare', Raja Rao focuses on the relation between India and Europe. R. K. Narayan's The English Teacher, The Dark Room, and The

Bachelor of Arts deal with patriarchal society and women's liberation. Anand in his novels Untouchable, Coolie, Two Leaves and a Bud, The Village, Across the Black Waters, The Sword and the Sickle, and The Big Heart discusses about racism, differences between urban and rural India and the injustice to the farmers.

Arundhati Roy's debut and only novel, which won the Booker Prize in 1997 'The God of Small Things' discusses the story of the twins Estha and Rahel and that of their mother's, Ammu, a Syrian Christian. The story revolves around the memories of their childhood when their mother had an extra marital affair with Velutha, a member of the untouchable caste. The novel brings out the loneliness of the children and the hypocritical attitude of the elders in their world.

Kushwant Singh holds an important position among the post independence English writers of India. He is one of the finest historians and social critic. Kushwant Singh has published two volumes of

History of Sikhs, several novels and non-fiction books. He is known for his candid and unique style of writing. He has written around thirty five short stories and has followed the O'Henry style of short story writing.

In his 'The Company of Women', Kushwant Singh portrays a man with all his elemental passions. He depicts the social problems faced by middle class society. Pursuing a sexual relationship with unattached contemporaries of similar social standing is largely taboo at that period of time. The novel speaks about the sexual exploits of the protagonist. 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.

Train to Pakistan reveals the tragic events which took place during the partition of India and

Pakistan. In this novel Khushwant Singh brings out the events through the eyes of the people of Mano Majra, a small village in India. The communal riots divided the country into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. The Hindus and the Sikhs who had lived on the Northern Frontier for generations were forced to migrate to the eastern part of the country.

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale deals with the colonial conflicts between the British and the Indians on account of the nationalistic consciousness of the Indians. Here, Khushwant Singh depicts two groups of characters, one pro-British and the other anti-British. The irony of the story is that both the groups belong to the same family. The father Buta Singh is a magistrate, who works for the British and the son Sher Singh is the leader of the rebel group against British rule. Buta Singh says "I do believe that in this war our interests and that of the English are identical" which shows the typical pro-British attitude. Sher Singh argues with his father, "we are far too concerned with other people" and continues "very few of us are bothered with our own future". He is full of patriotic fervour and he is not influenced by his father's loyalty to the British. The novel is a paradox where both the positive and negative aspects are involved.

In his 'Collected Stories', Khushwant Singh discusses about different genre humour, satire, lust, love and irony. 'Karma' is the story of an anglophile, Sir Mohan Lal, who tries to show himself as an Englishman by dressing up like one. Sir Mohan Lal wishes to be taken for an Englishman 'He rarely spoke Hindustani and when he did, it was like an Englishman's' where he anglicises the words. He apes the British in dress, language and behaviour but he is not acknowledged by the British soldiers as one. Hence he is neither British nor an Indian and is a case of loss of identity. The story ends with Sir Mohan being thrown out of the train and Lakshmi his Indian wife spits the betel saliva outside where her shocked husband was standing. The author tries to say that even though Lakshmi was uneducated she knows her place and restricts herself to the zenana. Sir Mohan's education and command over the English language makes him feel that he is not an Indian 'You are so very much like

everything else in this country, inefficient, dirty, indifferent’.

In ‘The Mark of Vishnu’ Khushwant Singh mocks at the superstitious belief of the Hindu devotee who is bit by Kala Nag just below the ‘V’ mark on his forehead. Khushwant Singh points out ironically how the symbol of the Omnipotent Preserver fails to save the devotee. He shows that religion is not a preserving institution, but divides the people as shown in his ‘The Riot’ which portrays the clash between two religions, which is instigated by a dog while ‘The Rape’ discusses about another taboo of Indian society, incest. The societal pressures make Bindo deny her sexual attraction towards her brother who is accused of raping her.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the impression that Khushwant Singh is an uninhibited and erotic writer, he brings out the reality and the Indian ness of the people. Most of his characters are candid and does not paint a rosy picture of the world.

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