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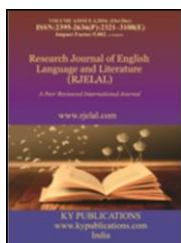
KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *DELHI A NOVEL*: RECOLLECTING AND RECLAIMING THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

A city has a past which is preserved in its geography, traditions and memories. Individual memory plays a significant part in putting together a montage of the city's culture which is less rationalised and standardised in comparison to history. Memory remembers a lot of city and city excites a lot of memory in cultural production produced by denizens of protean contemporary cities. Memory Studies is an interdisciplinary branch of knowledge, under the ambit of which the paper proposes to examine the relationship between city and memory with reference to Khushwant Singh's *Delhi a Novel*. Khushwant Singh's *Delhi a novel* is a cultural biography of the city mobilizing many significant tropes of the mnemonics of this phoenix of a city. The novel inaugurates the era of literature produced by individuals who have lived a major part of their life in Delhi or New Delhi and who now respond to the city from 'home-town' perspective where the narrative of self-doubles up as narratives of the city. As it goes all the way down to almost the first recorded period of Delhi history, the attempt is to compensate for manifold loss through reconstructing a mediated space of memory and identity.

Keywords: Cultural biography, Individual Memory, Delhi City, Khushwant Singh, *Delhi a Novel*.

A city has a past and that past is preserved in its geography and history. But it is also preserved in its traditions and memories. The culture of the city is a cumulative product of chronicling continuities and discontinuities with reference to all of these. Without this, the composite way of life of a people cannot be meaningfully foregrounded. Individual memory plays a significant part in putting together a montage of the city's culture which is less rationalised and standardised in comparison to history. Memory remembers a lot of city and city excites a lot of memory in cultural production by denizens of protean contemporary cities. This complex interplay between individual memory and

cultural memory of the city is visible in biographies, memoirs, novels, photographs and other documents engendered by citi-zens. In these documents, cultural memory intersects with individual memory, giving rise to interesting sites of identity formation. Cities identities are often dependent on canonical tropes like conventional history, tourism literature, state economy, maps and iconic images. However, when the city gets documented through the experiences of individuals, experiential memory plays a significant part in putting together an alternative montage of the city's culture which is more topical and empirical in comparison to canonical tropes. Citi-zens are also seen to grapple

with the space around them in these documentations of the city, aligning their past, present and future to the past, present and future of the city. The paper proposes to examine the relationship between city and memory with reference to *Khushwant Singh's Delhi a Novel*. *Khushwant Singh's Delhi a novel* is a cultural biography of the city of Delhi mobilizing many significant themes of this phoenix city's relationship with its residents. The novel inaugurates the era of literature produced by individuals who have lived a major part of their life in Delhi or New Delhi and who now respond to the city from 'home-town' perspective. Thus, the narrative of the self doubles up as narratives of the city. As the novel goes all the way down to almost the first recorded period of Delhi history, the attempt in this novel to compensate for manifold loss through reconstructing a mediated space of memory and identity becomes a much emulated and empathised approach in Delhi literature.

Memory Studies is an interdisciplinary branch of knowledge which studies the relationship between culture and memory as part of its project and practice. Apart from historiography, it subsumes under its ambit various other constituents of memory like myths, monuments, ritual, conversations, life writing, literature, films, documentaries and other neuronal networks. In other words, in studying the culture of a city, it is not just conventional history which can serve as a useful frame of reference, but also other media of memory which narrativize the "broad interplay of the present and the past". (Erl 2-3) Individual memory gets inscribed on collective memory or cultural memory by trying to make sense of the past and in the process, writing and highlighting dominant symbols, practices, inclusions, techniques, genres, meanings and identities which may be embraced or rejected at the point of recollection and retelling according to the needs of the present or the future. All these strategies make an individual's act of delving into the personal reservoir of memory simultaneously an act of delving into the cultural labyrinth of that society and culture. The identity provided to the city by the resident and the identity provided to the resident by the city are both

determined in the process. Identity is often linked to a specific physical landscape. James Clifford has argued that assertions of tradition are "always responses to the new" or the "other" (Clifford). Delving into the memories of living in a city, therefore, can be a cultural biography of the individual as well as the city. A cultural biography examines the impact that a surrounding culture has on a person, a group or even a product (Eakin). Steve Pile, in a very interesting article titled 'Memory and the City' develops the mind-city equation. One realises that there is much in common. Both contain "vestiges of earlier phases of development- some places blank; some partially new, partially old; transformations and restructurings" (Pile 112). The adult mind is also like the modern city in the sense that both have areas of visibility and invisibility. City is a maze, a network, a criss-cross of pathways, and so is the memory. Histories, pluralities, competing versions of reality, co-exist side by side in the mind as well as the city. Thus, it is hardly surprising that autobiographies as narratives of the memory also turn out to be the narratives of the city and vice-versa. Writers and thinkers like Walter Benjamin and Ian Sinclair attempt to write the city but in the process simultaneously produce "a particular narrative of the self". (Pile 111)

Khushwant Singh's Delhi a novel is probably the first novel to be quoted amongst "must read" novels on the city of Delhi. The novel occupies this place of prime prestige in Delhi bibliography perhaps on account of it being unambiguously eponymous with the city or perhaps on account of the notorious fame of its author. However, it is extremely critical to the Delhi oeuvre when seen as a cultural biography of the city initiating many themes that are to summarise his generations' struggle with the city and which continue to dominate the future generations' encounter with the city. The novel ushers in the era of literature produced by individuals who on account of spending a large part of their life in Delhi or New Delhi respond to the city with both pride and belonging as well as with criticism and cynicism. *Khushwant Singh* (1915 – 2014) was an Indian novelist, lawyer, politician and journalist. A post-colonial writer, he is well known

for his uncompromising secularism, his acerbic wit and humour, and an abiding love of poetry. He was the editor of popular literary and news magazines, as well as leading newspapers, through the 1970s and 1980s. He was the recipient of Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award in India, which he, however, returned as protest against Operation Bluestar by Indira Gandhi. *Delhi* is an integral part of their memories and selves. Khushwant Singh is the son of the builders of the city who bears intimate witness to the physical and socio-cultural creation of New Delhi. He is a lawyer, diplomat, journalist, writer and elite in Delhi who has had access to the high profile goings on in the Delhi society. He is the resident and discoverer of the city who lived in his block of flats in Sujana Singh Park for an exceptionally long period till his death at the age of 99. Around him, much has happened and changed in the city. He has seen the city made by the British for a few thousand people being inundated by millions. He has had the misfortune of seeing the horrors of partition, assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, assassination of Indira Gandhi and 1984 riots unfold in front of him. Testimony of one so placed and privileged holds provenance and power even before it begins to be written.

A city so painstakingly made with the efforts of his builder family, when subjected to such trauma and abuse, compel him to tell its story. His journalistic and literary skills empower him to adopt the form favoured in the late twentieth century for historical narration where the individual is not only the basic building block but also the documenting register of history. *Delhi a Novel* has been in the making since 1965. The creative output of the period between 1965 and 1990 when the novel was published comprises of history and literature in equal measure. He wrote *Ghadar* (1966), *A History of the Sikhs* (1966) and *Tragedy of Panjab* (1984). He also wrote *A Bride for the Sahib and Other Stories* (1967) and *Black Jasmine* (1971) during this period. He took up journalism with AIR, *Yojana* and *The Illustrated Weekly*. He remained engaged with publications like Indira Gandhi's *The National Herald*, Anand Bazar Group's *New Delhi*, K K Birla's *The Hindustan Times*, Maneka Gandhi's magazine *Surya* till 1986. He was also a Rajya Sabha member.

He was a MP in 1984 when both the Operation Bluestar and Indira Gandhi's assassination took place, also the time he returned in protest the Padma Bhushan awarded to him. He took to writing full time after 1986. He has been drawn to English Literature and Urdu Literature since his school days but came in personal contact with notable scholars and writers during this period. Singh has been in Lahore and London for studies, was practising law in Lahore at the time of partition, went to London, Canada and Paris as part of his diplomatic career till 1951, visited East Europe and Scandinavia during his diplomatic sojourn, went to London, Canada, the US, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore and Rangoon as part of the Rockefeller grant in 1966, University of Rochester, Princeton, Hawaii, Germany, Swarthmore College near Philadelphia, USA, on teaching assignments till he joined the *Illustrated Weekly of India* in Bombay in 1969. He made many visits to Pakistan, Mexico, Kenya, and Uganda as part of journalistic assignments and lectures on Sikh religion. He returned to Delhi in 1979 after quitting the *Weekly*. At the beginning of his chapter '*Bombay, the Illustrated Weekly of India (1969-79) and the Aftermath*' in *Truth, Love and a Little Malice*, Singh writes

Bombay, you will be told, is the only city India has, in the sense that the word city is understood in the West. Other Indian metropolises like Calcutta, Madras and Delhi are like oversized villages. (Singh 229)

Singh, however, finds it to be an overestimation of the urban appeal of the city. Its high rise buildings make it resemble New York from aerial view but at close quarters, it only holds congestion, stench, filth and squalor. Bombay does have a "heterogeneous mix of races, religions and ethnic groups" but it has its own mix of contradictions as well (Truth, Love and a Little Malice 230). Privately, each community considers itself superior to the others but publicly, in the typical fashion of *gemeinschaft* urban communities, each minds its own business to foster peaceable coexistence with others. It is the richest city but it also the most corrupt. It has a lot of luxury but an equal amount of ostentation. It offers the best food, but it also has a lot of poverty and

deprivation. As Singh concludes, "All said and done, Bombay is the most enjoyable city of India- if you can find a place to live in" (Truth, Love and a Little Malice 231). After a very exciting and successful stint with Bennett and Coleman, the proprietary firm to which the *Weekly* belonged, he was denied an extension by it in 1979 when the Bhartiya Janata Party turned unfavourable for his past contacts with the Gandhis. It is in this state of mind that he returns to the novel *Delhi*. He writes, "I had my fill of Bombay and wanted to return to my family and Delhi" (Truth, Love and a Little Malice 275). This echoes the first sentence of *Delhi a novel*. The abrupt and distasteful dismissal from the *Weekly*, combined with the opportunistic and ephemeral relationships of the corporate world, soured his memories of the city:

The experience soured me against Bombay; my visits became less frequent and I made my peace with Delhi which was the city to which I belonged and loved most. (Truth, Love and a Little Malice 276)

He writes that he spent the three months of his handing over charge to the next editor of the *Weekly* working "on the next chapter of my manuscript of Delhi" (Truth, Love and a Little malice 274). In the same book, reflecting on 'What It Takes to be a Writer', he says, "Writing is often a therapy for a troubled soul" (90). Both Singh and his narratorial persona fit the bill of troubled souls in search of healing relationships.

In *Khushwantnama- The Lessons of My Life*, the memoirs he has penned at the age of 98, Singh reiterates that "I have been a Dilliwala since my childhood, and the city has become an inextricable part of my life" (23). Intrigued by the amount of literature being produced on the city in recent times, he ascribes this profusion to the arrival of the second generation of post-partition immigrant population on the Delhi horizon who do not share the same outlook as their parents before them:

These new immigrants had no emotional attachment to Delhi- all their nostalgia was for the towns and cities that they had been forced to leave. Delhi was merely a temporary refuge for them, and they thought they would soon go back to where

they had come from. It was not the same with their children and grandchildren. They cultivated a sense of belonging to the city, an attachment helped by the fact that most schools and colleges organise trips to historical sites in the capital on a regular basis. (Khushwantnama 24)

Singh can speak with conviction about this cultivated sense of belonging as he himself belongs to the third generation of immigrant settlers in Delhi but the first who has almost entirely spent its lifetime in Delhi. He says, "I am almost as old as the city I have lived in for most of my life. ... I saw the new city come up day by day ..." (Khushwantnama 25). Singh makes *Delhi: A Novel* (1990) as much his own story as it is of the narrator or the city. Though the narrative incorporates a melange of voices in the *avante garde* fashion of a postmodern historical novel, yet Khushwant Singh prioritises his own engagement with the city as the guiding voice behind this work:

It took me twenty-five years to piece together this story spanning several centuries of history. I put in it all I had in me as a writer: love, lust, sex, hate, vendetta and violence-and above all, tears. I did not write this novel with any audience in mind. All I wanted to do was tell my readers what I learnt about the city roaming among its ancient ruins, its congested bazaars, its diplomatic corps and its cocktail parties. My only aim was to get them to Delhi and love it as much as I do. The readers response has been most gratifying and gives me hope that I may achieve my object. (Foreword)

In *Khushwantnama*, Singh summarises what he thinks ails the country most today based on his long life's experiences as

My biggest worry today is the intolerance I see in our country. We are a cowardly lot that burns books we don't like, exiles artists and vandalises their paintings. We take liberties and distort history textbooks to conform to our ideas and ideals; we ban films and beat up journalists who write against us. We are responsible for this growing intolerance, and we are party to it if we don't do anything to prevent or stop it.

If we love our country, we must save it from communal forces. Though the liberal class is shrinking, I sincerely hope that the present and future generations totally reject communal and fascist policies.

If India is to survive as a nation and march forward, it must remain unified, reassert its secular credentials and throw out communally based parties from the political arena. (35)

The writer and narrator in *Delhi: a Novel* approach the city of Delhi with the same fear and hope in their hearts. Underscoring the tenets of literary excellence which Singh has evolved and endorsed in his career, he writes in *Khushwantnama*,

We read history to learn about the past, and pass exams. We read biographies and autobiographies to acquaint ourselves with the lives of great men and the times they lived in. We read fiction for amusement. At times, we are lucky enough to come across a book which combines history, biography and fiction, from which we learn about our past and present, and which we enjoy reading. (92)

Commenting on historical narratives, he pinpoints that

Very few people write history the way history should be written: not as a catalogue of dry-as-dust kings, battles and treaties, but by bringing the past to the present, putting life back in characters long dead and gone, in order to make the reader feel he is living among them, sharing their joys, sorrows and apprehensions. (*Khushwantnama* 92-93)

Delhi a novel is all these literary beliefs and methods in a nutshell. The voices which reconstruct episodes from Delhi's past form a procession of tableaux but this tableaux flows from the writer-narrator's memory and imagination. The narrative is all apiece and adds up to the writer's thematic preoccupation of mapping the relationship between the self and the city through the alter ego of the narrator.

Khushwant Singh's *Delhi a Novel* has three distinct threads of narrative intertwined in linear as well as non-linear patterns to produce a cultural autobiography through personalised historiography.

A truly fascinating account, objective as well as subjective, straddling provocatively between history and literature, it works by breaking down spatio-temporal realities to subvert fixed notions of fiction and reality. The three threads are intricately interwoven as there emerge huge areas of overlap between the city, the self, and the storyteller. The first thread comprises of the first person narration by the quasi-authorial persona of the Sikh guide who has had his fill of whoring in foreign lands and is now based in Delhi. The persona is based on Khushwant Singh's self image of "Not a Nice Man to Know" as he moves around Delhi monuments with his elite clients occasioning one sexual encounter after another. With his hermaphrodite mistress Bhagmati in tow, he talks glibly and gleefully about taboos like farts and eunuchs to knock all middle class prudery out of people. The second thread consists of the 'story within a story' framework which touches upon some of the most significant epochs in the history of the city of Delhi through the insightful narration of characters, some imaginary and some historic as also, some commoners and some rulers. The third thread is in the form of the chapter 'Builders' as it carries the maximum autobiographical fidelity. All these threads intertwine as his personal engagement refracts through the narratorial persona, the symbolic matrix, and autobiographical dimensions.

Commentators often remark on Khushwant Singh's epic achievement of making the city of Delhi the virtual or titular hero of the novel but there are portions which confound them like the ones which have nothing to do with Delhi or its history. Writes Madhumeet,

The novel as described by the author is an attempt to tell the story of Delhi from its earliest beginnings to the present times. The chapters involving the earthy affairs of the purported author and Bhagmati are, in a way not history or part of the story of Delhi. (Madhumeet 4)

The chiaroscuro of Delhi history per se pans out through accumulation of fragments from various periods as told by characters picked up from the said periods. The historical and non-historical persons created or evoked are Musaddi Lal Kaisth of

Mehrauli, Timur, Jaita Rangreta, Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah, Meer Taqi Meer, Alice Aldwell, Nihal Singh, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Son of a builder of New Delhi and Ram Rakha, son of Sai Ditta, a refugee from West Pakistan. Out of these eleven, while five, i.e., Timur, Jaita Rangreta, Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah, and Bahadur Shah Zafar are makers as well as narrators of the history of Delhi, the remaining six are improvisations of the author and their role as makers of history is minimal. Meer Taqi Meer is a historical figure, being one of the most celebrated poets of Urdu, but he was only a witness, not a maker, of history. As is evident from the above list, the voices constitute an eclectic mix picked up according to no particular pattern of power, race, class or affiliation. The criteria of selection have discord and disharmony as the desideratum. The only discernible pattern is that these periods are of turmoil and conflict and all these characters have been witness to violence and fanaticism. Some periods in Delhi history known for prosperity, tolerance and cultural refinements have been omitted from this odyssey. For example, periods like Khiljis, Lodhis, Mughals and Pax Britannica find no mention. It is as if the attempt is to bring alive the conflicts and contradictions which have been at the heart of Delhi, and by extension, India, with the exception only perhaps of Delhi during the National Emergency of 1975, which is conspicuous by its omission. The so-called historical episodes alternate with narrator's private life and views. There are angry outbursts by readers of this novel who are at a loss to place the many sexually explicit encounters and many digressive but equally scandalising discourses indulged in by the narrator. The key to understanding the placement and utility of these apparently irrelevant chapters which seemingly serve no other purpose except expressing Singh's scatological and phallic humour is to see them as contributing towards the 'shaping' of this narratorial persona. The narrator is a carefully crafted persona with many shades of grey. By allotting the role of the narrator to a seemingly degenerate and debauched ageing Sikh, Singh subverts the notion of the "normative autobiographical subject" (Smith and Watson 196). The break between so-called historical pieces and personalised narratorial

sequences appears to be a break only when the readers expect the novel to be a fictionalised version of textbook history and disregard the fact that the novel, self confessedly, is an attempt by the writer to write the city mediated through his own individuality. The individuality of the narrator built up through his life, demeanour, beliefs and failings is a literary equivalent of writer's own objective. The presentification of the past in life writing is a strategy of re-reading life's experience which also leads to a conscious affirmation of the self. Taking cognisance of the postmodern concerns of referentiality, fictionality and intentionality in life writing, Singh inserts a narratorial persona between his life and its readers to negotiate the "impersonating effect of discourse" or "performativity of life writing" (Smith and Watson 208)

The 'self' of the writer and narrator coalesce at several points. The narrator is cast in Singh's own image in more ways than one. In his autobiography, *Truth, Love and a Little Malice*, Singh describes his 'Infancy to Adolescence: School Years' as where

More than changes in the family's fortunes were changes wrought in my body and mind. I grew up from a granny-loving child to a sex obsessed adolescent. (27)

Servants working in his home's kitchen, classmates and teachers at Modern School, friends at St Stephens' College, acquaintances at Lahore, his father's friends, companions in London- all figure in his coming of age saga in primarily sexual terms. The epithet of 'sex obsessed' can be applied equally to Singh as well as the narrator. The narratorial persona is also like Khushwant Singh in having travelled widely all over the globe. At the point where the novel begins, he wants to sow his wild oats and settle down in a place which gives out welcoming vibes of intimacy and belonging. There is a structured similarity between the author and the narrator built in the novel at the level of personality, historical subjectivity and interest in the city but there is also a structured dissimilarity in the form of the character of Bhagmati. The eunuch mistress of the narrator exists at a physical level for the narrator

but at a symbolic level for the writer. The character of Bhagmati delineates all that the writer thinks and feels for the city. Bhagmati has been through much abuse, exploitation and hardships. A eunuch prostitute is treated like a commodity to be used and thrown. Even normal humanity and dignity is not conceded to 'it'. This is how the writer sees the travails of Delhi which has been vanquished time and again by its conquerors only to be defaced, depleted and destroyed by each master. Bhagmati belongs to neither sex and yet, is a great source of pleasure and satisfaction. By breaking up the stereotype of conventional beauty and heterogeneous romantic relationships, the writer underlines the uniqueness of the city and his own intimacy with it. The pock marked, uncouth, pedestrian and dishevelled but ardent and accomplished paramour, Bhagmati, attracts as well as repels. This can easily be said about Delhi, which offers as many charms as it offers challenges. The love-hate relationship with Bhagmati, however, goes deeper than outer appearances as she is the emotional anchor in times of loneliness or crisis. This is true for the writer who digs the city less for beauty and more for belonging. The writer returns to Bhagmati with a sense of homecoming and finds succour in her unpretentious and undemanding love and generosity. After having lived and toured innumerable cities of the world, the writer feels a spontaneous and primordial bond with the city. She is the one who saves him from being murdered by the riotous mobs. The writer also feels grateful of having survived the maniacal frenzy of 1984 violence in the refuge of the city. At one point, the narrator says that Bhagmati is beginning to become old and he is beginning to feel satiety and irritation. He goes on to have only an occasional and platonic meeting with her. This is true of the writer who loses his appetite for the city as it changes beyond recognition and it becomes a challenge to step out on its polluted and congested roads.

Khushwant Singh's generation has also seen a lot of transformation in Delhi. In the "Introduction" titled 'Loving and Loathing Delhi' to an anthology, *City Improbable*, edited by him in 2001, he says that the entire milieu and culture has undergone a sea change. The uprooted migrants are

eager to rehabilitate themselves and those who succeed make a meretricious display of their newly acquired affluence. Also, he states that "the most loathsome aspect of Delhi is the new caste system that has evolved: the caste hierarchy of the bureaucracy". This caste hierarchy exists similarly in politics and other professions (Singh xv). As all these inner and outer developments come together in *Delhi a Novel* to produce a document where the city writes the native and the native writes the city, many of this generation like Anjolie Ela Menon, Arpana Kaur, Madhu Jain, Renuka Narayanan, Jasleen Dhamija also chart a similar course. Khushwant Singh begins his "Introduction" to *City Improbable* with this now familiar theme of does anyone belong to Delhi or does Delhi belong to anyone by stating

Some contributors to this anthology, especially the younger writers, wonder if Delhi can ever be anyone's native city. People come here to earn a living, to study, or were born here and so had no option. But if one had a choice, would one really choose to live here? Does this ancient city, once described as "mistress of every conqueror", inspire love or loyalty? (Singh xi)

He draws up a balance sheet for the things he loves and the things he loathes about Delhi. He loves its history, monuments, modern buildings, nature and greenery. The not-so-loveable aspects of Delhi are the inconsiderate behaviour of people, deplorable civic and road sense, lack of respect for women, ostentatious exhibitionism of the *nouveau riche*, disappearance of the *adab* and *tahzeeb*, and the hierarchical snobbery or VVIP culture in politics, bureaucracy and the armed forces. He concludes that the balance sheet has as much on the credit side as it has on the debit, hence "if you happen to be living in Delhi, why uproot yourself and go somewhere else of which you know less, and which may not be worth knowing either" (Singh xv). The process of striking roots in Delhi and then coming full circle of having to decide whether and why to continue to live in Delhi is a phenomenon to which the children of first migrants to Delhi have been exposed to. The first generation of people largely

brought up in Delhi is quite unique in this sense. It found a sense of belonging in its heyday living in the freshly minted New Delhi but lost it subsequently when Delhi grew and shaped up quite unlike anyone's predictions or expectations. The narratives of this generation frequently compare their present locations with their native lands and then with the pristine New Delhi before it became an urban clutter and bureaucratic slum. Inheritors of the Raj and its privileges, they grapple with loss of many kinds. But eventually justify their choice of living in Delhi around similar themes like the Delhi winters and monuments, the courage and spirit of the city, surviving cultural districts in the city, and the emerging entrepreneurial and professional opportunities in the city.

Cities are simultaneously both real and imaginary places, as demonstrated by Katia Pizzia and Godela Weiss-Sussex in an anthology titled *The Cultural Identity of European Cities*. Writes Pizzi in its "Introduction",

Indeed, to quote James Donald, it is the interplay between imagined city and 'real' urban environment, the 'traffic between urban fabric, representation and imagination [that] fuzzies up the epistemological and ontological distinctions and, in doing so, produces the city between, the imagined city where we actually live. (Pizzi 1)

This "city between" is a hybrid product of the physical landscape and the imaginary landscape. Boyer identifies three major cartographies producing the hybrid city: the traditional city as work of art; the modern city as panorama; and the contemporary city or postmodern city as spectacle (Boyer). Khushwant Singh's prismatic Hybrid Delhi traverses the whole course from traditional to modern to postmodern and thus, has the frozen quality of art, the vastness of panorama and illusion and glitter of a spectacle superimposed against each other. Hybrid city is as much a spatial practice as it is an identity marker; it is as much a really real city as it is a collection or archive of urban image banks to which we contribute to as well as borrow from. When a city dweller remembers and writes the city, she shuffles and reshuffles the deck of identities and

images. On the one hand, the individual's act of remembering and representing engages with questions like identity, viewpoint, authority, canonicity while on the other, it also opens up ways of analysing public and personal practices of memory- granting valence to places and periods based on dispensations of remembering or forgetting. For example, strategies to deal with memory of traumatic events in cities involve both a forgetting and a remembrance. While the immediate sufferers may choose forgetting, belated registers of trauma by later generations choose telling, retelling, revisiting, resisting and revising. Memory is an important tool to not just recollect but to also reclaim the city. Mark Crinson summarises, "Memory is both burden and liberation" (Crinson xi). Loss of familiar spaces, lifestyles, traditions, privileges leads to what is called musealization – arranging past in a display of significant evocation- of idealized as well as endangered heritage. Individual memory selects and rejects places and periods which hold a significance and value in its own place making project in the city. The cultural production pertaining to cities is thus an important interpretive grid to understand the shifting boundaries of public and private, past and present, signification and erasure, affiliation and disowning and harmony and conflict (Proceedings of the Memory Studies Thematic Workshop Zentrum Moderner Orient').

Khushwant Singh's process of recollection and reclamation of the city of Delhi in *Delhi a Novel* produces a self mediated cultural biography of Delhi where the selected traits are trauma, conflict, and transience on the one hand and continuity, diversity and adaptability on the other. Khushwant Singh's take on Delhi might have been written from a vantage point of intimate witness and privileged testimony, but it encourages many other ordinary dwellers and sensitive writers to reclaim their unique space in the city- a space which is invested with personal landmarks, mnemonics, feelings, names, characters, and historical periods. *Delhi a Novel* paves way for many Delhi lovers and lives to similarly reconstruct and reclaim a defining and distinctive space of memory and identity which is neither a perishable nor a transferable property.

While that Delhi built by Singh's family survived in a flat in Sujan Singh Park where Singh lived on almost as a recluse till the ripe old age of 99, *Delhi a Novel* survives today as an immutable and immortal saga of dislocations and retrievals of Singh's generation. As it connects to *Ahmed Ali's Twilight*, Anita Desai's *In Custody* and Nayantara Sehgal's *This Time of Morning* through the theme of loss of Mughal culture and Shahjahanabad and gain of independence, it opens the floodgates for everyone to write their own Delhi. Whether diaspora or NRI or campus goer or East Delhi peri-urban or graphic novelist- all have thereafter enriched the hybrid city that sprawls along the length and breadth of Khushwant Singh's life, novels and memories.

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