



Evolution of Postcolonial India in the Articles of Khushwant Singh

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Abstract

Khushwant Singh entered into the world of literature through his novel Train to Pakistan. However he also wrote articles on various aspects of postcolonial India. These articles very eloquently tell about the people of India with diverse ethnicity and the difficulties of uniting these people as a country. The horrors of partition and the shadows of notorious designs of colonial masters who tried to create a divide between the majority ethnic group and one of its biggest minorities, loom large in India. The articles discussed in this research paper make a humble effort to throw light on the desperate struggle of postcolonial India to progress and how the ethnic and historical baggage she carries with her.

Key words: moplals, goojur, harijans, adivasis, hatred

Khushwant Singh's articles An Indian Village, Portrait of a Famine - Bihar 1968, Why Hindu and Muslim Speak Hate, The Women of India are few pieces of literature which delve deep into the Indian psyche to portray the troubles of a country struggling to find its way of development after her independence. On one occasion Khushwant Singh stopped at a village road side tea vendor and interviewed people about the crops and their state of life in villages in the article An Indian Village. A Goojur milkman replied to the well-dressed sardarji to leave his car away and cycle with them in the countryside for twenty miles if he really wants to see their plight. Nevertheless, the goojur continues in the same breath that god has been kind to them and He gives to everyone. The communication between Khushwant Singh and the villagers shows how villagers suffer many difficulties and still they are patient enough to have faith in the providence.

'Why Hindu and Muslim Speak Hate' is another article which tries to decipher the reason behind the animosity between the two religious communities. The article starts with explaining how

Islam made inroads to India. How Arabs converted to Islam by Prophet Mohammad came to India as tradesmen and introduced their new faith to India and mosques sprang along the western coast.

After the Prophet Mohammad converted the Arabs to Islam, these traders introduced their new faith into India. Mosques sprang up along the western coast. There is evidence to prove that these early Arab Muslims were made more than welcome by the local Hindus, who gave them daughters in marriage. Descendants of these ancient traders are still found in large communities in Malabar, the present day state of Kerala. They are known as Moplals from the Malayalam word Mapilla, meaning son-in-law. The amicable relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim changed abruptly when, instead of the peaceful Arab trader, India began to be invaded from the northwest by Muslim armies. (94)

These armies looted and destroyed temples and idols therein leaving deep scars in the hearts of majority community of India. The partition of India and creation of Pakistan in the year 1947 followed by the riots and killings of millions of people of both the communities further deepened these scars. The sane voices of great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru tried to heal the scars and they stressed the importance of unity in diversity to develop India as a country. However people are still haunted by the memories to their unpleasant past and therefore sometimes cannot stop themselves from speaking hate.

Khushwant Singh's submission of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru as sane voices highlights his belief in the ideas of these two great nation builders who believed that India could be a secular democracy where people of all faiths – Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians being the major religious communities – would live in peace and work for their own and country's development under the new political system termed as Socio-Secular, Democratic Republic. India has, infact started progressing under the guidance of our great nation builders and leaving apart some minor setbacks India continues to march on the path of progress under its constitutional provisions and socio-political frame work.

Khushwant Singh does not hesitate to establish in these articles that Pakistan has failed to progress in the same respect because it chose to be a non-secular democracy and persecuted its minorities. However, Khushwant Singh is also very blunt about the complexities of India due to diverse religions, castes, classes and poverty. In his article 'Portrait of a Famine – Bihar 1968' he points out the deteriorating state of politics where common people are helpless and at the mercy of few rich and powerful.

Politics, explained my escort who was a young Sarvodaya worker. Politics is the plague. A third of our population consists of Harijans and Adivasis. The three castes that matter are the Kayasthas, the Ahirs and the Rajputs. These three and the

Brahmins make politics a whole time occupation. They think of nothing else except the elections. Whether it is the Congress or the Communists, the Jan Sangh, Jharkhand Socialists or the Swatantra, all they are concerned with is how many people of each caste they should take in order to win seats in the Vidhan Sabha. They have no time to think of the drought or the starving million. (54)

Later touring into the famine-stricken country side of Bihar state. Khushwant Singh explains the horrors of famine as people are starving to death in a country 20 years after its independence. How education and other government services are yet to reach in the remote villages mostly inhabited by Harijans and Adivasis. The drought which causes these famine can be avoided if government is alert enough to prepare dams and canals when the rivers of these areas cause heavy floods during the monsoon. However, vote bank politics and serving the interests of few rich and powerful make the authorities so reckless that they turn their faces from the miseries of the weak and poor. The gulf between rich and poor is also portrayed by the author when he tells about the posh colony clubs and restaurants where a rich fair and well fed lady sips beer and asks if there really is famine in Bihar, expresses her sadness for the victims before she takes another sip of her beer.

'The Women of India' further analyses the status of women in India. The article begins with the discussions about Indira Gandhi becoming Prime Minister of India. The patriarchal mind set could not accept a country as large and diverse as India could be headed by a woman in the beginning. It also tells that how women started getting place in both the upper houses and Vidhan Sabhas. Some women were on the Government benches alongside Prime Minister Nehru: Dr. Sushila Nayar, Minister of Health; Mrs. Laxmi Menon, Deputy Minister of External affairs, and the Deputy Minister of Finance, the fair, buxom Tarakeshwari Sinha whose black kiss curl

dangled on a cheek. (An American Senator introduced to Mrs. Sinha was so overcome that all he could stutter was: You are the most beautiful woman Deputy Finance Minister I have ever met. On the opposition benches, outshining other women parliamentarians was Gayatri Devi, Maharani of Jaipur and a member of the conservative Swatantra Party. (70)

Khushwant Singh elaborates in the article that one thing is common in all these women; they all belong to rich and famous class. The essay further examines women of poor and backward communities of India lead a miserable life no matter whether they are Hindus, Muslims or any other community. Male dominated society has turned them into mere children producing objects. They get little respect if they give birth to male child and if they produce only girl child or remain barren the husband can leave her conveniently to marry another woman. The writer further deliberates that religious provision fail to give equality and justice to these women and on the contrary they give upper hand to men to heap injustice on women. Thus women like Mrs. Laxmi Menon, Tarkeshwari Sinha and Gayatri Devi are growing in their representation in Indian politics but they do not represent the real women of India.

Khushwant Singh's articles deliberated and discussed in this research paper throw light on India of the sixties and seventies. The articles bare the harsh realities of Indian society and its state twenty years after her independence. The hatred between two major religions in India due the aggressions of her mediaeval rulers, partition of India and the consequent communal rites. The efforts of sane voices of great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru to heal the wounds and unite her as a nation. The plight of peasants, poor and backward tribes during famine and apathetic functioning of political parties which are more interested in winning elections and grabbing power rather than worrying about their subjects. The condition of common women folk due to patriarchal system dominating all religious communities is also

very transparently put forward by the writer, Khushwant Singh.

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