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Schizophrenia in Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*

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Abstract

*Literature serves as a mirror to society, with authors articulating societal behaviors through their works. Indian English novels provide a comprehensive platform for studying culture, cultural interactions, and cultural transformations, with a focus on Indian perspectives. A peek into the imaginative realm of the masters of Indian English novels reveals a cosmopolitan ensemble representing diverse religions, communities, professions, and viewpoints. The Indian milieu is eloquently portrayed through the lens of human psychology. Indian authors such as Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Tharoor, Shashi Deshpande, and Khushwant Singh voice their concerns in their writings, advocating for the state and psychology of Indian society. In his dissertation, the researcher aims to assess the perspectives presented in Khushwant Singh's novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, employing the psychological and postmodern approach known as Schizophrenia.*

Keywords: Postmodern Technique, Schizophrenia.

Introduction

Khushwant Singh, born as Khushal Singh on February 2, 1915, was a multifaceted Indian personality. He excelled as an author, lawyer, diplomat, journalist, and politician. His experiences during the 1947 Partition of India profoundly impacted him, leading him to pen his most renowned novel, "Train to Pakistan" in 1956 (which was later adapted into a film in 1998). Khushwant Singh hailed from Punjab and received his education at Modern School, New Delhi, St. Stephen's College, and Government College, Lahore. He furthered his studies at King's College London and obtained an LL.B. from the University of London. His legal journey began at the London Inner Temple, followed by eight years of practice as a lawyer in the Lahore High Court. However, his path took a fascinating turn when he joined the Indian Foreign Service after India gained independence from the British Empire in 1947. His journalistic pursuits led him to become a reporter at All India Radio in 1951, and later, he ventured into the Department of Mass Communications at UNESCO in Paris in 1956. These experiences fueled his passion for literature. As a writer, Khushwant Singh was celebrated for his sharp secularism, wit, sarcasm, and an unwavering love for poetry. His astute observations

on the social and behavioral differences between Westerners and Indians were infused with acidic humor. Notably, he held editorial positions in various literary and news magazines, as well as two newspapers during the 1970s and 1980s. In the realm of politics, Khushwant Singh served as a Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament, from 1980 to 1986. His principled stance was evident when he returned the Padma Bhushan award in 1984 as a protest against the Operation Blue Star, during which the Indian Army conducted a controversial raid in Amritsar. In recognition of his significant contributions, Khushwant Singh was honored with the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award, in 2007.

Born into a Sikh family in Hadali, Khushab District, Punjab, now a part of Pakistan, Khushwant Singh was the son of Sir Sobha Singh, a well-known builder in Lutyens' Delhi. His uncle, Sardar Ujjal Singh, had served as the Governor of Punjab and Tamil Nadu. Khushwant Singh received his education from Modern School in New Delhi, Government College in Lahore, St. Stephen's College in Delhi, and King's College London, before studying law at the Inner Temple.

Khushal Singh, meaning "Prosperous Lion", was the birth name bestowed upon him by his grandmother. He was affectionately referred to as "Shalee". This name, however, became a source of mockery at school, where he was often teased with the phrase, "Shalee Shoolie, Bagh dee Moolee", implying "This shalee or shoolee is the radish of some garden." To rhyme with his elder brother Bhagwant's name, he chose the name Khushwant. He stated that this new name was "self-manufactured and meaningless". However, he later found out that a Hindu physician shared the same name, and the count subsequently grew.

Khushwant Singh embarked on his professional journey as a lawyer in 1938, serving at the Lahore Court for a span of eight years. In 1947, he joined the Indian Foreign Service of the newly sovereign India. His initial role was that of an Information Officer for the Indian Government in Toronto, Canada. He then served as the Press Attaché and Public Officer for the Indian High Commission in London and Ottawa for four years. In 1951, he transitioned to journalism with All India Radio. From 1954 to 1956, he was associated with the Department of Mass Communications of UNESCO in Paris. In 1956, he pivoted to editorial services. He edited Yojana, a government journal of India from 1951 to 1953; The Illustrated Weekly of India, a newsweekly; and two significant Indian newspapers, The National Herald and the Hindustan Times. Under his leadership, The Illustrated Weekly emerged as India's leading newsweekly, with its circulation soaring from 65,000 to 400,000. After a nine-year stint with the weekly, he was asked to leave "with immediate effect" on 25 July 1978, a week before his retirement. A new editor was appointed the same day. Post his departure, the weekly experienced a significant decline in readership.

Khushwant Singh passed away due to natural causes at his residence in Delhi on 20 March 2014, at the ripe age of 99. His demise was deeply mourned by many, including the President, Vice-President, and Prime Minister of India. Born in 1915 in Hadali, Khushab District in the Punjab Province, which is now a part of modern Pakistan, he had expressed a wish for some of his ashes to be scattered in Hadali, which was duly fulfilled. Over his lifetime, he was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Rockefeller Grant, Padma Bhushan, Punjab Rattan Award, Padma Vibhushan, and the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, among others.

Schizophrenia in Khushwant Singh's I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale

Schizophrenia is a severe condition that impacts an individual's thinking, feeling, and behavior. Those suffering from schizophrenia might struggle to differentiate between reality and their imagination; they might appear unresponsive or detached and might find it challenging to express typical emotions in social contexts. Contrary to common belief, schizophrenia does not equate to split or multiple personality disorder. The majority of individuals with schizophrenia are non-

violent and do not pose a threat to others. The disorder is not a result of childhood experiences, inadequate parenting, or a lack of willpower, and the symptoms vary from person to person. In this novel, the representation of the postmodern concept of schizophrenia provides a profound understanding of characters in society with opposing ideas and mindsets. While many individuals suffer from this disorder, only some manage to overcome it, either through their own capabilities or with the assistance of others.

In this novel, the main character grapples with a disorder similar to schizophrenia. His adeptness in managing this situation is detailed in this article. Khushwant Singh's novel, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, has garnered commendable praise for its fictional depiction. The novel provides a glimpse into the lives and traditions of the Sikhs in India. It unfolds a family drama that can be appreciated by Western readers, even those with minimal knowledge of India. Despite its one-dimensional character, the novel captivates with its plot, climax, and layered narrative. The vivid imagery of Punjab and its Sikh inhabitants enhances its allure and beauty. The inaugural chapter commences with a poignant reference to a baptism in blood, creating a stark contrast to the atmosphere suggested by the title. The narrative portrays Sher Singh and his friends participating in target practice and rifle shooting in a rural Punjab setting. Madan tests his weak nerves, and Sher Singh rises to the challenge.

He had somehow believed that he would muddle through,
Getting the best of the two worlds the one of security
Provided by his father who was a senior magistrate, and
The other full of applause that would come to him as the
Heroic leader of a band of terrorist..... (15)

In a matter of life and death, Sher Singh turned to his mother for counsel. Identifying herself as an "uneducated, local woman", she sought guidance from the Guru. When Sher Singh inquired about the Guru's words, she responded, "...my son has erred. However, if he were to identify those who accompanied him, it would be a graver mistake. He would no longer be considered a Sikh, and I would never see his face again." (208-9) Following this, Sabhrai bestowed his blessings upon him and departed. The Guru's words had a miraculous effect, leading the Taylors to present the Buta Singh family with a generous gift upon Sher Singh's release from jail. As there was no solid evidence against Sher Singh, he was held on suspicion. Sabhrai's mystical powers led to Sher Singh's victory. It was a triumph of good over evil and violent forces. It reaffirmed the belief that human values and natural justice ultimately prevail.

Conclusion

The protagonist's encounter with schizophrenia in this novel enables the reader to comprehend not only the author's predicament but also the context of the times. The researcher posits that the novel mirrors the skepticism prevalent in contemporary Indian society, which is manifested in the state of schizophrenia, a mental interpretation of life events. This postmodern concept is explored in Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*.

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