

CHAPTER III

THEMES

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1. Socio- Political Themes

“The Mark of Vishnu” deals with the powerful theme of clash between superstition and reason or science.

The playful and mischievous school children in “The Mark of Vishnu” come to know of Gunga Ram, the pious and devoted Brahmin who pours milk into a saucer for the *Kala Nag*, or black cobra, as a symbol of the Hindu’s worship of *Shesh-Nag*. Gunga Ram of course, believes in the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh or (Shiva), the creator, the preserver and the destroyer, respectively. He had an implicitly faith in Vishnu, the preserver and as a symbol of his faith. Gunga Ram regularly smeared his forehead with the V mark with sandalwood paste. He was extremely superstitious and had an implicit faith in the snake and cobra or *Kala Nag* as forms of deity.

Gunga Ram was a poor Hindu servant and his idea of a *phannyar* (hooded cobra) laying eggs was ridiculed by the scientifically- oriented schools boys. Kala Nag, the black-hooded, six-foot long, fleshy round cobra was seen one rainy morning and was later surrounded and hit on the hood by the mischievous school-children. They stoned him and reduced him to a squishy- squashy pulp of black and white jelly, spattered with blood and mud. They put it in a tin box. Gunga Ram, as usual took the saucer of milk for the Kala Nag; but it remained untouched and the poor devoted Hindu sensed danger. Next day the mischievous children took the tin box to their school class room, wishing to present it to the science teacher. As soon as the lid was taken off, the Kala Nag burst out and surveyed the scene with his bloodshot eyes. It was able to drag himself to the door. outside the classroom stood Gunga Ram, devoted figure. He placed the saucer of milk for the Kala Nag and himself sat on his knees as a gesture of reverence. He prayed and asked for divine forgiveness for the

injury done to the Kala Nag by the erring schoolboys. In desperate fury, the Kala Nag bit Gunga Ram all over his forehead and then escaped. Gunga Ram died on the spot. The teacher noticed the little drops of blood on Gunga Ram's forehead and saw also the V mark where the Kala Nag had dug his fangs.

Khushwant Singh develops the theme realistically through the characters. The issue is presented between superstition and science. Gunga Ram represents a superstitious belief which is representative of general Hindu religions through the snake or the cobra called Nag which occupies an important place in the Hindu view of the chain of being. It dominates the ritualistic creeds and traditional modes of thinking. The Hindu worship snakes of different variety are Killing a snake is against this creed and traditional modes of thinking. The school boys and their science teacher and the classroom stand for the scientific attitude and the changed attitude visa-a-vis superstitious beliefs. The story shows the conflict between their two outlooks.

The autobiographical element in the story adds to the realism in the story. Rahul Singh, Khushwant Singh's son writes about his father and the short story "The Mark of Visnnu". Khushwant Singh also loved playing pranks some of which got him into trouble. One of them clearly bordered on the dangerous.

Having found a cobra in the garden, my father and his brother smashed it to pulp but left the head intact. Taking it to be dead, they put it into a biscuit tin, fastened the lid securely with a string, and presented the tin to their chemistry teacher who had a variety of snakes in methylated spirit, in jars but no cobra. The teacher got a jar of methylated spirit untied the string of the lid, and put his hand in the tin to take out what he imagined was a dead cobra. Instead a live and angrily hissing cobra sprang out, its deadly fangs just missing the startled teacher's face. That incident would later be turned into one of my father's best short stories, the mark of Vishnu".¹

Superstition, it appears, is still an integral part of the average Indian's mental make-up. Khushwant Singh being acutely aware of the dangers of superstition shows in this short story how superstitious beliefs persist among the poor, illiterate religious minded persons. As a humanist Khushwant Singh belief. disapproves superstitions and blind belief.

“The Voice of God” deals with the theme of unfair practices in elections in a democratic system of governments.

It is the story of the people of the village called Bhamba where nothing that is important ever happens. But the placid course of life's current in Bhamba is disturbed by electioneering and gusty political winds. The English Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Forsythe arrives at Bhamba ostensibly on an official visit, but actually to canvass support for Ganda Singh who had earlier helped the British government in suppressing peasant agitations and the Congress movement, in his bid for election to the Punjab Legislative Assembly. Ganda Singh was a notorious leader of dacoits and thugs; his men robbed with impunity and shared the proceeds with the police. He was greatly hated by the people of the area because of his cruelties, injustice and aggressive activities. The British officer Mr. Forsythe paid tributes to Ganda Singh. He went about distributing favours to the Zaildar and the Lambadars, the village officials, in exchange for promises of block voting in his favour. Next day a lorry carrying men and a loudspeaker reached Bhamba to the mild astonishment of the innocent and simple villagers. The men who wore white Gandhi caps shouted slogans in support of the Nationalist nominee, Kartar Singh, an advocate, who was also a contestant. The Nationalist nominee was patronized by Seth Sukhtankar, a millionaire, owning a chain of cloth mills who poured money into the election campaign. Kartar Singh was followed by Baba Ram Singh, who was a genuine worker among peasants and had served several terms of imprisonment for participation in nationalist movements. He was old and pious and the people loved and admired him. He called himself a Kisan

(a simple farmer), and his appearance and behaviour reminded the people of their Sikh Gurus and true religious leaders.

The polling took place on the appointed day and Sardar Ganda Singh, Honorary Magistrate (incidentally leader of the thugs) was declared elected over his rival Sardar Kartar Singh by 2,220 votes. Baba Ram Singh the genuine representative of the people, not only lost the elections but also forfeited his deposit. Khushwant Singh's comment has the characteristic ironic touch, "The people had spoken. The voice of the people is the voice of God." ("The Voice of God", P.39)

The story shows that muscle power, unfair means, pressure tactics and goondaism are used to win the elections. Those who really good people are defeated through unfair practices in the election. "The Voice of God" highlights the inherent evils of a democratic system of government in which elections play a dominant role, but these elections are often won by hardcore criminals like Ganda Singh at the cost of deserving candidates like Baba Ram Singh.

"The Voice of God" is a realistic story. It gives voice to Khushwant Singh's experience, observation and trust with politics. Khushwant Singh was disillusioned with Indian politics. His son writes in the biography of Khushwant Singh :

To be successful in Indian politics, you need, to begin with, considerable funds or a benefactor who can provide you those funds (needless to say, the benefactor will expect something in return when you become a Member of Parliament, or better still, a Minister.) Then, you have to be a seasoned liar who does not easily get caught out. Truth, principles and public interest, which should be the beacons of a self respecting politician are alien to all but a handful of Indian politicians, which is why India remains a highly flawed democracy.²

Realism finds, expression through the characters used in the story. Ganda Singh, Kartar Singh, Baba Ram Singh and Mr. Forsythe are typical characters. The village atmosphere and the village scene appear

realistic. The Sikh, Muslim, Christian and Hindu inhabitants, village fair, flour mill, afternoon and evening, election campaigning are portrayed vividly and convincingly.

Khushwant Singh's humanism implies that man like Baba Ram Singh should be elected by the people. He has all the good qualities required to serve the people. He was a freedom fighter, worked for the cause of humanity. He was a god-fearing man who had spent his life serving the peasants. He was like the Guru himself. He would fight for liberation of the people from foreign power as well as exploiting landlords. He would fight the police bullies and the corrupt administration. The author evokes sympathy about him in the minds of the reader. It is suggested that people should avoid such mistakes to save democracy. But he has sent this message quite artistically.

"A Punjab Pastoral" deals with social problems in Indian villages. A socialist and his Indian friend who is a Marxist and the narrator of this story work in the rural area to reform the people. They are after social reform, economic reform, educational reform and moral reform. They want to enlighten the rural minds on many useful things. They want to teach the villagers to denounce police oppression, corruption and injustice in the law courts. They do the philanthropic work with missionary zeal in the villages.

They work together in Soorajpur to further the cause of progress. The village was backward. There were many social problems. The Sikhs would not let the Christians into their temple because the Christians were sweepers and skinned dead buffaloes. These two gentlemen helped solve the problem through personal contact and taking the people of the two communities into confidence. There was also the problem of drinking. Moola Singh who had two wives appeared drunk before the two young men. So they couldn't talk with him on an important subject on that day. The Christian converts were full of pagan superstition like their Sikh or Hindu brothers. The American is surprised to see the villagers practicing social evils in their life. He thinks that India is a queer country.

In "A Punjab Pastoral" the theme of social problems in Indian villages is treated realistically. Social realism is obviously noticed throughout the story. The young men go from Amritsar to Soorajpur on their bike. The author gets an opportunity to describe the rural scene and the Punjabi Pastoral against the back drop of which the characters practicing social evils are shown quite vividly. It is pictorial and romantically evocative.

Khushwant Singh treats the theme from the humanitarian point of view. The Christian Missionary Hansen is interested in the welfare of the villagers. He takes interest in the work and the people though he fails to know the mind set of the rural folk at times. He is happy to see the beautiful daughter of Moola Singh. His mood of depression disappears soon. Khushwant Singh's humanism is at work through the missionary who undertakes the work of illumination or enlightenment in the interest of man.

"The Man With a Clear Conscience" explores the theme of poverty and its consequence. Poverty is a social evil. It leads man to be a criminal in the eyes of the society. It is illustrated through the incident of theft.

The narrator, a Sikh sees the two very strong Sikh taxi drivers beating a Bengali man for stealing some items of their motor cars. He intervenes and prevents them from beating the thief. He listens to both the parties. He feels sorry for the thief. He shows his willingness to pay for whatever the thief has taken from the adversaries. The narrator tries to convince to the Sikhs and the spectators that they should think of the so-called thief's family and children. They will starve if he is jailed. Poverty or social circumstances make one. But the taxi drivers and the spectators ignore the narrator and take the thief to the police station.

The narrator becomes helpless. But he thinks that he has done his duty and his conscience is clear. He wants to sleep the sleep of the just. But he cannot. He is disturbed to know his limitations as a humanist.

Realism can be seen in the author's depiction of the place of the action of the story and the way he makes his narrative convincing. His description of Calcutta where the incidence of theft takes place adds to the realism of the story. The narrator says :

Calcutta is a big city – one of the biggest in the world. It has four million people packed in a small space. It is over – crowded, filthy and full of beggars. It is also very cruel city because the people who live here have become hardened against suffering. Here every man's hand is against his neighbor's because there is not enough money to be made and too many people wanting to make it, so besides beggars, prostitutes and pavement dwellers which abound in any big but poor city, Calcutta is full of tricksters, pickpockets and common thieves. ("The Man With a Clear Conscience", P. 105)

The scene after the thief is caught red handed while stealing is described in a convincing manner. The limitations of humanist are brought to the notice of the readers also in a convincing manner.

Humanism is shown through the narrator – an active character in the story. It appears that it represents Khushwant Singh's views. The narrator says people are basically good but they become victim of evil due to circumstances and turn bad. The causes of crime can be found in the society. So we should have sympathy for the criminals who are the product of society. Every criminal act is a censure against society. The author is against violence. His conscience tells him that society is responsible for criminality in man. The first person narrator a Sikh seems to be the spokesman after the author.

"The Riot" deals with the social theme of communal violence.

There is an unnamed town. People of different communities - Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs live together. But the atmosphere is communally charged in this sensitive town. Ram Jawaya, a Hindu shopkeeper has a bitch namely Rani. Ramzan, the Moslem greengrocer has a dog namely Moti. Moti runs after Rani. The owners of the dogs

come out of their houses at night to listen to the dog making noise. Jawaya throws a stone at the dogs but it hits Ramzan. The Muslim 'yells' Murder! People of the whole town wake up and become violent. It leads to riot. The police rush to the scene and open fire but they fail to avoid destruction and loss of property and people. Ram Jawaya's home is burnt and he barely escapes with his life. Houses of other people are also burnt.

"The Riot" is a realistic story. It gives a vivid picture of a town communally charged leading to communal disharmony and violence. It exposes the gross senselessness behind communal riots viewed aptly against a background of the communally indifferent life of dogs and bitches. Khushwant Singh obviously hints that these pariah curs are preferable to the human beings whose senseless hatred for each other leading to violence and arson was a common experience in the early years of our Independence. An important aspect of Khushwant Singh's humanism is that communal disharmony leading to violence is sheer folly. Belief in the brotherhood of women is a great virtue which needs to be practiced by all. People should live peacefully. It is shown in a suggestive manner.

"The Great Difference" deals with the theme of the problem of religious differences in India.

The Maulana represents the religion of Islam. He is chosen to represent the Islam in the world congress of faiths meeting in Paris. He is supposed to carry the message of Islam to the people of the West. He boards the train for Bombay to Delhi. Swami Vasheshvra Nanda boards the train at Mathura. He is symbolic of all that the Hindu religion stands for. He is known as Swami because of his accumulation of knowledge of his religion and Western philosophy. He is going to represent Hinduism at the world congress of faiths in Paris. The narrator Khushwant Singh is a Sikh but he has no religious belief. He accompanies them to Paris. He narrates how the two representative look at, behave with and treat each other and what role he has to play along with them.

The two illustrious representatives dress differently. They eat different foods. The narrator, a Sikh shares the Maulana's food to show his broadmindedness. The Swami criticizes him. The Swami and the Maulana criticize each other's communities and their ways of life. They pray God differently. The narrator realizes his own identity on the ground of religions.

The world congress of faith opens in Paris. A French lady Mlle. Jeanne Dupont meets all the three representatives – the Hindu, the Muslim and the Sikh. She is surprised to know that there are so many religions in India. She wants to know the differences. But she fails to understand the different religious faiths in India. She is confused.

The author shows realistically that people are divided in India on the ground of different religions faiths. They look at each other's faiths critically. As Khushwant Singh mentions in his autobiography, this story is based on an incident that took place in his life. The humanist in Khushwant Singh is revealed through the narrator who shows broadmindedness and is happy with people of different faiths. Khushwant Singh was agnostic. So he is tolerant. It is illustrated through the story.

Racial discrimination is the theme of "Maiden Voyage of the Jal Hindia."

The ship namely the Jal Hindia docked at Liverpool, undertook her maiden voyage to India with about one hundred and fifty passengers. There was an interesting crowd – Europeans, Pakistanis and Indians. The ship was carrying people of diverse races and religious creeds. The central character in this crowd was Dr. Chakkan Lal, M.A. (Alld.), D. Liff. (Eng.Lit;Leeds). A romantically inclined man, he was a funny fellow. He got attracted towards a European woman who looked like a sexy Juno. He invited her to dance. To the surprise of the crowd, the blonde accepted Chakkan Lal's invitation to dance in the tourist lounge and they spent sometime on the deck. She squeezed his hand in a friendly way and said, "Come along, Prof... one last dunz and zen to bed." (P.149) This last expression stimulated Chakkan Lal's imagination. After

eleven at night the professor began his search. But he went to a wrong cabin and looked through the pothole at Mrs. Tyson who was lying on her bed with her clothes on. Mr. Tyson saw him looking through the pothole at Mrs. Tyson and the angry husband caught him by the collar and slapped him on the face. A Pakistani diplomat tried to interfere but he was insulted by English. So he gave a serious turn to the situation. This extraordinary encounter developed into a situation of racial conflict.

The passenger of the Jal Hindia found themselves divided according to their races – the Europeans on one side - the Pakistanis and Indians on the other. The people were divided between the coloured passengers and the whites. The racial conflict produced new attitudes and leaders. The racial ill-will poisoned the atmosphere aboard the ship. The people racially charged were on the point of resorting to violence. It plagued the minds of the authorities and the passengers on the ship. Coloured people thought that times had changed and whites should treat the black as their equals. The whites had grudge against the black and they said that they should know their places. But Mrs. Tyson handled the situation cleverly. She became successful in her mission of making peace with the coloured people by taking Professor Chakkan Lal into confidence and making use of his weak point for women.

The theme of racial conflict is developed realistically and it is shown how the situation can become explosive. Racialism is a sensitive issue and people form groups without taking trouble to know the reality or truth behind an incident. Khushwant Singh as a humanist suggests that like religious differences and nationalities racialism divide people into groups. People take disadvantage of these differences. Man made differences should be eschewed.

“My own My Native Land” is about the theme of corruption in Government offices.

In this story there is a satirical portrayal of the narrator's exasperating experience at the custom's office on his return from abroad. Before disembarking at Bombay Harbour from Europe, he proposes a

toast to 'My own My Native Land'. His enthusiasm and ecstasy are subdued by the shoddy treatment meted out to him by the customs authorities. He enters queues several times only to discover that he had not followed the correct procedure. At last he puts himself in the hands of the 'agent' who is an expert middleman whose services can be had for ten rupees. The 'agent' manages everything perfectly and the narrator's baggage is released without further difficulty. Although the narrator has the legal right to diplomatic immunity he is not certain whether it will be honoured and therefore he allows himself to be protected by the guardian 'angel'. He arranges to transport his luggage by truck and he sits on the top of the packages. On the ride he invites the truck driver to join him and in a drink and they raise their glasses to Mother India. 'Jai Hind'.

The picture of the customs office and the procedure followed there is vividly depicted. The experience of the narrator at the counter is not uncommon. The middle men take disadvantage of the situation. The humanist in the author mildly satirizes the customs officials who harass and the middle men who exploit the people.

It is expected that a government department is expected to give good services and help the people. The author's humanism implies this meaning.

"Mr. Singh and the Colour Bar" treats the theme of the problem of race prejudice in a lighter vein. The narrator who is pompous, showy and morally hypocritical waxes eloquent on the *raison detre* of the colour bar in the west. He holds the coloured people responsible for the West's prejudice against them. He thinks that the coloured people, for instance, Indian students in Britain are unmannerly, untutored and uncivilized. They don't know European etiquette in everyday life. It is but natural boarding houses avoid taking coloured people. The narrator says :

Our boys stretch their hands across the table to help themselves before even the ladies have taken anything. They belch loudly. They sit on their haunches on lavatory seats and make them dirty. They splash water in the bathrooms by pouring it over themselves with a *lota*

instead of lying gently in the long baths. (“Mr. Singh and the Colour Bar”, P.175)

These things cause unpleasantness and unpleasantness causes prejudice. The narrator suggests that the Indians must be taught European etiquette, table and bathroom manners. He further says that the Indian students who go abroad take interest in sex instead of their studies. But it is suggested through other characters by the writer that what Mr. Singh says might be true but the question remains unanswered whether this is the real cause of racial prejudice. Educated Negroes know all these manners and yet there is prejudice against them. One can not justify the problem of racial prejudice or colour bar. Realisms evinced through the depiction of the plight of the coloured folk in Britain. Khushwant Singh’s humanism disapproves racial prejudice. The authors view point about racialism and colour bar appears to be expressed through characters who oppose Mr. Singh and refute the social evil or racialism.

“Mr. Kanjoos and the Great Miracle” treats the social theme of miserliness realistically. This story reminds us of Maugham’s famous story “The Luncheon.”

Mr. and Mrs. Kanjoos frequented the club and drank whisky at others expense without much reciprocating the hospitality offered by the hosts. They skillfully practiced all the typical stratagems of sponging and never offered anything in return for the hospitality. The narrator, though invited by the Kanjooses, never had the pleasure of a meal with them. Mr. Kanjoos had developed a talent for disappearing exactly at the time of signing the bills. The author of course, had to sign for the Kanjooses. Mr. Kanjoos came back and beckoned the bearer : ‘What ! you’ve signed for the whole lot!’ he exclaimed indignantly. Then he forgave the narrator’s rashness: ‘All right, next time it will be on us. Then you come home.’ (“Mr. Kanjoos and The Great Miracle”, P.171)

The Kanjooses and the narrator were nominated members of an Indian delegation to Germany where the couple and the two children practiced this art with extreme skill and sophisticated exactitude. Mrs.

Kanjoos was nominated the secretary of the delegation and her pretty eighteen-year-old daughter sought the advice of other important members at noon, whereby she was invited to lunch. The climax was reached when Budhu Sen unwittingly got involved with Bhuki Kanjoos and her mother arranged the wedding at 3:00pm on August 15, India's Independence Day. The mother met the Indian ambassador and sought his consent and blessings for the wedding on the embassy premises. The outcome was very pleasant for the Kanjooses since they received numerous presents and the guests stayed on for the ambassadorial reception at government expense. Thus the Kanjooses are embodiments of social and individual limitations. How some people are parasitical in exacting money and benefit from others is shown very realistically and humorously by Khushwant Singh in this story.

The humanist in Khushwant Singh exposes such types of the people in society in a light-hearted manner.

“Rats and Cats in the House of Culture” deals with the theme of bureaucratic style of work which gives more importance to formalities and procedures rather than good and quick results. The theme is developed humorously. Director Langford makes every possible effort to clear the House of Culture of all rats and cats. But he is required to make a brief noting on the rat file which is started about two years before he takes over as a director and which contains ten pages of budgeting minutiae, proposals, counterproposals and expert-advice. With a view to destroying rats which become a menace, Langford recommends in the file: ‘why not cats? And ‘should be of the same sex.’ (“Rats and Cats in the House of Culture” P.189) This marks the commencement of the cat file which supersedes the rat file. The sewer rats killed with pistols are laid out for Langford's inspection as a part of procedure. Then the required number of kittens are procured and a beginning is made on ‘Operation Cats.’ But the cats also become a menace. When the honorable Indian Minister is about to address to the House, the cats disturb the program of address to the House. The Operation cats is

launched to dispose off the cats but it fails as the cats announce their arrival with 'Mews'. The cats outwit officials by showing up again at the plenary session of the international conference of the House of Culture. Thus Khushwant Singh is quite critical and realistic about officialdom, government procedure and bureaucratic method of work. His humanistic outlook suggests that bureaucracy should care more for the benefit and welfare of the people rather than sticking rigidly to formalities and procedures.

"The Interview" exposes the pretentiousness of the Public Relations Officer. One Mr. Towers comes uninvited to see Public Relations Officer and introduces himself as one of the world's nine leading numismatists. He is accompanied by Mrs. Towers, an absent minded lady, and by Pam, his indifferent incurious daughter. They call on the Indian Public Relations Officer because they have nothing else to do, ask for coffee, and then overwhelm him with complex details of numismatics. The Officer's discomfiture begins by his inadvertent remark on Banerjee's supposed book on Mohenjodaro, which is pure guesswork. The baffled Public Relations Officer desperately sends for a book. It comes Miss Merriman, who is introduced to Mr. Towers obviously pleased, shakes her hand vigorously. Then in a desperate bid the Public Relations Officer reads a short statement about Mohenjodaro and the excited Mr. Towers takes the book out of the host's hand only to find that it is a dictionary! The unmasking and discomfort of the Public Relations Officer are thus complete, for by getting hold of the dictionary Mr. Towers scores the point over the baffled Public Relations Officer. The story is sheer fun, and yet the exposure of the Public Relations Officer is unrelenting and thorough. The humanistic approach of the writer is seen in unmasking the pretentious nature of some people who pose to be knowledgeable people and try to impress others.

2. The Sensitivity to Animal World

“The Portrait of a Lady” deals with the theme of Sensitivity to animal world.

The author lived with his grandmother in his house in the village when he went to school and the grandmother used to accompany him to go to the temple. They went together. She carried several stale chapatti's with her for the village dogs. When they were on their way back to their home from the temple, they would walk together. At that time, the village dogs would meet them at the temple door. They followed them to their home growling and fighting each other for the chapatti's they threw to them.

Then the grandmother and the grandson went to the city to live with the latter's parents. The grandmother began to take more and more interest in the sparrows as there were no dogs. Most of the time she was spinning and reciting prayer. Only in the afternoon she relaxed for a while to feed the sparrows. While she sat in the verandah breaking the bread into little bits, hundreds of little birds collected round her creating a veritable bedlam of chirruping some came and perched on her legs, other on her shoulders. Some even sat on her head. She smiled but never shod them away. It used to be the happiest half-hour of the day for her.

The author went abroad for further education and then came back after some years. Even on the first day of her grandson's arrival, her happiest moments were with her sparrows that she fed longer and with frivolous rebuke. The author observed the close relationship between the grandmother and the birds. When she died and her dead body was kept in the verandah in the evening. All over the verandah and in her room right up to where she lay dead and stiff wrapped in the red shroud, thousands of sparrows sat scattered on the floor. There was no chirping. The author's family felt sorry for the birds and his mother fetched some bread for them. She broke it into little crumbs, the way grandmother used to and threw in to them. The sparrows took no notice of the bread. When they

carried the grandmother's corpse off, they flew away quietly. Next morning the sweeper swept the bread crumbs into the dust bin.

The portrait of a lady is a realistic story which reflects Singh's delicate sensitivity to the animal world in an exceptionally touching and moving manner. Singh has shown the close relationship between the human being and animal world very effectively. Realism finds expression through their intimate relationship and vivid portrayal of vivid scenes in the story. The author's humanitarianism can be seen in this story through the depiction of the grandmother's humanitarian beliefs, actions, her generosity and kindness towards the animal world.

“Rats and cats in the Houses of Culture” deals with the theme of kindness towards animals.

In this story, it is shown that cats outwit the officials by showing up again at the plenary session of the international conference of the house of Culture. Director Langford had made every possible effort to clear the houses of Culture of all rats and cats. Langford made a brief noting on the rat file which was started about two years before he took over as director and which contained ten pages of budgeting minutiae proposals, counter proposals and expert advice with a view to destroying rats, which had become a menace. Langford wrote it would be better if they had cats of same sex. They would eat the rats. Rats disappeared as the cats destroyed them. But the cats soon assumed menacing proportions. They disturbed the Indian minister's program of address to the house. When the honorable minister was about to wind up his speech with an impressive peroration the great hall echoed with 'mews'. When the climax of oratory was about to be reached the cats announced 'mews' and the assembly burst into laughter. At this stage 'operation cat's' was launched and Raoul Colin was assigned the job of clearing the House of Culture of all cats. These cats were at last locked up in tiger sized traps and put on a truck. The vehicle then started on its journey toward their anticipated doom. Colin and Jean stopped on the way for a drink and learned from the waiters that cats would swim – since no gunny bags

were in the truck, the cats were let off quietly at a place about seven kilometers from the house. The next day at the plenary session the cats triumphantly announced their return with an assertive 'Mew' ("Rats and Cats in the House of Culture", P. 201)

The cat- catchers feel very sorry for the cats. They think that the cats will be killed soon. One of them expresses his feelings about them:

"How silent they are! As if they knew what is coming to them." ("Rats and Cats in the House of Culture", P. 198)

When the catchers get to their destination, they are overcome with remorse. So they decide to let loose the innocent cats to fend for themselves. After they open the cages the cats leap out of the cage and seek the path of life and liberty. The cat- catchers admit they could not have been free from guilty feelings of killing so many innocent cats.

The theme is treated realistically against the background of the atmosphere in the House of Culture. The description of officialdom, government procedure and methods of work and the way they want to get rid of the rats and cats that prove to be a menace to them appears quite convincing. The author is able to evoke feelings of pity in the minds of the readers about the innocent cats. The cat- catchers show sympathy towards the cats though they fail to understand the further consequence of their decision. Kindness towards animal is part of Khushwant Singh's humanism.

"India is a Strange Country" also deals with the theme of sensitivity to animals. It is an absorbing story of Kenneth Tyson's intense attachment for his dog. Tyson seemed very proud of his dog and called the bitch 'Sweetie', and 'nice old gal'. He used to take her for a walk through a beautiful park in Delhi. The narrator's German dog, Simba, made friendship with Tyson's Martha. Tyson lived in India even after Independence for the sake of his dog. The English laws did not permit the dog owners to take their dogs to their homes immediately after they return from a foreign country. They were made to put newly arrived dogs

in quarantine. Tyson expressed his dissatisfaction over such laws before a friend.

It's these damned uncivilized laws England has for animals. How can you leave a dog you love in quarantine for six months, I ask you? ("India in a Strange Country" P.168)

The author shows the attachment between Tyson and Martha through the accident which took Maratha's life. Maratha ran across the street in pursuit of a bandicoot and was run over by a speeding car. Maratha's back was broken. Tyson carried her in his arms. His eyes were filled with tears. The vet was called. He examined her and he had to kill her to put her out of her misery. Martha died with her larger eyes fixed on her master. Tyson broke down and wept like a child. After two weeks Tyson left India. He lived in India for the sake of his dog.

Tyson's love for his dog signifies his values of life. K. Singh skillfully rendered Tyson's inward and very intense feelings for his dog very effectively using realism. Khushwant himself had a dog called Simba. He treated the dog as if he was the member of his family. The author's feelings for the dog find expression in this story. Khushwant Singh's humanism comprises sensitivity and kind treatment towards animals.

"The Fawn" is about the theme of sensitivity towards animals.

It is a touching story of animal life. The narrator and a Shikari (hunter) who was a Muslim, went to a forest for hunting. On their way, they discussed their respective attitudes to life and also their desire to escape from the city into the idyllic countryside. They came to know that no animal could be seen in the neighborhood. The narrator says that he is not keen on killing an animal as a part of game. He makes it clear.

I do not mind if I kill nothing. In fact I find killing somewhat wicked. ("The Fawn", P.90)

But soon they heard the baying of a doe and the Shikari rightly expected a fawn in the vicinity of the animal. A shot was fired and the fawn appeared with a look of surprise. The doe bayed again and the bullet pierced, the snow white skin of the fawn's belly; it began to shake its head and legs in pain. The Muslim Shikari took out a razar and swearing incessantly slit the animal's throat. A stream of blood gurgled out of the fawn's veins and a white film covered its dark lusterous use eyes. The Shikari performed ceremonial cutting of the animal's throat in accordance with the Islamic injunction of uttering Bismillah and sending the animal's soul flying to paradise. He repeated the act after killing the doe. The narrator, though he was fond of an outing and of woods, thought that the practice of hunting game was cruel.

In "The Fawn" K. Singh incidentally brings out the unsavory reality of the double – facedness of man. Man takes interest in hunting for sheer joy but at the same time he realizes that he cannot escape the guilty feeling of killing a harmless animal. Khushwant Singh humanism implies that cruelty to animals should be avoided.

"The Riot" refers to the world of animals.

Rani was a pariah bitch whose litter populated the lanes and by lanes of the unnamed town. She would have died of starvation with her first litter of eight had it not been for the generosity of the Hindu shopkeeper, Ram Jawaya in the corner of house. The shopkeeper's family fed her and played with her pups till they were old enough to run about streets and steal food for themselves. The shopkeeper's generosity had put Rani in the habit of sponging. Every year when spring came she would find an excuse to loiter around the stall of Ramzan, the Moslem greengrocer.

Ramzan, the Moslem greengrocer also kept a dog called Moti. He had fed him till he grew big and strong and became the master of the town' canine population. One day Moti escaped from his master's house went to Rani, standing near the doorsteps of Ram Jawaya. As the town was paralyzed with fear of communal riots and curfews, the atmosphere

had become very tense. Ram Jawaya threw a stone at the dogs in the dark. It hit Ramzan who yelled ‘Murder!’ Men emerged from their houses with knives, spears hatchets and kerosene oil can and begun to burn houses. The mob involved in the riot were dispersed when the police opened fire but the flames enveloped the entire neighborhood – Hindu, Moslem and Sikh alike. When peace was restored Ram Jawaya went to see his house which was completely burnt down. But he could see there Rani and her litter Moti guarding his bastard brood.

The theme of sensitivity to animal world is presented realistically through the vivid description of the pariah dogs and the pet dogs and their relationship with human beings. Khushwant Singh’s humanistic outlook can be seen in his treating the dogs as if they are human beings and better than human beings in being free from the social evil of communalism.

“Rats and Cats in the Houses of Culture” deals with the theme of bureaucratic style of work which gives more importance to formalities and procedures rather than good and quick result. The theme is developed humorously. Director Langford makes every possible effort to clear the House of culture of all rats and cats. But he is required to make a brief nothing on the rat file which is started about two years before he takes over as a director and which contains ten pages of budgeting minutiae, proposals, counterproposals and expert–advice. With a view to destroying rats which become a menace, Langford recommend in the file: ‘Why not cats? And should be of the same sex’. (“Rats and Cats in the Houses of Culture”, P.189) This marks the commencement of the cat file which supersedes the rat file. The sewer rats killed with pistols are laid out for Langford’s inspection as a part of procedure. Then the required number of kittens are procured and beginning is made on ‘Operation Cats.’ But the cats also become a menace. When the honourable Indian minister is about to address to the House, the cats disturb the program of address to the House. The operation cats is launched to dispose off the cats but it fails as the cats announce their arrival with ‘mews.’ The cats outwit officials by showing up again at the plenary session of the international

conference of the House of culture. Thus Khushwant Singh is quite realistic in his approach. The story is based on an incident that took place in UNESCO. Khushwant Singh develops it into this short story. Khushwant Singh suggests that it is common sense not to waste money and energy on trifle things. These resources should be used for the welfare of the people.

In “A Punjabi Pastoral” the theme of social problems in Indian villages is treated realistically. Social realism is obviously noticed throughout the story. The young men go from Amritsar to Soorajpur on their bike. The author gets an opportunity to describe the rural scene and the Punjabi pastoral against backdrop of which the characters practicing social evils are shown quite vividly. It is pictorial romantically evaporative.

Khushwant Singh treats the theme from the humanitarian point of view. The Christian Missionary Hansen is interested in the welfare of the villagers. He takes interest in the work and the people. Though he fails to know the mind set of the rural folk at times he is happy to see the beautiful daughter of Moola Singh. His mood of depression disappears soon. Khushwant Singh’s humanism is at work through the missionary who undertakes the work of illumination or enlightenment in the interest of man.

3. Supernatural and Mystery

“The Memsahib of Mandla” deals with the theme of the tragic play of the supernatural and mystery. Jean Memsahib, the wife of one Mr. Cotton, had built a red-bricked house. It was situated in the centre of a small clearing in the jungle. That house was built for use as a school. Jean then suddenly died. No one knew anything about her except an old gardener who had lived and tended the garden there for over fifty years. Jean Memsahib was buried in the garden.

John Dyson, his wife and their daughter , Jennifer arrived at the red-brick travelers bungalow on a holiday. The old mission school was acquired by government and converted into a rest house. On the first evening at dinner Jennifer, while looking at the wall, suddenly saw a picture on the wall. Mrs. Dyson was frightened to see many patterns on the wall which changed shape with the flickering of the lamp. Mrs. Dyson told John that she did not like the place, but he thought hers was merely the reaction of exhaustion. On the first night John slept soundly but Mrs. Dyson could not sleep. She decided to take a stroll. Jackals howled. As she returned to the Varanda, she stopped suddenly and saw footprints marked on the floor and the ground. She felt exhausted and went to bed. On the following morning John got up early and left for the forest, where he remained till evening. The family dined in silence. Margaret told her husband again that she did not like the place. Furthermore her daughter told them that she had seen a woman in a white dressing gown looking into her net to see whether she was asleep. John dismissed this notion as superstition or unreal fear. He decided to load his gun and shoot the jackals. Mrs. Dyson could not sleep at all and she saw emerging out of misty haze the figure of a woman in a white dressing gown. The phantom figure was moving toward the varanda and the bed when a Jackal howled. John got up to watch; but everything seemed to him to have totally vanished. On the next morning Margaret told John that she had seen a woman in a white dressing gown. John was then taken to the lawn, which was milky white and shimmering in the sunlight and was shown the footprints. The footprints came to an end near the grave. John Dyson was shaken by the sight. The following night John loaded his gun and began to read. The night was dark and lightning and thunder disturbed the quiet of the jungle. A Jackal howled; John woke up with a jerk : the lantern went out. Dyson saw through the net the outlines of a human figure standing near his bed; he saw a pair of bright eyes. John was stunned. He saw the woman in white. He screamed , and still fixing his eyes on the human shape, groped for his gun. He caught the butt and fired. He fell with the full discharge of the gun in his face.

This is an exceptionally intriguing situation and the end of John Dyson is awful and tragic. In aiming at the phantom figure, he aimed at himself. As persons who are extrarational become quite ironically, the victims of their own rationalism – because life is too complex for them to know its value and truth. John became the involuntary victim of the supernatural, which added to the intensity of his emotion.

Although Khushwant Singh is a pronounced realist, he quite often confronts the supernatural. His treatment of the intangible, inexplicable and supernatural elements of human existence and its differentiation from the actualities of existence brings out his view of the complexity of life and the danger of oversimplifying it. He portrays characters and situations that are outside the boundaries of the rational and yet seem truer than real– life characters and commonly prevailing situations.

As a humanist Khushwant Singh is very critical of the so called supernatural element and the mystery.

Theme of strange and mysterious elements of human experience the intangible and incomprehensible elements of human experience are expressed with great effect in “Death comes to Daulat Ram”.

Ranga, the son of Dault Ram was sitting in a restaurant on the morning of the 21st of July. He was having his midmorning cup of coffee. He felt a bit uneasy. He thought something was wrong somewhere. The air – cooling plant in the restaurant was not working. The sky was overcast with clouds. There was not the usual sort of light music. He felt the unusual music had some sort of significance. There was a phone call. Ranga thought that it was for him as the barman looked at him. He came to the conclusion that there was going to be bad news. He had a premonition of bad news. He was told that his father was taken ill, he had to come home. Ranga drove home at once. The house seemed odd, widowed and covered with anemic patches; there was an uneasy stillness, everything appeared unusual; lawns were deserted, the telephone was off the hook, the Chaprasi had gone; even Moti, the Alsatian dog, was not in his usual mood.

This extraordinary event of the dead grandfather visiting the house at the time of Dault Ram's death in the form of an old beggar carries mysterious inexplicable and supernatural implications. Khushwant Singh a realist appears to have come to terms with the complex, supernatural, irrational and mysterious elements of human nature. The atmosphere of fear is also created when Ranga notices that the beggar who resembled the grandfather disappears and Ranga runs out of the room sobbing. 'The beggar has gone, he has gone.' ("Death Comes to Dault Ram", P.82)

Khushwant Singh's humanism accommodates the supernatural and the element of mystery here in this story.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Rahul Singh, Khushwant Singh in the name of the father (New Delhi, Roli Books, 2004).
2. Rahul Singh, Khushwant Singh (New Delhi, Roli Books, 2004).