

Khushwant Singh's *Delhi*: Revisiting History

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"I asked my soul: What is Delhi?

She replied: The world is the body and Delhi its life."

(Ghalib)

There are a few cities in the world, as ancient and as modern as Delhi. Its history, its architecture and planning, its flora and fauna, the economy, life and rhythm, its culture, its problems and its future have enamoured people who have been at the helm of political and cultural life of India. Pt. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and a historian in his own right wrote: "The cobblestones of the great city whisper the glory of past centuries". It is a city with the recorded history going back to 3000 B.C; at the same time, today it is an ever expanding city growing into a metropolitan structure as any in the western world. To Hindu, Sikh and Muslim, Delhi is also a sacred city. Its sacred river, the Yamuna and the religious folk tales associated with the river invest the city with a mythic aura.

A highly kaleidoscopic panorama of Indian history, politics and culture from A.D. 1192 to 1984 emerges in Singh's most outstanding novel *Delhi*. History cast in the form of fiction shapes a different version of history from that of historiography. The personal, private, secret peripheral and marginalized portion of history find voices in Singh's fictional world, and a history of our cultural moorings, philosophical assumptions, political reflexes and anxieties come into being.

Delhi embraces numerous histories: history of power politics, of architecture, of conflicting religious faiths, biographies, interesting tales of *herem* life, untouchables, all render life and breath, colour and nuances to the historical landscape. A conflation of several intertexts and subtexts evokes a vast panorama of history.

The city of Delhi in *Delhi* assumes the same importance as Henry James's Venice and London and James Joyce's Dublin. James's *The Wings of Dove* connotes a range of values associated with its historical eras. People, building decor, the streets of this claustrophobic city – all express the moral sickness of exploitations [Bradbury 176]. Singh's fascination with Delhi stems from his scholarly pursuit as well as love for Delhi that recalls Pushkins's passion for St Petersburg, a historical city in Russia and Balzac's intense rendering of Paris. The cities as portrayed in the European classics attain an awesome aura. Landscapes, monuments, pillars museums, buildings, rivers and ruins sometimes appear as the analogue to the qualities of characters in their novels. Singh's Delhi like Venice, Florence, London, Dublin, St. Petersburg and Paris stands defiant, untainted by the depredation of or the march of history. Singh's love and obsession with Delhi figures in his discovery of its etymology as he puts it:

Nobody really knows why and when this city acquired the odd sounding name. Delhi, pronounced by the literate as Dehlee, by the hoi-pilloi as Dillee. One version to that it is derived from the Persian Dehleez, meaning threshold, because it was the gateway to the Gangetic plain. Ptolemy, the Alexandrian geographer, called it Daidalas. Feristha, the sixteenth century Persian historian, traces the origin of the

name to one Raja Dhelu who ruled over it. Yet another version connects the name to the famous Iron Pillar close to the Qutub Minar. It was designed as the standard of Lord Vishnu and meant to be implanted deep into hood of the Cobra which bears the earth on its head. It was believed that anyone who tampered with it would be cursed and his dynasty would end. A foolish Tomar Rajput King who wanted to make sure that the pillar was indeed embedded in the serpent's head had it dug up. The base of the pillar was found to have blood stains. The curse fell on the Tomara prince and his dynasty was finished forever. The event is recorded in a doggerel: "Keelee to dheelee bhatee/Tomer hua metheem" meaning the pillar was loosened and the Tomer lost his head. [Delhi,12].

The plethora of knowledge ingrained in myths, folk-tales, memoirs, diaries and several histories of our culture available to us today, make the history of Delhi awesome and more ideologically complex. On the subject of the heavy burden of history on a novelist who wants to write history in the novel form, Chaman Nahal remarks that the novelist is obliged to do careful research into the period he chooses in order to be accurate (Nahal 25). The transcription of history into the novel inevitably involves careful selection of stories with dramatic content – the content which has a bearing on the contemporary culture at the end of the 20th century. In this sense *Delhi*, as the most controversial novel, touches the contemporary minds by its mode of interpreting history. The novel is a record of historical events from the year 1192 when the Rajput clans who had ruled over Delhi were completely dispossessed and little was left of the Hindu Rajput legacy in Delhi at the beginning of the reign of Giasuddin Balban to the 1984 riots against Sikhs.

Travelling through time and space into history, to discover his beloved city, the narrator of *Delhi* encounters a large gallery of characters. From a gamut of historical characters the novelist chooses the actors of his choice, in the medieval history omitting several significant characters for example, Babar, Humayun and Akbar. The reign of powerful and famous Muslim rulers and invaders, Balban, Allauddin, Khilji, Timurid, Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Abdali and Bahadur Shah Zafar is tellingly described in documentary details evoking colours, glitter and the gaudy aura of their period. The scores of characters relate their version and events in the novel. Each character has been granted a subjectivity, beginning with Musaddilal, Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah, the Untouchable, Meer Taqi Meer, Alice Aldwell, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Nihal Singh, Sobha Singh, Ram Rakha, and finally to the omniscient Sikh narrator. Twenty-one chapters portray a collage of Delhi by blending ordinary, mundane or coarse details with the voyeuristic, murky, sordid, artistic and sublime.

One may not however consistently trust the authenticity of characters' version of what happened in history. The version of Aurangzeb, for instance, generates the elements of doubt as well as half truths making him a 'not so reliable narrator'. The ironic tone inherent in the style of the narrative beckons the readers to infer the suppressed meanings – double intentions seem embedded in the narrative. Singh seems to have taken the new historicist perspective in presenting history as open text, his mode encourages the readers to resist the kaleidoscope of history, the fictional characters move about multiplying the identity of Delhi, they evoke an extravagant scenario of every possible region of cultural life from the highest in the hegemony to the lowest in the subaltern.

The saga which extends over than 700 years is principally narrated by a bawdy reprobate nameless Sikh, who loves Delhi as much as he loves the hijda Bhagmati. Bhagmati a eunuch- whore, the ever-present character in the novel is implicated in plurality; neither a male nor a female, ugly and scarred from outside, pure and untainted from within. Like the city Delhi Bhagmati is also a site/text/persona that assumes multiple identities, it has been coveted, tortured violated and abused through the ages. In the opening pages of the novel the narrator expresses the irony of fate of both Delhi and Bhagmati in the following analogue:

I return to Delhi as I return to my mistress Bhagmati when I have my fill of whoring in foreign lands. Delhi and Bhagmati have a lot in common. Having been long misused by rough people they have learnt to conceal their seductive charms under a mask of repulsive ugliness. It is only their lovers, among whom I count myself, that they reveal their true selves (Delhi 1)

For the narrator, both Delhi and Bhagmati are complementary to each other because of certain common qualities in them. His sympathy to both grows as he understands their true nature. In the opening pages of the novel, he says:

To the stranger Delhi may appear like a gangrenous accretion of noisy bazaars and mean- looking hovels growing round a few tumble down-forts and mosques alone a dead river. If he ventures into its narrow, winding lanes, the stench of raw sewage may bring vomit to his throat. The citizens of Delhi do little to endear themselves to anyone. They spit phlegm and bloody betel-juice everywhere; they urinate and defecate whenever and where the urge overtakes them; they are loud-mouthed, express familiarity with incestuous talk. It is the same with Bhagwati. Those who do not know her find her unattractive. She is dark and has pock-marks on her face. She is short and squat, her teeth are uneven and yellowed as a result of chewing tobacco and smoking beedis. Her clothes are loud. Her voice louder, her speech bawdy and her manners worse. (Delhi 1)

After Bhagmati's birth, her parents and the doctor were uncertain about her gender. Her parents had three boys already that is why they gave this child a girl's name Bhagmati. With the passage of time, Bhagmati's mother gave birth to two girls. Both these times Bhagmati was examined by the doctors and they said, " I am not sure, it is a bit of both" (Delhi 29). Now it was clear that this child was a eunuch. At the age of four she was given to a group of hijdas as she was one of them. They taught her to sing, clap her hands and dance in the manner of hijdas. Thus she becomes a eunuch prostitute. According to the rules of society she was prohibited from enjoying equal rights like her brothers and sisters. Now as a member of the group of eunuch, she was treated as an object of crude entertainment supplied to eminent political leaders of "Amerikan, Pakistani, Russi and Japanese embassy" (Delhi 3). Even pimps and embassy chauffeurs did not leave any chance of exploiting her. To the narrator Bhagmati's sadistic subjection is symbolic of " the violence done to Delhi. Like her/him, Delhi is also sterile... It (the hijda) can never conceive, and I thought this was a wonderful symbol for a city in which so much has happened that repeats itself... In the way of change of dynasties, it has still not produced anything as great as one would have expected it" [Delhi 4] Like an old prostitute/eunuch it gathers its dispersed self and stands decked up again to be plundered and violated.

Mussadi Lal, a Kayasth scribe's account foreground a history of Delhi's fine architecture. It is informed with the details of the impact of early Islamic barbarism on Hindu temples and architecture and the political conversion of Hindu masses into Islam. In the character, Musaddi Lal, we find representation of that class of citizens in the Islamic rule that learnt the art of survival and Singh shows him congratulating himself on his tricks to survive and to seek favour of the rulers. He argues with Hindus who were not willing to accept Muslims as their master. Musaddi Lal rebukes them for living in the past glory. Endowed with practical wisdom, he says:

Everyone in the world knows that if you put the four Vedas on one side of scale and commonsense on the other commonsense will be heavier. But not so with the Hindus. They would look contemptuously at me and call me a pimp of the Mussalmans. Their great hero was Prithvi Raj Chauhan who had defeated Ghoris once at Tarain in AD 1191. But very next year, on the same battlefield, he had been defeated and slain by the same Ghoris. They had an answer to that too. Prithvi Raj's only mistake was to spare the life of the maleech when he had first defeated him. (*Delhi* 54)

Delhi relentlessly divests characters like Timurid, Aurangzeb and Nadir Shah of all the apparent pretension of moral responsibility. In this process he allows each of these to express themselves in long monologues. The three chapters allotted to these historical personages, highlight their unparalleled villainy in medieval India. The novelist is almost at his best in his comprehension of their motives, impulses and action, he gives them an idiom redolent with Persian words and phrases that chimes in with their Islamic lineage. He accomplishes complete empathy with which the characters are made to speak out in their 'conscious defence' which can also be for us, their greatest condemnation [Mathur, 186]. The author has made them condemn themselves by their own self-aggrandizing accounts of adventure. All of them hide their lust for wealth and power under the cloak of religion. The sinister trinity Timur, Aurangzeb and Nadir Shah primarily stands for the lust for power, religious bigotry and passion for wealth. Majumdar describes Timur:

The wealth of India naturally excited the temptation to invade this land, for which the disintegration of the Delhi Kingdom afforded him a suitable opportunity. He used his championship of faith as a pretext to win support of the nobles and warriors who were not in favour of this mediated invasion of this distant land. [328]

In *Delhi* the chapter 'The Timurid,' takes the issue of Timur's controversial political postures. We encounter a poignant exposition of the boldly motives of Timur. He himself declares his objectives for attacking India. The one is to fight against and destroy the infidels; and the other is to plunder their wealth, possess more land, power, money, slave and women in the guise of laws sanctioned by Islam:

We told them that our object in undertaking the invasion of Hindustan was to bring infidels to the true religion and to purify the country from the filth of polytheism and idolatry. We exhorted them to place helmets of courage on their heads and the armour of determination, gird on the swords of resolution and like alligators dive into the river of blood : if victorious they would gain renown as warriors who had carried the flag of Islam to the farthest horizons of the earth if subdued, they would gain admittance to paradise as martyrs. We told them of the enormous wealth of

Hindustan; of the city the Tughlaks had built of gilded bricks that glistened in the sun and of the cistern in this citadel which was said to be filled with molten gold. (96)

Wherever Timur marched he brought about destruction, massacre, burning, looting and dishonor to women. Terrorizing the populace was one of his tactics to get easy submission from his rivals. His army proceeded towards Delhi butchering people and destroying everything which came in his way. On 19th December 1398 he defeated Mehmud Tughlak in the battle. The moments have the elements of high drama. When Timur entered the city, Delhi, initially he agreed to spare the citizens, as people appealed to him under the leadership of 'Ulema'. However, when the citizens exhibited some resistance, he ordered the mass massacre and plunder:

We ordered our troops to enter these towns and extend the hand of rapine, to slay every able-bodied man and take his women and children as slaves. For the next ten days our men drenched their sword in blood. There was no count of the numbers killed: some said 50,000 others 5,00,000... We were informed that after our departure there was no one to bury the dead. The rotting corpses had spread pestilence and the few who had survived had succumbed to disease. For many months the towns of Delhi were deserted save for crows, kites and vultures by day and owls, jackals and hyaenas by night. (101)

The city of Delhi was ravaged, left deserted without its inhabitants. Because of large number of dead bodies, epidemics broke out. Those who survived lived in constant fear. The macabre and grotesque scene of butchery testified to the extremity of sadism and savagery.

Throughout history since Manusmriti untouchables/shudras have always been looked down upon as underclass and are deprived of human dignity. The rule of anarchy unleashed by the Muslims however did not alienate them any further. Not only in terms of everyday action and behavior, but more fundamentally in the religious tradition, caste hatred remained deeply entrenched and became a social code shared by all, notwithstanding who the ruler was: What have we poor untouchables to do with kings' remember my Bapu saying, 'They are all same to us. One goes another comes, *zulum* goes on' (123).

Beyond the monomania of hegemony Singh excavates the lives of this section of society, and Rekabganj a mohalla of Delhi inhabited by the untouchables is brought before us. Rangreta is witness to the changing course of history. In his voice the tragic end of Shah Jahan comes into being and in this tale description of claustrophobic, subhuman existence of the sweeper community intersects. Deprivation and powerlessness were the determining factors in the lives of these untouchables and that made them the gullible victims of sectarian zealots. In Rengreta's rendering we also get a record of the sense of not belonging that afflicted the untouchable who in desperate urge to escape from castist prejudice sought conversion in Sikhism and yet failed to seek human treatment. Their outcast status however made them politically neutral fingers, they could adopt any mode of clothing and bearing; the whole community of domes and sweepers wore beards like Muslims with impunity. The ludicrous and sordid irony of their condition lay in the fact that while their association with filth, dead, rotting flesh and stench made people stand off them, at the same time

by virtue of this cultural practice, they could compare themselves to the kings as Rangreta recalls his Bapu's words: "Son only two people can pass through the gates of Shahjahanabad without being questioned: the king and the untouchable" (128).

One find the novelist making selection and omissions in visualizing the Islamic history; Shivaji one of the most historic Hindu Emperor, a formidable threat to Islamic rule finds a brief reference in the untouchable's rendering:

Some months later the Mussalman cook gave me an extra large portion of flowers.' He looked very happy' 'Have you heard of that Shivaji of yours? He has been captured and brought in chains to Agra. He will be sent to hell' When I told this to the Bania, he said it was a lie and that Shivaji had come of his own free will to talk to the King. For many days everyone in Dili was talking of this man Shivaji. The Mussalmans said he was a great villain and that the King would cut off this head. The Hindus said he was a great hero. Then we heard that he had escaped and returned to his mountain Kingdom in the Deccan. Didn't I tell you so? said the Bania to me. They can never catch him. Ramji is his Protector.'The king was very angry. He ordered Hindu temples at Varanasi and Mathura to be destroyed (131).

The untouchable's rendering gives perspective on Aurangzeb's seething barely concealed ambition for power. In the chapter. "Aurangzeb Alamgir: Emperor of Hindustan" figures a large account of Aurangzeb, scripted by himself, in a mode that makes him seemingly speaking through the annals of his time but addressing the modern world, Singh has given him the status of a scribe who gives an account of his own secret suffering caused by his by his father, brothers and sisters. He offers in self-righteous logic, his version of the infamous acts attributed to him and in his perspectives we are made to understand his psychology that motivated him to murder and persecute his kins.

Misguided historians have written many falsehood about the way we came to acquire sovereignty over Hindustan while our father Emperor Shah Jahan was alive. They have maligned our name as a scheming self, seeker and a plotter. They forget that the holy book says: God is the best of plotters. We were but the instrument of His design (151).

Khushwant Singh assigns Aurangzeb the first person narrative, who in the guise of a humble confession provides the readers with a self congratulatory account of his political strategies. As a simple man, a man of justice, and a true devotee to Allah, all that his actions were proceeded from the political need of the time. He believes in the theory that the fittest could survive and carries forward the legacy of fratricide from his ancestors:

Since the Mughals had ruled over a domain larger than that ruled by any other dynasty in the world, it was the Mughals who had spilt more royal blood than any other succession of monarchs. Our great ancestor Zahiruddin Babar had laid the foundation stone of the empire in Hindustan in 1526. His two sons, Humayun and Kamran, had then drawn their swords against each other. Allah had granted the throne to Humayun and so he took the light out of the eyes of his brother and sent him off to Mecca to die. When Akbar succeeded Humayun he disposed of Kamran's only son. Likewise Emperor Akbar's reign was disturbed by the revolt of his beloved son Salim Jahangir – who in his turn had to keep his own impatient son, Khusrau in confinement (153).

Though Aurangzeb in his historical records, and the mode in which the novelist presents his version tries to wash his hands off the responsibilities of launching a barbaric chart of action. The historical sources tell us clearly that it was in his leadership that his brothers formed a dissident group against Dara Shikoh no matter how humbly he tries to conceal his real intentions. Allah who knows the innermost secrets of our heart knew that we had no thought of royalty when we responded to Murad' request to him on the march to Agra. Our only aim was to save the empire from falling into the hands of an enemy of Islam like Dara Shikoh. (p. 154) Following the laws of Machiavellian politics Aurangzeb got Dara beheaded as his survival even in the prison could have posed further danger to the supremacy of Aurangzeb.

Aurangzeb believed that all my Mughal rulers prior to him had committed one blunder that they did not try to establish the supremacy of Islam in India. The emperor Aurangzeb's sole objective was to extend the domain of Islam'. This dedication of Aurangzeb to Islam however narrowed his concept of kingship and made him intolerant towards the majority of his subjects. He became atrocious towards Hindus. All famous Hindu temples of northern India were destroyed by Aurangzeb and mosques were raised in their place. He imposed Jajia tax on the Hindus with view that Hindus would convert themselves to Islam in order to survive. Muslim subjects praised this emperor and called as "Jinda Peer". His bigotry however inflamed the Marathas and the Rajputs and they emerged as powerful force in the leadership of Shivaji. About Aurangzeb's blind fanaticism and his personal austerity, Lane-Poole, a historian observes:

For the first time in their history the Mughals beheld a rigid Muslim in their Emperor- a Muslim as sternly repressive himself as of his people around him, a king who prepared to stake his throne for the sake of the faith. (Sharma 399)

In the garb of a religious missionary Aurangzeb violated the all norms and concepts attributed to a righteous ruler or a constructive statesman. As S.R. Sharma puts it "Aurangzeb's outbursts were reflective of blind fanaticism, unworthy of the great genius that Aurangzeb undoubtedly possessed in all other respects" (399).

The chapter "1857" contains a kaleidoscopic collage of a range of narrative conflating the grand elegiac tale of Bahadur Shah Zafar, Nihal Singh with the intersecting saga of Alice Aldwell, an anglo- Indian woman married to Alexander Aldwell, an English Officer. The moment in history was preceded and followed by unsettling events in Indian life. Ruskin Bond's *The Flight of Pigeon* also present the plight of anglo-Indians caught in a time warp in 1857. Singh's narrative attains credibility in assigning Alice the role of a principal narrator of the history of this time . Incidentally, the history reveals that until 1857 Sepoy Mutiny the situation turned in favour of Anglo Indians again. During the Mutiny when native Indian army vigorously turned against the British, the Anglo Indians fought loyally against their Indians brothers to save British.

Anglo-Indian, as community were growing in Calcutta, yet their identity was dubious in the colonized situation when a great number of people converted themselves to Christianity, Alice describes:

Being half-cast is not their fault, is it? But I simply had to get Away from them. Mum had lived in Cal so long that she had forgotten where she had come back from Home. She had also picked up that awful *Chichi* of the half castes. For another I had married a pucca English gentleman, Alexander Aldwell, Esquire of her Majesty's Post and Telegraph Services. Although Your sincerely was only a sweet eighteen and he going into his fifties when she went up the alter with him. He was, as I said before, of pucca English stock – Sixteen annas to the sicca rupee! I didn't want him to mix with the riffraff of Cal (237).

She considers herself privileged when Mr Melcalfe puts her in the service of the court of Bahadur Shah Zafar to "keep in touch with harem of the Nawabs to know what their begums were saying" [Delhi, 240]. She proudly calls Indians "native" and has even cultivated the idiom of Mem Sahib.

Intersected in Alice's story is the monologue of the last emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar. History regards him as a forced leader of the movement. Bahadur Shah, a meek, highly imaginative and sensitive poet-king lacked the courage and determination to take the charge of revolution. He failed to organize the first war of independence which needed a proper command and coordination. Marx made an incisive comment on the chaotic condition of 1857 mutiny "... a motley crew of mutineering soldiers who have murdered their own officers, torn asunder the ties of discipline, and not succeeded in discovering a man upon whom to bestow the supreme command, are certainly the body least likely to organize a serious and protracted resistance" (Marx 71).

Bahadur Shah Zafar, true to his character, employed most appropriate metaphors to describe the helplessness and vulnerability of Hindustan in the wake of the revolution. On the cognitive level, he was alert to the crafty politics of British Raj and yet emotionally he could not muster will and defiant courage to combat them.

One after another the great Kingdom of Hindustan were swallowed up by the firangi. He spared neither friend nor foe. Only a few months ago was the great house of Oudh which had befriended the firangi was by the firangi deprived of its dominion. And before Oudh there were Nagpur and Jhansi and Satara and Tanjore and Murshidabad and Karnatak (Delhi 226).

After the capture of Delhi by the British, Bahadur Shah Zafar who had been hiding in Humayun's tomb on the outskirts of Delhi was taken prisoner. Accused of conspiracy against the firangi rule he was humiliated by the officers of the empire: " Buddha man where are all you young wives" (Delhi 311). After trial he was sentenced to exile from Hindustan and was sent to Rangoon. Suffused with inconsolable melancholy and shame he composed his last verse:

My beloved tormented me so much
We were forced to leave our native land:
As drops wax from the burning tape
So we quite this circle of life.
Fell tears from our eyes
The gardener forbade us sporting
In this garden with laughter we came,
With waiting we parted (Delhi, 313)

The elegiac saga of Bahadur Shah Zafar is resonant with deep self introspection of a man given to philosophical withdrawal from the all kinds of materialism and militarism. A romantic dreamer/ philosopher he failed to perform the role that history had assigned him.

With the introduction of Ram Rakha in the story of *Delhi*, the novel comes to the middle of the 20th century and spans the period from the partition of India to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Ram Rakha the spokesman of RSS provides us the history of the rise of the Hindu Organization The Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh. The narrative describes how adolescent Ram Rakha became a dedicated soldier of RSS. Singh has substituted Ram Rakha for Nathuram Godse. In fictionalizing the growth of RSS's ideology and Gandhi's assassination, linking the issue directly with Punjab's partition, he provides a more lucid rationale to the readers in defence of Ram Rakha/Godse.

In Singh's account of history of the last 20th century from 1950 to 1983, a few very significant incidents are either only casually cross referred or absent: amongst the event that guided the course of future politics of India, the Chinese war of 1962, two wars with Pakistan, New Delhi's role in the liberation of Bangladesh, the emergency declared by Indira Gandhi, the atrocious wanton but brief tenure of Sanjay Gandhi are conspicuously absent.

The post-emergency period threatened India with several secessionist movements. The Khalistan movement in Punjab in particular grew most volatile and dangerous. This aspect remains untouched in *Delhi*, in Singh's two books however, *A History of the Sikh* and *Operation Blue Star*, he traces the subterranean reasons of violent uprising in Punjab in an unequivocally impartial mode. He reveals mature understanding in analyzing the history of Punjab's disputed territory with Haryana when the central government took control of the natural resources and displayed tardiness in resolving those basic issues.

In the last chapter of *Delhi* entitled 'Bhagmati' that dramatically serves the purpose of catastrophe, Singh's intimacy with the Sikh narrator grows more sincere and emotional. The narrative suffused with a personal sense of grief and loss describes the gory details of 1984 riots against Sikhs. Singh had himself described in *The History of the Sikhs* that the Operation blue star was a "grievous error of judgement", a blunder for which Mrs. Gandhi personally and the country would have to pay a heavy price for decades to come" (Singh 336). The people who witnessed the genocide brought about by the Operation Blue Star swore oaths on the holy granth that they would never forgive the people responsible for the desecration of the temple. The subsequent historic events obviously resulted from this deep sense of vengeance embedded in the Sikh psyche. In the morning of October 31, 1984, Mrs Gandhi was shot dead by her own Sikh body-guards and this event led to the riots against Sikhs in Delhi.

To the Sikh narrator of *Delhi*, the 1984 riot was the emblem of laceration and mutilation of the city Delhi. In detached tone, the narrator traces the covert reasons for this event and tells us that the gurudwara adjoining the narrator's house distributed pershad saying that the desecration of the Akal Takht has been avenged. The news of assassination Mrs Gandhi spreads confusion, terror and hatred among the people

against the Sikh community. People became mad and started Killing the Sikh very brutally. The anti Sikh riots revealed a sordid tale of administrative and political complicity in a massacre of dimension not seen in Indian since it became an independent state. In *A History of the Sikhs*, Singh accuses Delhi politics in its open complicity with the rioters who could not have carried out the menacing acts of vendetta against Sikhs without the cooperation of people in high places:

Neither the central government nor the Delhi administration showed such eagerness to grapple with the situation. It later transpired that the Delhi administration was taking orders from leaders of the local Congress Party and that in other States where the Congress was in power the police had been instructed not to interfere the Sikhs had to be taught a lesson they would not easily forget The initial outbursts of anti-Sikh feeling was meticulously fanned into a vast conflagration which engulfed most of northern Indian (singh 382)

The aggressive task of "teaching a lesson to Sikh" was easier as Sikh male could easily be recognized The mob targeted a priest Bhai of Gurudwara:

The mob is composed of about fifty young boys armed with iron rods Some have canisters of petrol in their hands they pour petrol over his hair, splash it on his beard and push him on the flaming pile. He shrinks and crumples into a flaming course they yell triumphantly" Indian Gandhi amar rahey (Indian Gandhi is immortal) (388).

Bhagmati exhorted the narrator to cut his hair and beard to avoid the fury of the mob. He refused to do that. He. Somehow saved himself by hiding in the garden. The novel comes to an end with stunning description of the sadistic brutality – the burning alive of Budha Singh the watchman of the sikh narrator. The history of Delhi even in his catastrophe remains unfinished, it is still in process.

The politics and history of Delhi in medieval age, British Raj and modern India as treated by the novelist also aims at an enquiry into the politics of contemporary India whose nerve-centre is Delhi. The novel provides the pre- history of the present and raises many questions pertaining to the problems confronting us – communalism, extremism, regionalism and violence: Delhi, the city provides Singh with a site where the dramas of invasion, defection, human savagery, betrayal, religious bigotry; oppression of the poor, the untouchable and the conquered are enacted.

Singh's narrative following the paradigm of Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*, opt for circular modes of rendering the details – progresses into the past, coming back to the present – embracing heterogeneous voices that render Delhi multiple identities. In carnivalesque mixture facts and fiction, Singh's bricolage, *Delhi* ferrets out, excavates, rewrites and re-invests those portions of history that were highly polemical or those which were supposedly forgotten and also those which were never recorded in historiography. All these constituting the history of Delhi make it a crucible where the hopes of the present blend with the past; Delhi attains an aura, a history, and it is infinitely scriptable in many more versions of histories.

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