



JOURNALISM AND COLUMN WRITING IN INDIA AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF KHUSHWANT SINGH AS A COLUMNIST

SONAJI B. RAJPUT

Assistant Professor

Smt. M. P. Patel College of Commerce
& Center for Professional Courses, Kadi
(GJ) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The rise of column writing supported the leaders to voice against the system in the beginning but with the demand of time, the objectives of column writing keeps changing. In the context of India, column writing echoed radical social reforms in the later part of 19th century whereas the same field served different purpose in 20th century. Khushwant Singh, who is known as the maverick journalist has marked a different benchmark in the field of journalism. He made people to wait for newspapers to read the columns only. In this paper, genuine effort has been made to highlight the rise of journalism in India and to mention the contribution of Khushwant Singh as a columnist.

Key Words: Journalism, Column writing, Opinion, Issues

INTRODUCTION:

Journalism and Column Writing in India

The end of nineteenth century observed social reforms in India and so social reformers actively participated to implement radical changes in India. They run a movement for the abolition of the tradition of *Sati*, widow remarriage, and reformation of India. The newspaper was the best medium to reach to the every corner of the country. The leading news paper of this time were, *The Times of India* (1861), *The Pioneer* (1866), *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1868), *The Statesman* (1875), *The Hindu* (1887), *The Tribune* (1880), *Malayala Manorama* (1888). After his return from South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi edited *Young India*. He launched a weekly in

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Gujarati *Navjeevan*, and *Harijan*. The beginning of 20th century witnessed a revolution in the field of professional journalism under the impact of two World Wars and rise of nationalism movement. In the early years newspapers used to carry more views and less news as the publishers were eager to share their views with the readers. Majority of column writers were social leaders, activists and freedom fighters who shared their views and encouraged people to follow them.

Column writing in journalism developed as a different and independent field in 20th century. The journalism business witnessed the rise of articles and column writing. Column writing was different in form and content compared to the traditional journalism. There was an era in India when newspapers were missing vigorous, energetic, and sensational news. Even the editorials were full of newspaper's views. The column writing only answered the readers' 'why'. The Ideology of Mahatma Gandhi regularly published in the newspapers. Mahatma Gandhi himself used the term "View Paper" for Tribune as during that era more views and less news used to publish in newspapers. Mahatma Gandhi believed, "The newspapers should be read for the study of facts. They should not be allowed to kill the habit of independent thinking."

Amartyasen writes in his book *The Argumentative Indian*, "We have long tradition of raising questions through discussion and dialogues and columns provide us the opportunity". In India even after independence column writing did not lose its spirit. Column writing covered many new topics of discussion. The popular columnists of India are Prem Bhatia, Nikhil Chakravarty, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Khushwant Singh, Amita Malik, Kuldip Nair, TJS George, Soli Sorabjee, Gurucharandas, Shobha De, Prajal Bidwai, Tavleen Singh, Swapan Dasgupta and Chetan Bhagat.

Khushwant Singh and Column writing:

Khushwant Singh adopted journalism just to enter the literary world. Later he proved himself the benchmark in the field of journalism. Khushwant Singh's columns have been regarded as opinion writing in journalism. As a journalist, he knew the pulses of his readers and so he could bring the circulation of *Illustrated Weekly* higher in nine years from 1969 and 1978. His journey as a journalist started from the short story 'Karma' and that established his career as a successful journalist for 70 years. Khushwant Singh had worked with all major newspapers or publications such as *The Yojna*, *The New York Times*, *The Tribune*, *The Observer*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *The Guardian*, *Sunday*, *Hindustan Times*, *Evening News*, *The Statesman*, *Outlook*, *India Today* and *Holiday*.



Khushwant Singh's active participation in journalism started from 1950. His take over as the editor of *Illustrated Weekly* gave him new direction as the journalist with acid wit. In the words of V. S Naipaul: "An Appetizing way of writing It's his own brand of Patriotism" (Outlook Interview). There would not be an exaggeration in saying that his writings had an impact to change the image of the nation. India used to be believed as the country of the poor and snake charmers. During his tenure as the editor of *The Hindustan Times*, his popular and controversial column "With malice Towards One and All" gained larger public favour. Even though he was close to the Gandhi family he opposed Operation Blue Star by returning Padma Bhushan. He openly rejected the idea of Khalistan that put his life in danger. Khushwant Singh honestly wrote in appreciating Christian Missionaries for their efforts to uplift the quality of education and public welfare. In his book *Truth, Love and Little Malice* he candidly states, "I got fulfillment out of journalism and creative writing. It was only then that I really began to relish the bounties of nature as my just reward for the work I had put in." Khushwant Singh's columns have power to connect the readers to the news with convincing powers.

Khushwant Singh expresses his intention of joining as a journalist in the preface to a collection of columns called *Khushwant Singh's Editor's Page* (1981): "Under its first two Indian editors(*The Illustrated Weekly*) became a vehicle of Indian culture devoting most of its pages to art, sculpture, classical dance and pretty pictures of flowers, birds, and dancing belles. It did not touch controversial subjects, was strictly apolitical and asexual save occasional blurred reproductions of Khajuraho or Konark. It earned a well-deserved reputation for dull respectability. I changed all that. What was a four-wheeled Victoria taking well-draped ladies out to eat the Indian air I made a noisy rumbustious, jet-propelled vehicle of information, controversy and amusement? I tore up the unwritten norms of gentility, both visual and linguistic. . . . And slowly the circulation built up, till the *Illustrated* did become a weekly habit of the English-reading pseudo-elite of the country. It became the most widely read journal in Asia (barring Japan) because it reflected all the contending points of view on every conceivable subject: politics, economics, religion, and the arts."

Khushwant Singh covered all major subjects in his columns such as nationalism, communalism, politics, political ideology, politicians, celebrities, secularism, emergency, international relations, neighboring countries, gender issues, marital issues, social issues, , Impotency, education system, economic inequality, Theology, theory of karma, Our Future non-violence, philosophy and knowledge. Dr. R. K Dhawan observes Khushwant Singh's acid wit satire and honesty as "Khushwant Singh wants to shock and provoke existing norms of Victorian morality, which he must have been discomforted by in his younger days."



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