

Uncovering Sedimentary Pasts in Khushwant Singh's *Delhi*

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Abstract

Khushwant Singh's *Delhi: A Novel* narrates the history of Delhi over several centuries, and in doing so overlaps the genres of fiction, history book and memoir. There are two sets of narration: one based in the present named after the hijra, Bhagmati; and the second named after historical personages. The alternating and shifting narrative voices uncover a spatiotemporal account of the city. The spatial stories are unfolded at the intersection of invaders and lovers of the city, biography and poetry, monumental spaces and everyday events, tales of emperors and subalterns, and through creative mixing of history and anecdotes. Through tales of horror and pathos surrounding violence over the centuries, the article argues for acceptance of dichotomous and binary characteristics in the city.

Keywords: Delhi, narrative voices, spatiotemporal, dichotomous, identities

Khushwant Singh's magnum opus *Delhi: A Novel*, written over twenty-five years narrates the history of Delhi over several centuries and in the process unfolds a spatiotemporal account of the city. Covering events roughly from the seventh to twentieth century, through multiple narrators including prominent historical personages and not so well-known figures, Singh presents Delhi as a palimpsest where rulers and invaders over the years have inscribed their power. The paper analyses the novel's narratology, explores the relationship of the various narrator-characters with the city and argues for acceptance of contradictory and dichotomous characteristics in the city and its people.