

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

KHUSHWANT SINGH

Born 1915 Hadali, Punjab, India (now Pakistan)

Died 2014 New Delhi, India

Life

Khushwant Singh was born in Hadali, Punjab, which is now a part of Pakistan. His father, Sir Sobha Singh, was involved in the construction industry and worked on the building of New Delhi in the 1920s and 1930s. Khushwant Singh went to the Modern School in New Delhi and later attended Government College in Lahore, St. Stephen's College in New Delhi and King's College in London. He also enrolled at the Inner Temple and was called to the bar. A move to enter the Indian civil service proved unsuccessful, and so he went back to Lahore in 1938, where he pursued a less than brilliant legal career at the High Court.

After Independence in 1947, he joined the Indian Foreign Service and was posted to Toronto, Canada. In 1951, he changed careers again and joined All India Radio as a journalist. He later worked in Paris for UNESCO and in New Delhi as an independent journalist. In 1956, he published his first novel, *Train to Pakistan*, which catapulted him into the public's eye. At the same time, he researched and wrote a history of Sikhs that became the standard reference for scholars in the 1960s. He was also prominent for his editorship (1969-1978) of *The Illustrated Weekly*, a Bombay-based periodical that covered culture and politics. He then became editor of the *Hindustan Times*, a newspaper in New Delhi and wrote a humorous column on current issues called 'With Malice Toward One and All'. From 1980 to 1986, he was a member of Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian parliament. It was during this time that he returned a prestigious government award as a protest against the military attack on a Sikh temple in 1984. During the later decades of his life, he spent time translating Urdu poetry into English. He was frequently seen at literary festivals and on television, commenting on literature and politics. His wife, Kaval Malik, died several years before him. They had a son, Rahul, and a daughter, Mala.

Achievements

Khushwant Singh was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974 (although he returned it ten years later in protest against the government's military attack on a Sikh temple). He also received the Punjab Rattan Award in 2006; the Padma Vibhushan in 2007; a Sahitya Academy Fellowship award in 2010; the Tata Literature Live Award in 2013; and a Fellowship at King's College, London, in 2014.

Select list of works

Fiction

The Mark of Vishnu, and Other Stories, 1950
Train to Pakistan, 1956
I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, 1959
Delhi: A Novel, 1990
The Company of Women, 1999
The Sunset Club, 2010

Non-fiction

The Sikhs, 1953
A History of the Sikhs, 1469–1964, 1963, 1966
Truth, Love and a Little Malice, 2002
The Good, the Bad and the Ridiculous, 2013