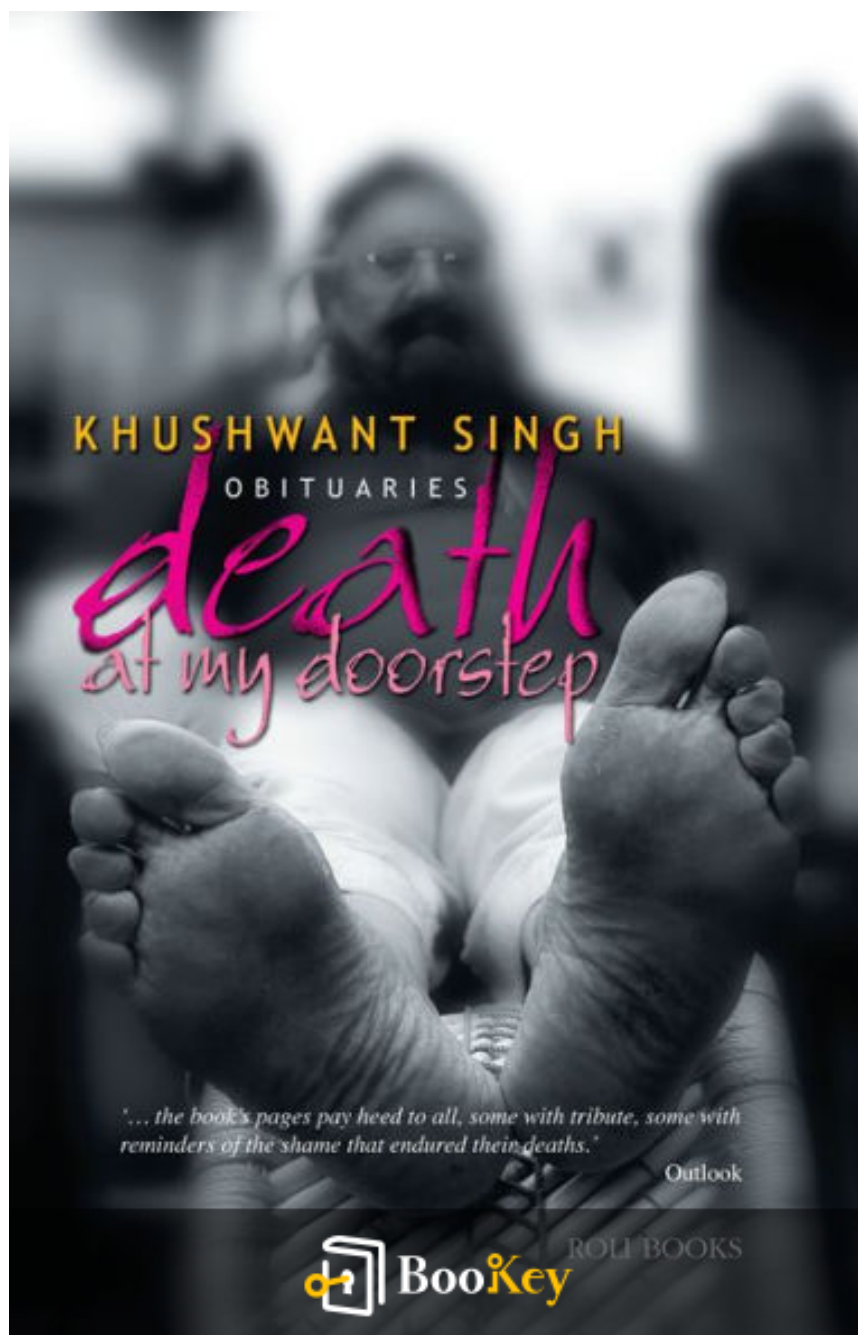


Obituaries PDF (Limited Copy)

Khushwant Singh



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Obituaries Summary

Life's fleeting moments captured in poignant remembrance.

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About the book

In "Obituaries," Khushwant Singh masterfully intertwines humor and poignancy to reflect on the lives of individuals who have left an indelible mark on his world, transforming the typical notion of mourning into an exploration of the human condition. Each vignette serves as a testament to the complexities and contradictions of life, showcasing the author's unparalleled ability to blend personal anecdotes with sharp social commentary. Singh's narrative invites readers to celebrate the quirks, failings, and triumphs of those he has known, ultimately challenging our perceptions of death and legacy. As readers traverse the pages of this evocative collection, they will find themselves not only contemplating the impact of those who have passed but also examining the rich tapestry of their own experiences and relationships.

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About the author

Khushwant Singh (1915-2014) was a renowned Indian author, lawyer, diplomat, and journalist, celebrated for his sharp wit and keen observations on Indian society and politics. Born in what is now Pakistan, he witnessed the tumultuous events of India's partition, experiences that profoundly shaped his literary voice. Singh was known for his ability to blend humor with serious commentary, creating works that ranged from fiction to non-fiction, with notable titles including 'Train to Pakistan' and 'Delhi: A Novel.' His expansive career also included roles as the editor of several prominent newspapers and magazines, and his extensive writings often echoed his secular views, advocating for communal harmony in a diverse nation. A recipient of numerous accolades, including the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan, Singh's legacy as a literary giant and a stalwart of Indian journalism endures through his thought-provoking narratives and commentary.

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Chapter 1 Summary: 1

In the reflective and thought-provoking Chapter 1 of "Obituaries" by Khushwant Singh, the author discusses the complexities surrounding the concept of death and the diverse perspectives that can help individuals confront their fears and uncertainties about mortality. The dialogue unfolds through insightful conversations with notable figures such as the Dalai Lama and Acharya Rajneesh, each providing a unique viewpoint on death, life, and the human experience.

1. The Dalai Lama emphasizes the subjective nature of beliefs regarding death, asserting that it is not necessary to have firm conclusions about life after death. He encourages acceptance of uncertainty, advocating for honest living rather than a preoccupation with afterlife conjectures. He cites examples from Buddhism that suggest a continuity of consciousness beyond physical existence while acknowledging the scientific limitations of such beliefs.

2. Contrastingly, Acharya Rajneesh approaches death with a more theatrical lens, urging individuals not to fear but to embrace death as part of life's cycle. He argues that the inevitability of death should transform how people live, suggesting that a celebration of life should accompany the acceptance of death. His anecdotal style appeals to some, but his dismissal of death as a profound reality is met with skepticism by Singh, who expresses unease at

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this perspective.

3. Singh relates his own experiences and introspection regarding death, showing that while it is a universal concern, the fear surrounding it is deeply personal. He acknowledges that contemplating death is inevitable but finds solace in a life lived fully. Through conversations with others, like retired commissioner S. Prasher, Singh explores memory and consciousness, questioning if anything persists after physical death.

4. The author touches upon practical matters related to dying and encourages readers to prepare for their inevitable end. This includes drafting a will, clearing debts, and minimizing worldly possessions to face death with dignity. The notion that solitude can bring peace in one's final days is also suggested as a meaningful way to reflect and find contentment.

5. Singh also highlights the social and cultural aspects of mourning, illustrating how different cultures handle the death of loved ones. He reflects on his personal experience with grief, noting the contrast between his own solitary coping mechanisms and the communal rituals present in various traditions. He ultimately emphasizes the need for individual approaches in processing loss.

6. The chapter concludes with a contemplation on how one should confront death, stressing that it is inescapable. Singh advocates for living with dignity

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and grace, suggesting that acceptance and preparedness can lead to a calmer approach when the end is near. By describing vivid memories, engaging in philosophical discussions, and illuminating the varied responses to mortality, Singh encapsulates a rich discourse on the meaning of life and death.

In summary, "Obituaries" weaves together philosophical musings, personal anecdotes, and the beliefs of religious figures to create a nuanced exploration of death—a subject that remains one of life's greatest mysteries yet profound realities. Through careful consideration of various perspectives, Singh ultimately posits that while death is inevitable, how one chooses to confront it defines the essence of life itself.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Uncertainty

Critical Interpretation: As you journey through life, remember that just like the Dalai Lama suggests, the ambiguity surrounding death should not intimidate you; instead, allow it to empower your choices today. Embracing the uncertainty of what comes after life can free you from the shackles of fear and encourage a more honest, fulfilling existence. Imagine waking up each day with a renewed sense of purpose, letting go of fears about tomorrow and instead focusing deeply on living authentically in the present. By accepting that you may never have all the answers about death, you can create space for meaningful experiences, personal growth, and connections that define your life. This perspective encourages you to tackle each day with courage, to cherish your relationships, and to live with integrity—transforming your approach to life and death into one of celebration rather than apprehension.

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Chapter 2 Summary: 2

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, once a prominent figure in Pakistan's political landscape, faced an intricate web of sentiments as he awaited his execution, scheduled for April 4, 1979. In the backdrop of an unusual rainstorm lashing through Islamabad, the populace gathered in hushed anticipation around news stalls, absorbing the harrowing news of his death sentence. This overwhelming gloom paralleled the somber atmosphere in Sadar Bazaar, where groups of people read newspapers in silence, occasionally shedding tears, but notably not expressing anger or violent defiance against the regime purportedly responsible for his fate.

1. Resignation and Acceptance: Many citizens seemed to have accepted the idea of Bhutto's impending execution, recognizing that while he had fostered hope among the masses through his populist rhetoric—promising freedom from hunger, clothing, and shelter—these promises remained largely unfulfilled. His supporters faced suppression, with estimates of over 25,000 dissenters detained, reflecting a political atmosphere rife with fear yet tempered by a shared apprehension about the nation's uncertain future.

2. The Paradox of Popularity: Bhutto retained considerable support among the impoverished, his rhetoric resonating even if they questioned his intentions and means. Critics articulated a striking paradox: despite public esteem, there seemed little likelihood of a widespread uprising to challenge



his execution, as many feared repercussions from the militaristic governance under President Zia-ul Haq, who exhibited a persistent determination to quell any signs of dissent.

3. **The Days Leading to Judgment:** The day Bhutto's verdict was read in the Lahore High Court, he remained stoic, reflecting on his fate without apparent fear or anger, seemingly detached from the gravity of the situation. His condemnation to death by hanging was met with a silent courtroom, illustrating a disconnect between the legal proceedings and the deeper emotional turbulence of a divided population, pondering his legacy—a legacy marred by his earlier rule characterized by political oppression.

4. **The Emotional Toll:** After the court's decision, Bhutto experienced profound despair. Secluded in his jail cell, his initial defiance waned as the reality of his sentence sunk in. Indulgent visits from family members portrayed a contrasting sense of normalcy amidst the tumult, yet Bhutto's interactions were tinged with a recognition of finality, revealing his humanity and vulnerability.

5. **The Last Days and Final Pleas:** Appeals for clemency poured in from various quarters, yet the political climate dictated an inevitable conclusion. Bhutto's last public moments involved interactions with those close to him, where he conveyed his thoughts through final will preparations, but ultimately disallowed any pleas for mercy, choosing to confront his demise



with a semblance of dignity.

6. Execution: In the early hours of April 4, Bhutto met his fate with a blend of resignation and discomposure. The meticulous planning surrounding his execution reflected the regime's fear of public disturbance. Surrounded by heavy security, he was removed from his cell and, despite attempts to maintain bravado, succumbed to the gravity of the moment as he ascended the gallows, marking the end of a tumultuous chapter in Pakistan's history.

7. Aftermath and Legacy: Following his death, Bhutto's legacy transformed into a complex tapestry of reverence and contempt. Reports trickled in of public displays of mourning, with individuals offering prayers at his grave, indicating a shift towards martyrdom in the narrative surrounding his life. His execution imbued his persona with newfound allure among supporters, catapulting him into a realm of revered memory, while the ruling class recognized the resurgence of the political fervor he inspired.

8. Martyrdom and Political Future: Bhutto's death did not extinguish the political fire he had kindled. His martyrdom paved the way for future leadership within the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), foreshadowing a legacy carried on by his family, including his daughter, Benazir Bhutto, highlighting themes of resilience amid political turmoil.

Each facet of Bhutto's dramatic end contributes to the ongoing dialogue

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concerning power dynamics, political legacy, and the intricate layers of public sentiment that continue to shape Pakistan's evolving narrative.

Section	Summary
1. Resignation and Acceptance	Citizens accepted Bhutto's execution, acknowledging his unfulfilled promises while many dissenters were detained, indicating a fearful political climate.
2. The Paradox of Popularity	Despite retaining support among the poor, fear of repercussions under Zia-ul Haq's regime stifled potential uprisings against Bhutto's execution.
3. The Days Leading to Judgment	Bhutto exhibited stoicism during his court proceedings, reflecting a disconnect between his fate and the emotional turmoil of the public over his legacy.
4. The Emotional Toll	In jail, Bhutto's initial defiance faded into despair as he confronted his sentence, while family visits highlighted his human vulnerability.
5. The Last Days and Final Pleas	Despite appeals for clemency, Bhutto chose to face his death with dignity, preparing his final will without seeking mercy.
6. Execution	On April 4, Bhutto's execution was heavily secured, reflecting the regime's fear of public unrest. He faced the gallows with a mix of resignation and trepidation.
7. Aftermath and Legacy	Following his execution, Bhutto's legacy was viewed with reverence and contempt; he was mourned as a martyr, deepening political fervor among his supporters.
8. Martyrdom and Political Future	Bhutto's martyrdom catalyzed future leadership within the PPP, notably through his daughter Benazir, symbolizing resilience in political struggle.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Resilience Amid Adversity

Critical Interpretation: As you contemplate Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's journey, particularly his resignation and acceptance in the face of imminent execution, allow it to remind you of the importance of resilience in your own life. Just as many of Bhutto's supporters silently grappled with their own fears yet cherished the hope he inspired, you too can find strength in adversity. Embrace the moments of challenge as opportunities to grow; be it through facing your own trials or standing in solidarity with others. This chapter illustrates that even in the darkest times, the human spirit can be buoyed by collective hope, urging you to cultivate resilience and find meaning within your struggles, fostering a sense of purpose that transcends despair.

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Chapter 3: 3

In a reflective narrative that intertwines personal anecdotes with broader societal observations, Khushwant Singh illustrates the lives of notable figures and their complex legacies. The chapter features various prominent personalities, painting portraits that are rich with detail and emotional resonance, while also shedding light on the sociopolitical landscapes they navigated.

1. The chapter opens with Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, a pivotal figure in Sikh politics, whose leadership over the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and his initiatives focused on community service are highlighted. Despite his significant influence and the anticipation of his death, Tohra's passing received little media coverage, overshadowed by other events of the day. Singh reflects on Tohra's shortcomings and missed opportunities, including his handling of the Golden Temple's sanctity and his inability to advance the educational prospects of the Sikh community, which marked a contradiction to his otherwise honest character.

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Chapter 4 Summary: 4

The life and legacy of Ali Sardar Jafri as a prominent Urdu poet intertwines with the cultural and political landscapes of his time. When he passed away on August 1, 2000, I tuned into Pakistan Television to observe how his death was reported. While they acknowledged his contribution to poetry, the tribute felt superficial compared to the life he led, marked not only by art but also by his passionate advocacy for peace between India and Pakistan. Over three decades, I shared enriching conversations with Jafri and his wife, Sultana, often accompanied by good food and Scotch. His home, albeit modest, was filled with a wealth of literary knowledge, exemplified by his extraordinary memory and impressive understanding of Urdu and Persian poetry.

During our interactions, I often questioned his staunch Communist ideology, noting the apparent contradictions in his life, from the political prison he endured to his deep engagement with Islamic traditions, especially during Moharrum. Jafri's height and presence commanded attention, while his poetry conveyed messages of harmony during turbulent political times, as epitomized in one of his well-known verses addressing the need for unity between Indians and Pakistanis. His belief in continual growth, inspired by Rumi, was reflected in his poetry, asserting his place in the continuum of existence.

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Jafri's birthplace and background, along with the accolades he received throughout his career, underpin a body of work that transcended borders. His last collection, characterized by a heartfelt message of love, encapsulated his essence as a poet and humanitarian.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz, another monumental figure, shared a complex narrative entwined with his time at college, his political beliefs, and the strife during Partition. Our bond grew during mutual exposure to literature, and I was deeply moved when Faiz was dying in Lahore while I was away. His poetry, recognized for its profound emotional depth and political consciousness, continued to resonate with millions. Even in his conflicts regarding his social standing versus his compassion for the downtrodden, Faiz emerged as a unifying figure who defied nationalistic divides.

The recollections of poet George Fraser highlighted how friendship and admiration transcend time, emphasizing the quiet contributions to literature made by those who often go unnoticed. In a dedicated tribute, his memory was honored as part of a legacy left for the Sikh community, reminiscent of the uncelebrated lives sharing similar narratives.

The Moraes family story, particularly the dynamic between father Frank and son Dom, illustrates the struggles of artists burdened by personal tribulations while grappling with their craft. Dom's journey through addiction, love, and loss reveals a resonance with many poets, framed within a context of

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familial ties and artistic aspirations.

Kishan Lal, a restaurateur and poet, brought joy and laughter into my life through his culinary offerings and genuine passion for Urdu poetry. His enthusiasm for food and friendship highlighted the warmth of human connections within our shared cultural experiences, culminating in a deep appreciation for the mundane yet profound moments we often take for granted.

The tale of Yogi Bhajan, enigmatic and controversial, further expands the notion of cultural exchange. As a pioneer in promoting Sikhism in the West, his legacy merges spirituality with entrepreneurship. His departure marked a significant moment for many who followed his teachings, illustrating the complexities of religious identity in a diverse world.

Ultimately, these narratives weave together a rich tapestry of life, love, and literature, each story reflecting a unique journey marked by personal battles, moments of connection, and the timeless quest for meaning in poetry and existence alike.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Importance of Unity and Compassion

Critical Interpretation: As you reflect on Ali Sardar Jafri's profound belief in the need for unity, particularly between India and Pakistan, you may find inspiration to actively cultivate compassion in your own life. His poetry, a beautiful call for harmony amidst conflict, reminds you to seek connections rather than divisions. When faced with differing perspectives, challenge yourself to embrace the art of dialogue, fostering relationships that transcend cultural and ideological borders. In a world increasingly marked by separation, your commitment to understanding others can empower you to contribute to a more peaceful coexistence, echoing Jafri's legacy of love and advocacy for unity.

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Chapter 5 Summary: 5

In chapter five of "Obituaries," Khushwant Singh reflects on the lives and legacies of several remarkable personalities, each showcasing a unique character shaped by their experiences, relationships, and societal impacts. The chapter encompasses stories of passion, rebellion, and the complexities of life and death, demonstrating how these individuals navigated their paths.

1. **Protima Bedi** was born into an unloving household in 1949 Delhi, which molded her into a rebellious spirit. Despite a tumultuous personal life characterized by numerous relationships and an unabashed devotion to living authentically, she ultimately faced tragedy in her pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Her candidness, even to the detriment of others' feelings, marked her vibrant existence, and her memoirs, posthumously published, resonate with themes of love, freedom, and existential reckoning.

2. **Nargis Dutt**, the iconic actress known as "Mother India," came alive in Singh's memories as a warm, friendly presence whose laughter could instantly uplift those around her. Nargis, while struggling with illness later in life, remained fiercely committed to her responsibilities, showcasing her dedication to social causes. Her faith and identity exemplified a blend of Hindu and Islamic influences, marking her as a figure of unity in a time of division, even as she left behind a profound emptiness in the hearts of her admirers after her demise.



3. **Amrita Shergil**, a talented artist, is portrayed as a femme fatale whose beauty and charisma captivated many. Though her life ended prematurely, her legacy as a creative force stirred intrigue and admiration. Her unapologetic sensuality and rebellious nature defined her narrative, intertwining with stories from her encounters, showcasing her as both gifted and controversial.

4. **Chetan Anand**, a significant yet complicated figure in Singh's life, reflects on friendship's ebbs and flows. Despite years of camaraderie, their relationship soured due to misunderstandings. Upon Chetan's death, Singh felt a mix of remorse and nostalgia, revealing how friendship can be fragile and deeply affecting in the face of loss.

5. **Dharma Kumar**, a spirited academic with a vivid personality, was someone Singh cherished deeply. Their bond, however, was strained due to a misunderstanding that led to estrangement. Upon her passing, he grappled with the impermanence of life and the gifts of friendship, acknowledging that sometimes the greatest affections lie unexpressed until it's too late.

6. **P.C. Lal**, the Air Chief Marshal, epitomized dedication and integrity. Known for his leadership in the Indian Air Force during wartime, Lal's life story unfolds with accounts of valiance and principled standing against political pressures. His qualities of humility and respect for all, including his

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magnanimous approach towards adversities, illustrated the essence of gentlemanly conduct amid pressures of authority.

7. **Jack Wilberforce Burke Peel** exemplified a lifelong companionship that transcended cultural divides. A gifted linguist and pianist, his unassuming yet impactful life revealed layers of connection built over decades. Singh's tribute unveiled the quiet yet profound riches of friendship nurtured through shared experiences and mutual support across generations.

8. **Manzur Qadir** stood as a model of integrity and kindness—traits that endeared him to those around him. As a prominent lawyer in Pakistan, his life reflected a deep commitment to principles, evidenced through his resistance to power plays and moral foresight. His legacy endures in the memories of friends who viewed him as a moral compass amidst a tumultuous political landscape, illustrating the impactful essence of personal character over political affiliation.

Through these stories, Singh captures the essence of human experience—the joys, the sorrows, and the intricate tapestry of relationships that characterize our lives, illustrating how even in death, the legacies of these remarkable individuals remain alive in collective memory. Each life reflects a journey, where the interplay of choices and circumstances defines one's path, leaving footprints of inspiration and reverence.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace Authenticity

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter 5, Khushwant Singh highlights the rebellious spirit of Protima Bedi, whose journey of living authentically amidst societal pressures serves as a powerful reminder for you to embrace your own uniqueness. As you navigate through life's complexities, the courage to express your true self, like Bedi, can inspire you to break free from the constraints of conformity. This chapter urges you to reflect on the importance of loving yourself and living with passion, ultimately leading to a more meaningful and fulfilling life. By daring to be genuine, you not only honor your own existence but also inspire those around you to seek their own authentic paths.

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Chapter 6: 6

The chapter unfolds through the author's poignant memoirs, revealing personal relationships and the profound impact of enduring friendships.

1. Bhisham Sahni, a talented writer, stands on equal ground with a famous brother yet remains in the shadows of admiration amongst his peers. Despite being classmates and sharing familial ties through interlinked generations, the narrator laments missing deeper connections with Bhisham. Notably, both brothers share a commitment to leftist ideologies and communal harmony, traits that not only define their character but also resonate throughout their lives and works.

2. The tragic Palam Air Crash of 1973 serves as a somber backdrop for reflections on mutual friends – Satish Loomba, Mohan Kumaramangalam, and Gurnam Singh. Each individual had unique contributions and political journeys. Satish, initially apathetic to politics, blossoms into an outspoken trade unionist, exhibiting integrity that distances him from opportunism. Mohan, renowned for his charming yet boisterous nature, evolves from a law

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Chapter 7 Summary: 7

In "Obituaries" by Khushwant Singh, Chapter 7 narrates the poignant experiences tied to two significant figures in Singh's life: Chajjoo Ram, the devoted caretaker of Raj Villa, and Simba, a beloved family pet.

1. Chajjoo Ram's Legacy: Singh reminisces about his deep bond with Chajjoo Ram, a man he knew for over fifty years. Born in Goal village, Chajjoo Ram eventually became the caretaker of Raj Villa, treating the home with unparalleled devotion as if it were his own. His bravery was evident during crises, such as when he successfully warded off robbers by intimidating them with the notion of a gun he did not possess. He also defended the property during violent ethnic riots and tirelessly cared for the lush gardens surrounding the villa, battling against marauding monkeys and wildfires. His dedicated service and fierce loyalty left a lasting impact, and Singh felt a profound sense of loss upon Chajjoo Ram's passing in September 1998, recognizing the void left in his life.

2. Simba, the Cherished Companion: Upon returning home to Delhi after losing his job, Singh found solace in the company of an Alsatian puppy named Simba, gifted to his daughter. Over time, Simba developed a close bond with Singh, becoming a loyal and loving companion who recognized and mirrored family dynamics. His playful antics and protective nature endeared him to the family, especially during outings to the park



where he showcased his hunting instincts. Simba's intelligence, combined with a playful but possessive nature, endeared him even further to the family.

3. Evolving Relationship: As Simba grew older, the bond deepened, marked by affectionate rituals and shared experiences. However, with age came challenges; Simba faced health issues leading to a gradual decline. Singh reflects on the profound bond they shared and the immense impact Simba had on his life. Ultimately, Simba's peaceful passing underscored the irreplaceable nature of their companionship, leading Singh to decide never to replace him with another dog.

4. Epitaph of a Writer: Finally, Singh humorously encapsulates his irreverent persona in an epitaph that acknowledges his controversial nature and sardonic wit. This self-reflection showcases his candid acknowledgment of life's complexities, revealing a multifaceted character that embraced both affection and satire.

Overall, this chapter weaves together themes of loyalty, love, and mortality, painting a rich tapestry of Singh's connections with Chajjoo Ram and Simba, each leaving indelible marks on his life.

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