

## **Khushwant : the Innocent King**

That is the long life-sketch I wrote on his life, and his beliefs and convictions and writings, and his love of nature. It was called '*Bhola Badshah*'.

Khushwant was a rare human being. A king who could feel at home with '*darveshs*' and '*fageers*'. He was a rare writer, with simple prose which was everybody's idiom, with a common touch.

He was the President of our Academy of Fine Arts and Literature since 1977 and Chairman of our Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature since 1987. I requested him, and he accepted to be our friend, philosopher and guide. We were proud of being associated with him.

He had a rare knack of always 'giving' all he could, to whosoever needed his name, his guidance, his love, his affection.

People often visited him to offload their sorrow or dilemmas, and he had always a word of advice and consolation for them. He was the best listener. Never in a hurry to wind up a dialogue.

His ideas were profound, written in simple language, and laced with a bit of humour too. People loved his columns and wrote him loads of letters. He never ignored to reply each one of them, with a scribbled sentence on a post card.

When I was interviewing him for my sketch '*Bhola Badshah*', he narrated his childhood memories, memories of his younger days in Delhi when his father, the great builder Sir Sobha Singh, was constructing the monumental buildings of North Block, South Block, Rashtrapati Bhawan and Connaught Place, "thick forests were being cleared for the constructions. I saw wild animals roaming in the forests wondering what were we doing to their habitat !"

He loved cats all his life, cats and women. They flocked to him, and he had place for everyone in his home and heart. About twenty cats loitered around him, and responded to the names he had given him, 'Lajwanti, Lakshmi, Sujata, Meena, Rani.....!' If he went out for dinner, he never forgot to collect bones for his cats, and brought them home with an apology for his absence in the evening.

Inspite of his image of a ladies' man, he loved his wife Kanwal deeply, and respected her. During her illness, he suffered along with her, and could never accept her ultimate departure. Without saying a word, he absorbed the pain of her death with great grace.

And he went as gracefully as he lived. Quietly, and with dignity, after doing his daily crossword.

**AJEET COUR**