

Khuswant Singh as a Psycho- Analyst: A Study of his short stories Kusum and The Riot

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Khuswant Singh (2 Feb 1915-20 mar 2014) was an Indian novelist, lawyer, journalist and politician. As a writer he was best known for his trenchant secularism, humour, sarcasm and an abiding love of poetry. Khuswant Singh first established his reputation as a writer through the short stories which first published in 1950. Since then he has become one of India's most celebrated authors, and is most widely read journalist, apart from being an out spoken public figure. He is a writer of high caliber. His stories have varied themes. They have Indian setting irony, humour and satire have made the stories pleasant and interesting. The author also uses the elements of folklore and super natural elements in some of his stories. Singh has also created a varied world of person in his stories. They belong to various strata of society and do various jobs. But here in this paper I present khuswant Singh as a psycho-analyst who, in his short stories gives the authentic proof of psychological working behind every human action. As a psychology confirms that mind are body are closely related, as the activity or condition of the one has its inevitable impact on the other. We are not able to attend anything properly when we are hungry, tired or ill. During some illness the mind is generally quite idle. Thus our mental condition affects our body directly. Khuswant singh uses this theme in his short stories very skillfully.

Khushwant Singh, a writer with a cause, is generally tagged as a partition writer. But his collection of short stories unearths the hidden aspect of his creative writing. All his short stories replete with some issue important in modern scenario. He can be termed as a psychologist, who put his characters into a particular situation and as the story moves ahead, he unfold various layers of human psychology like an astute psychoanalyst, he tries to find out the reason or rational behind every human action. He is not just a critic of behavior rather he dwells deep in the dark cavern of human psychology & explores the brain teaser. I his short stories like KUSUM, The Right and The Rape and many others, like an astute psychologist he speaks about the causes of human behavior. For example in his short story Kusum, Kusum a girl of eighteen is genuinely good. Although she is just eighteen but physically she appears to be twenty eight and in her mannerism she equals to a "middle aged woman, in her forties." From any angle she does not appear beautiful, her face dark and spotted with the marks of

small pox. She wears thick glasses on her eyes and applies oil on her short and sparse hairs, which are “tightly plated at the back, stretching up her forehead and arching her eyebrows.” She is fat and seemingly there is no difference between her belly and bust. This squatty frame kusum drapes in white sari. But her goodness and intelligence are a repair to all this. Her glasses and her physic are a testimony of this that she spends hours over books. Being an obedient child she gets up early and cycles to her college, she comes back from college and she has no distraction she does not distract anybody because she is without beauty. Through Kusum Singh has beautifully illustrated that when we have some weakness we create a boundary around us to protect ourselves. Same is the case with Kusum. She has created a boundary of hard and pure life around herself, detested all pleasures of young age (because they are not available to her). Having no interest in boys she detest sex and modern fashion. In her views there is no need of make up as we should be content with the skin God give. She believes in the orthodoxy view that woman’s place is, in kitchen and girls should never be seen with their head uncovered. Because of her traditional ideology she is very famous with old man and woman quite opposite to it young men took no notice of her. On Kusum’s 19th birthday her college friend gives her a lipstick and some rouge as a birthday present but due to her conservative attitude she takes it as her insult. She hides the things in a corner of her drawer and coldly announced that she has thrown them out of the window (that is not true the reason becomes clear in the end). With the passage of time she grows more rigid and tough even she turns face of her mirror towards the wall and decides to squash the desire to see herself. No man ever takes notice of her so there is no point in looking attractive, and as she looks unattractive, no man took notice of her.

In the month of April, she took her university examination and her university life comes to an end. Other girls are busy with their friends and relations, but Kusum, like usual, collects her bicycle starts for the home. Other girls look forward matrimony but Kusum has nothing to look forward to “nothing but her sparsely furnished room with her mirror facing the wall and a few textbooks.”

But Khushwant Singh, likes a trained psychotherapist, gives one single incident pat in the story and Kusum’s true self like a fully bloomed flower is before us. After the examination when Kusum is returning home with complete void in her mind, alone and thinking, she takes the turning home on the wrong side of the road and before she can collect her thoughts she runs into a young hawker with a basket of oranges on his head. She falls on him and then rolls over on the road. Her glasses are smashed. The bicycle is on the pavement. The hawkers are just a bit shaken not hurt and his basket of oranges is all right too. He smiles and says “Miss Sahib, you should keep to your side on the road.” Kusum is already angry and tune of the hawker makes her angrier. She shrieks hoarsely:

‘Are you blind? Can’t you see where you are going?’

The hawkers look around. The road is deserted and his smile becomes roguish.

‘No Miss Sahib, I am not blind but I am one-eyed.’

He shuts one of his eyes in a long lecherous Wink and makes the sound of a loud kiss. A touch a feeling which is new to Kusum. Her face colours. She is furious she picks up the bicycle and gets on hurriedly. In a hoarse voice she swore at the hawkers

‘PIG ASS.’

The hawker is not offended rather he is enjoying the situation. Kusum is flustered. She has never been accosted before. She rushes home – rush to her room and buries her face in a pillow. Kusum lay buried in her pillow and her thoughts for several hours. The wrath is gone but the image of the hawker winking and making lewd suggestion still lingers in her mind. Nobody has ever done that to her before. And the question pricking her “Did the hawker find her attractive”? One single incident changed her life completely. Now she is not that tough, hard and ugly girl with glasses. Encounter with Hawker realizes her that she is beautiful and attractive for males and sees the result.

It is the time of night now, pale moonlight is crept and lit her room her bed she lay on. Kusum is still thinking of the hawker – “now with tenderness and regret.” ‘May be ‘, she says to herself, ‘May be’. She gets up and opens the drawer where her lipstick and rouge lays hidden ‘(articles kept safely and adorely’): How beautifully Khushwant describes the intimate moments of a young girl yearning for a touch of tenderness. Kusum pats her cheeks with the rouge. She turns the face of the mirror towards her and pouts her lips to put on lipstick. She undoes her hair, step back and tilts her head sideways to admire herself;

Khushwant Singh beautifully ends the story – with Kusum self-expression:

*“Mirror, mirror on the wall
Who is the fairest one of all ?”*

And now before us is a totally transformed dame:

“An attractive dark eyed girl with a mass of tumbled black hair adorned by a rose bud smile back at her – i should say so!”

In his another story “The Riot Khuswant Sigh, a trained psychologist, has proved that how a little psychological in balance can create a havoc. In the “The Riot” Khushwant Singh has explained that how a rumor, a suspicious mind, a sick psychology can affect the people, society and the nation. “The Riot” story opens in a gloomy atmosphere in a small m muholla, somewhere in Punjab, where curfew is being laid due to the communal riots. There is a pariah bitch whose name is Rani, who would have died of starvation if the Hindu shop keeper, Ram Jawaya “ in whose courtyard she has unloaded her womb” has not fed her. Every year in the autumn season Rani presents the Ram Jawaya’s courtyard with half-a-dozen Moti’s offspring’s_ a pet dog of Ramzan, the Muslim green grocer in the same muholla. This time spring has come, but the town is paralyzed with the fear of communal riots and curfews. An air of suspicion, fear and tension has spread all around. The peoples who were neighbor and close friend, living together from decades, have immediately grown suspicious of one

another. A small stone appears as a hand grenade and even a cry of a small child creates the illusion of last cry or of a yelling at the time of death.

Ramzan keeps his dog Moti, tied to his cot since the curfew has been laid. Rani is searching for Moti. As she is disappointed, she gives up Moti and ambles down the road towards Ram Jawaya's house, with a train of suitors follow her. These suitors (dogs) snarl and snap with each other. Rani stands impassively waiting for the decision. In Ramzan,s house, Moti is sited pensively eyeing his master from underneath his " charpoy". He tugs and strains at the leash and begins bark. Ramzan gets up angrily to beat him and Moti makes a dash towards the door to rush out. He makes a savage wrench and the rope give way and Moti leaps across the road. Because of the fear that is deep in the heart of Ramzan, he "ran back to his room, slipped a knife under his shirt and went after Moti".

Suddenly Moti comes at the spot, where Rani, his unfaithful mistress, is present with her new lover. Moti leaps at Rani's lover and other dogs also join the melee, tearing and snapping wildly. At the same time Ram Jawaya who has spent several sleepless nights keeping watch and yelling back war cries to the Muslims. Because of these communal riots he always sleeps with a heap of stones, soda water bottles filled with acid under his charpoy. The noise outside wakes him and he picks up a big stone opens the door and throws it on the dogs. Suddenly a human emerges from the corner and the stone catches him.

The stone does not cause much damage to Ramzan , but the suddenness of the assault takes him aback. He yells "murder" and produces his knife from under his shirt. Both – shopkeeper and grocer- eyed each other for a brief moment and then run back to their houses shouting. The petrified town comes to life. There are more shouting and drums at the Sikh temple beat loud_ the air is rent with war cries. Men emerge from their houses and without trying to find out the real problem making hasting inquiries Muslim or a Hindu, who is being attacked. And because of suspicion, prejudice and religious tension a minor snapping and sneering of dogs turned into disaster. What followed next....

"Group of five joined others of ten . Ten joined twenties, till a few hundred armed with knives, spears, hatches and kerosene oil cans proceed to Ram Jawaya's home and the entire neighborhood, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh alike."

All night and all the next day the fire burns- and the houses fell and the people are killed. Ram Jawaya's home is burnt and he barely escapes with his life. For several days smoke roses from the ruins and what has been a busy town once is a heap of charred masonry now.

Fear of an uncertain future, lack of communication between the leaders of the estranged communities, the waning authority of the British and the consequent unreliability of the state institution and functionaries created the social and political

milieu in which suspicion and fear proliferated and generating angst among the common people. In such situations reactions and over reactions led to intended and unintended consequences which aggravated and finally resulted in the biggest human tragedy in the history of the Indian sub-continent.

Thus khuswant Singh in his short stories has authentically proved that human behavior is influenced by many factors and he identifying these factors and showing their interdependence

REFERENCE

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