

**PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN KHUSHWANT
SINGH'S FICTION: A PSYCHO ANALYTICAL
INVESTIGATION**

A THESIS

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Psychoanalytical criticism is an effective analytical method which imparts insightful knowledge to study the literary characters' psyche. Psychoanalytical theories proposed by stalwarts like Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Carl Jung have been considered to establish a relationship between the characters' psyche and clinical psychology. The researcher has attempted to make a close reading of Khushwant Singh's literary characters in context of various psychoanalytical theories. This helps to understand the workings of the human mind and conceptualizes the day-to-day experiences like anxieties and sexual repression of humans.

Kushwant Singh's plots are not tense and melodramatic nor are they Freudian. In the short stories, men and women live and tolerate each other with their natural instincts and weaknesses. Khushwant Singh has written a self-portrait in the form of an essay, "On Myself" in *Sex, Scotch and Scholarship* where he discusses about his public image. Although many regard him as a drunkard and womanizer, he claims that there is no truth in these portrayals. He says:

I am not a drunkard; I have never been drunk even once in the over fifty years I have been drinking. Although some women have come into my life as they do in the lives of most men, I have never made passes at them, nor been snubbed or slapped for taking undue liberties with any. As a matter of fact, though I am nothing to look at, it is women who have sought my company more than I have sought theirs. (8)

He adds, “The only explanation I can offer is that it was my writing which earned me both popularity and ill-fame” (34). This proclaims that Singh is quite different from what is portrayed in his own writings. He also writes about how his wife maintains a strict discipline at home in checking the flow of visitors and avoiding visitors who come without prior-appointment. In his autobiography, Khushwant Singh writes about his turbulent relationship with his wife. He recollects the meeting of his wife’s cousin, Harji Malik, in a bookstore by chance where Kaval Malik too turned up and accused him of having an illicit affair with her cousin.

In his essay “The Women in India” in the *Book of Unforgettable Women*, Khushwant Singh makes a serious investigation about the role of women in India. Singh’s father expresses his disapproval of the fact that Indira Gandhi, a woman has been selected to lead the nation as Prime Minister. He believed that this would bring ruination to the country. But Khushwant Singh differs with him and states that she is the best alternative to any of the Congress leaders. This issue makes him think about how women are emancipated in the Anglicized Indian society.

Khushwant Singh quotes the example of Maharani Gayathri Devi of Jaipur who has been a fierce opponent of Nehru. He also ponders over the condition of women in the lower strata of the society. He delves into history and how the injunction of Manu has deteriorated and undermined the position of women in the society. When Singh asks a villager what he thinks of Indira Gandhi’s elevation as Prime Minister, he answers: If my wife makes a mistake, I slap her across the face. Who can slap the face of a Prime Minister?” (76) This is the perfect example of how patriarchy has been instilled in the Indian psyche. Khushwant Singh is seen to be empathizing with women’s cause in this context.

Khushwant Singh writes pompously, “There are not many examples in history where the poisoned relationship between a woman and her daughter-in-law influenced the course of events of a nation” (279) about the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her daughter-in-law, Menaka Gandhi. His friendship with Sanjay and Menaka Gandhi was well known but later Menaka Gandhi filed a court suit on him preventing him the publication of his autobiography for seven years.

Margaret Bloom in “Paradise” comes to an ashram in North India in the year 1982 to attain spiritual salvation after leading a life of excesses and indulgence in her country. Her attempts at spiritual revival fail when she consumes alcohol and indulges in a lesbian encounter. Singh situates this story in the same year when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India. In *The End of India Singh* states that the Nehruvian secularism breathed its last during the rule of Indira Gandhi as that was the period when “Astrologers and tantrics were included in decision-making circles” (137-38).

Khushwant Singh had met a large number of people in his life and some of them have left a lasting impression on his mind. He gives a lively account of real-life and fictional women in the books, *On Women*, *Book of Unforgettable of Women* and *Women and Men in my Life*. One such portrayal is that of Devyani Chaubal who became his friend when Singh shifted to Bombay, as editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Devyani was a film critic and Khushwant Singh enjoyed her company. His description of Devyani being “fat, full of life, malicious gossip, mimicry and zest for life” (10) portrays an image of Devyani. Though he had met the artist Amritra Shergil only twice, he could depict her personality with a great finish. Khushwant Singh says that Amritra is said to have given appointments to her lovers with two-hour intervals and states that sex is what that mattered to her.

Khushwant Singh seems to have a keen sense of observation which enables him to capture the total personality of the subjects he writes about and the innate sense of humour and wit he is endowed with is reflected in his judgment and evaluations of his fictional and non-fictional women. To give a few examples Khushwant Singh says that Dharma Kumar was more animated than any woman he had met as her eyes sparkled and her toes twitched and her hands were restless.

The present study is aimed at analyzing the psyche of Khushwant Singh's women characters based upon the theoretical researches done by the likes of psychologists Freud, Jung, Lacan, Adler, Chodorow, Adrienne Rich and Karen Horney. He explored the complex psychic processes that his female characters undergo. For instance, in *The Company of Women*, Champak is trapped in an incompatible marriage which drives her into an illegitimate relationship with Madan, Sher Singh's friend.

In the introductory chapter which is the first chapter, the first segment gives a brief outline of how psychoanalysis helps in reading a literary text and a brief history of psychoanalysis is given. This outlining of the background was propelled by a desire to position Khushwant Singh in order to compare and contrast his portrayal of women with that of the other writers. A brief introduction to the life and works of Khushwant Singh has been provided and the summary of his literary works.

The second chapter deals with Scopophilia, where Khushwant Singh's women reveal the traits of voyeurism and exhibitionism through the theories propound by psychoanalysts. All through their lives, the women in Khushwant Singh's fiction are at crossroads between the old values and the new culture. The psychologists often voice dilemmas like that of Richard Nice in *Abnormal Psychology*:

The sexual impulse is one of the two primary drives of the human being. Had it been less compelling, the human race could not have survived the rigors to which it has been subjected during the course of its development. But today, under conditions far different, the impulse needs to be controlled in the interest of social welfare. In modern man, it has been estimated, the sexual impulse is four times as strong as needs be to perpetuate the race. Such control is much more difficult in a society of clashing cultures, disintegrating codes, and uncertain sanctions. (Nice 189)

The desire to love and to be loved, the want of peace and company and the search for perfection are the causes of Khushwant Singh's women's psychological dilemma.

Champak, Sher Singh's wife is in constant quest of quenching her excessive sex desire. Besides getting her buttocks massaged by Mundoo, she engages in a sexual relationship with Madan. Madan, a married man seduces Beena. Khushwant Singh exposes the innate smallness of most of the people who camouflage their petty desires under righteous ideas. Pervasion is common in day-to-day life. Hirschfeld in *Other Partial Impulses* (2016) says that

In a purely quantitative sense, a perversion is only an exaggeration or an intensification of tendencies inherent in the normal person. Every normal person is 'a little' scopophile; but in pathological scopophilia the desire of seeing certain things becomes an obsession. Similarly, every normal person in erotic intercourse derives a certain amount of pleasure from the act of uncovering the body, but to the exhibitionist, uncovering is the end itself. (Hirschfeld 355)

Looking at somebody is quite a normal human instinct and hence every human being like the bottom pincher in the short story is a little scopophilic in daily life.

The stereotype of the sexual frigidity in women has always been treated in ambiguous terms by the society. The control over one's sexual desires and the avoidance of any overt display has been the hallmark features of an Indian woman. Sexual reticence on the part of women in relationship with their husbands offers pertinent basis for the explanation about them being apprehensive about their inability to please their husbands. The sexual frigidity of Sonu makes Mohan Kumar to embark on various relationships and their marriage is a failure. The failure of sexual satisfaction in women forms the basis for frigidity. Helena Wright in *The Sex Factor in Marriage* (1931) says:

A man's sex feelings are easily and quickly aroused and quickly satisfied, and the actual sensations are limited to the relatively small area of the skin of the penis. A woman's desires, on the contrary, are neither quickly aroused nor quickly satisfied. A traumatic wedding night, in which a bride discovers both the brutality of men and what sex is, could stunt forever her potential for sexual happiness. (50)

Mohan Kumar who had been in the West for long time, found it difficult to understand Sonu's apprehensions about sex on their wedding night. In fact he had to have a drunk for the act. This was due to the fact that Sonu comes from a patriarchal household and "not having been taught to love" (Angel 536-41). Mohan Kumar believes that occasional adultery does not destroy a marriage; in fact it proves to be a cementing factor as in cases where the husband could not give his wife as much sex as she needed or where the wife was frigid.

Bindo's exhibitionism makes Dalip Singh dream of his uncle's buxom daughter. The conflict within him as a son and as a lover acts as a block from letting her know of his love for her. His suppressed amorous feeling finds an outlet in the form of his forced physical enjoyment with her. Khushwant Singh tries to bring out the incestuous relationship between Dalip Singh and Bindo. He stresses that the carnal desire between a man and a woman is more powerful than the relationship of brother and sister.

The sexual escapades the women have in *The Company of Women* and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* do not mean anything beyond a few sessions of sexual fun. The very soon realize their inability to get across their self-conceited ethos of superiority which brings the affair to an abortive end. Thus they are confined to their own self fail to overcome the claims of their egoism, and ultimately let go of all the intimacies they form.

The third chapter discusses the mother and mother figures in Khushwant Singh's fiction. Woman as mother enjoys marginally a better status than woman as second sex in our socio-cultural set up. When a society is governed by norms than pragmatism, it tends to be regressive. The whole set of relationships like mother-child, husband-wife, mother-daughter and mother-other women in the family is dependent upon attitudes which are conditioned by society.

Khushwant Singh's mothers and mother figures are real human beings. The basic mother-instincts such as nurturer and protector are the same, but their responses are conditioned by their social status. They depict real life personalities with their strengths and weaknesses. Sabhrai, the maternal woman in *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* emerges as a typical mother in the Indian context. She is deeply religious, loving and caring, devoted to her family, and above all, upholder of human values like truth, righteousness and justice.

Sabhai reveals the characteristics of excessive mothering through the qualities of maternal solicitude, sympathy, wisdom and spiritual exaltation. As a result of her excessive mothering, Sher Singh becomes unable to countenance the sordid realities of life and throws him to the manipulations of cunning persons like Madan. This over protectiveness makes Sher Singh a self-centered person. He neither holds a job nor gives enough attention to his wife. His physical inadequacy makes him to be daring in his political activity. This inadequacy in love making with his wife shows his timidity and lack of self confidence.

Sher Singh weeps when he is kicked by a white sergeant in his groins. He feels helpless, loses self-esteem because even his dog had shown more fight. Sher Singh did not realize that strength was not a natural development of his own personality but nurtured behind the protection provided by his father's position and his mother's smothering. Madan, Beena and Champak epitomize the unbridled relationships to mere body contact.

The entire family seems to revolve around Sabhai and she comes out as the domineering figure in the novel. Her religiosity makes her have premonitions about her family members which help her daughter Beena from getting into the clutches of Madan Chand. Though Sabhai takes care of her family, she is unaware of the affair between Champak and Madan. ”.

In *Indian Writing in English*, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar opines, “Sabhai wholly redeems the dimness and murkiness of the general atmosphere. The fever of sensuality is easier to describe than the radiance of Faith and this is the reason why Sabhai ‘steals’ the novel” (502-504). Iyengar’s observation is inspired from the fact that the woman in a

mother grows stronger with the powers entrusted on her traditionally. Wielding them she could be made to dominate or divert the entire action at her will.

Though there is no memorable portrayal of Mohan's mother in *The Company of Women*, a mother dead and lost and displaced has an impact in the psyche of Mohan Kumar. The absence of the mother has a psychological perspective in the life of Mohan Kumar throughout his life. Left motherless at infancy, the baby was breastfed by a wet nurse and found emotional security as a child suckling a maid. He is nursed by a maid.

Mother-infant separation without the provision for a stable mother surrogate has many adverse effects on the child according to the psychoanalyst Spitz. There is a strong need for a meaningful human relationship during this critical period of its development. In her *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan writes, "Motherliness is a way of life. It enables a woman to express her total self with the tender feelings, protective attitudes, the encompassing love of the motherly women" (58).

Mohan is not a sexual fiend motivated by an uncontrollable need for gratification. "He is satisfying some other need while performing the aberrant sexual act such as retaliating the trauma experienced with a hostile, rejecting or castrating mother or wife" (Nice 188). In Mohan's case his sexual pursuits are a mistaken search for love. His emotional and moral growth is his romantic or sexual liaisons with women. Mohan's development is seen only in terms of his sexual awakening. His adult relationships with women begin when he goes to University in the USA. Mohan's sexual career is the product of the fault of his motherless infancy. It is a search for peace and perfection that Mohan fumbles for in his life.

Mohan Kumar did not have a mother to fit into the role model of an ideal for him. It is the quest for a perfect and an ideal woman in life who never really exists. When Mohan goes to Haridwar with his father he knows peace for the first time. He feels that Ganga the holy river that flows through Haridwar is his spiritual mothers. The Oedipal basis with Mother Ganga becomes clear to him and knows that River Ganga is his mother.

The narrator in “The Portrait of the Lady” has been under the loving care of his grandmother. The grandmother is an ideal mother who stands for traditional values. The old woman is religious in the real sense of the word. To her religion means humanitarian concern. Her love and sympathy extends even to animals. The old woman is good without being conscious of it and this quality makes her one of the most loveable characters in the short stories of Khushwant Singh. Sabhrai and Khushwant Singh’s own grandmother are ‘good’mothers. Singh attracts our attention when he had been taken ill when he had been young. He writes about his miraculous escape from the jaws of death. The doctors had given up hope of his survival but he recovered within a short span of time after his grandmother took charge of his treatment.

Sarojini, the professor from Rewari, reveals the trait of dual mother-mother of love and mother of desire. She is in a mental dilemma between the two motherly attributes. The mother of love in her makes her want to get back to her son in Rewari. She calls her parents and checks about her young son. The mother of desire makes her want to take a chance with Mohan Kumar and find out whether she could have a future with him. For the present she agrees with apprehension and knows that Mohan Kumar does not promise a permanent relationship.

Kusum's behaviour in the short story "Kusum" can be interpreted in terms of Adlers's concept of complexes and Freud's theory of the three principles governing human action. Earlier Kusum's approach to herself is negative. Instead of entertaining pleasant thoughts, an act that is so natural for a teenager, she is obsessed with her unattractive bodily features. She behaves in a slightly neurotic manner. Her accidental encounter with the peddler proves to be a turning point in her otherwise eventless life. The irony is that an uncouth person like a hawker through a crude gesture, an expression of sex symbol, enables her to think positively, indicating how thin her veil of male shunning had been.

The women in Khushwant Singh's fiction are bold and frank enough to act and admit what many may do secretly or mentally. The aspects of lust such as voyeurism and exhibitionism are the symptoms of a deeper need for love and recognition in their life. In their search for love, the women run after lust, like a deer mistaking a mirage for an oasis. They seek ideal womanhood while sharing their lives and love with many of them actually or in fantasy. The antidote to their need is acceptance of people like them as they are by the society. If their dilemma is due to the denial of love in their lives then the cure lies in affection, care and sympathy to them.

The fourth chapter analyses the solipsistic women in Khushwant Singh's novels. In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, it is extramarital sex that Madan and Champak indulge in. Both are conscious of their social stations in life. In *The Company of Women*, Mohan Kumar, deeply self-conscious, makes friends with various women and forms intimacies, but keeps himself on the move. His intimacies fail to anchor him to any situation. In the same way the women are hooked eternally to the ego, meddle with the lives of all those they run into, and finally get unhooked.

The craving for company and understanding of their needs make the women seek and partake of the sexual joys, only to realize the futility of such involvements. It is the inability to love and understand, to sympathize and establish the link, the dialogue right across the wall of subjectivity. It is the condition of letting go of the expected values of the society and drowning oneself in the destructive element of the self. When they can no longer hang on to the relationship the women let go of it.

At another level they feel that it is better to accept the letting go as a “prospect of a new self, leaving oneself open to new experience letting go of the old embracing the new” (Karl 357). It results from a realization of the meaninglessness of life, meaningless because men stay together but do not live together. Thus solipsism emerges as the leitmotif of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* and *The Company of Women*.

Khushwant Singh is a writer who is tough-minded and is capable of a detached compassion for the human condition, an analytical acumen, candidness of approach and presentation. Though his stories are never permanently moving or elevating, his characters and situations are easily recognizable. Their follies and foibles, meanness and graciousness are familiar. His no-nonsense attitude towards life has made creative writers aware of the grey sides of human nature.

Singh’s women defy any time and place conditioned critical attempt to confine them to the frame of a narrow racial and national identity. When his contemporaries were conditioned by the taboos, he was bold to talk about sex and comes close to Philip Roth and John Updike. Of his four novels and collection of short stories, *The Company of Women* is more fascinating as it reflects the personality of the writer in a better light.

All the women Khushwant Singh's fiction seems to be very different from each other. The women are placed in a position where they either take other women for granted or do not consider it important enough to relate to them for they have to find their identity in a male context. They view the male world and are oblivious of other female claims. Mary Joseph, the wet nurse, has an illicit relationship with her employer Mohan Kumar.

This relationship does not last long as his wife, Sonu suspects it and dismisses Mary Joseph. Dhanno is illiterate, but Sarojini, who supplants her, is highly educated, as is Susanthika. Yasmeen befriends Mohan and on her last evening in Princeton it is she who forces herself sexually on him, even though there is no emotional bond between them. She knows that what she is doing goes against all her religious beliefs.

Kushwant Singh's women belong to different social classes, believe in different gods, and have different vocations in life. Kushwant Singh has classed some of them among the women he regards as "unforgettable" but none of them are unique or indeed in any way remarkable, except for their sexual appetites. They are all in their own ways good women representing different layers of society, linked together only by their association with Mohan and by their eager and satisfying response to sex, which is itself, is a popular male fantasy as in the pulp fiction of Norman Mailer-Harold Robbins school of writing rather than a womanly characteristic per se.

Novy Kapadia quotes Dileep Padgaonkar in *The Fantasy-Erotica Paradox* in *The Company of Women*: "Any reader exposed to the multiple orgasms in the fiction of Jackie Collins or Harold Robbins or even more to the sexual acrobatics described in pornographic literature or on the internet would be forgiven for believing that Singh has taken him for a ride" (Kapadia 247).

All women regardless of place, time, education, upbringing or circumstances, think and act in the same manner. Only because the Bombay prostitute is a professional sex worker and does not necessarily find pleasure in what a routine is to her but degrading way of earning her living, she is unnamed, and becomes the source of the HIV virus. The other women perform the same role as she does and it is difficult to say how Dhanno or Molly Gomes are different from her as they are also involved due to their financial needs.

Singh's vision gets expressed in various degrees, from different angles, as his characters develop and participate in the stories. Mohan Kumar, the egotistical protagonist subjects the women to sexuality in order to achieve a description of his own neurosis. In his case it is not the companionship he seeks but the female body just for mating. In the absence of an understanding of all bonds and entanglements, the women fail to survive and the self-preservation comes to turn on the hinge of loyalty to the solipsist authority of the self. Hence they all resort to saying goodbye or letting go, which is purely a state of intellectual hypocrisy.

Kushwant Singh has disturbed the world of readers, that of thinkers, and above all the world of critics. He has the ability to see through and beyond the immediate pale of his time and space. To him life is a universal phenomenon and as such his art is as inconclusive as life. The inconclusiveness of Khushwant Singh is better understood in the light of what he does in his fiction. He studies, knows, shares his experiences and leaves it at that. A closer scrutiny reveals to the reader what Khushwant is, what he presents as a writer, and what approach he brings to his profession as a writer.

Khushwant Singh's women live, perpetually enslaved to the self and hence never feel complete about them. This is their extraordinary glimpse, which is made possible by the

intellectual sensitiveness they are capable of, despite the fact they are otherwise people belonging to the usual run of trousered apes of the wasteland in as much as their conscious world is concerned. Therefore they are ready to give it up and be indulgent to the self. Thus the women in the fiction of Khushwant Singh are confined to their own self fail to overcome the claims of their egoism, and ultimately let go of all the intimacies they form.

Women play major roles in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* and *The Company of Women* and they are the source of inspiration for male action. They appear as women of spirit inclined essentially towards fulfilling what their minds or bodies desired. Yet, the same spirit is questioned from the male point of view. In contemporary post-feminist academia, psychoanalysis enables in understanding Singh's critique of contemporary urban society and social mores surrounding women.

Khushwant Singh depicts women as psychic beings, who express their emotions strongly sometimes without inhibitions. They voice their concerns and influence the course of events in the novels. They mould the circumstances as per their whims and fancies. It is through the protagonist's interaction with women and his feelings about them. Khushwant Singh most obviously communicates his views on society and human relationships. His vision gets expressed in various degrees, from different angles, as his women develop and participate in the stories.

Table - 5.1 Psychoanalytical Study of Khushwant Singh's Fictional Women

Character	Relationship	Psychoanalytic Observation
Sabhrai	Sher Singh (son)	excessive mother overprotective
Champak	Sher Singh (husband)	narcissistic Exhibitionistic Neurotic promiscuous
Sonu	Mohan Kumar (husband)	Egocentric Possessive Jealous insecure
Sarojini	Mohan Kumar (companion)	Demure Nurturer neurotic
Dhanno	Mohan Kumar (employer)	Exhibitionistic Selfish adulterous
Susanthika	Mohan Kumar (Companion)	Emancipated self-secured
Grandmother	Narrator (grandson)	'good mother'
Lachmi	Sir Mohan Lal (husband)	pragmatic
Bindo	Dalip Singh (Cousin)	incestuous
Janaki	Devi Lal (husband)	'penis envy' mother
Baljit	Caretaker in Dargah	adulterous

Scope for further study

The present study has attempted to explore only one facet of Khushwant Singh's literary mirror. The researcher has focused mainly on the women characters of Khushwant Singh's fiction. There are other angles which remain to be explained. The research can further be extended with the psychoanalytical study of Khushwant Singh's fictional male characters. Similarly psychoanalytical studies on the fictional works of Indian English writers can be pursued. The researcher found a striking autobiographical element in the characterization of some of the fictional characters which paves way for a study. There is an immense possibility for a comparative study between Philip Roth's *The Professor of Desire* and Khushwant Singh's *The Company of Women*. Research works can also be done on the idea of marital discord in Khushwant Singh's fiction.

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