

**CONSTRUING THE EMOTIONS IN KHUSHWANT SINGH SHORT NARRATIVES**

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DOI: [10.333329/joell.7.1.107](https://doi.org/10.333329/joell.7.1.107)**ABSTRACT**

Education, entertainment and enjoyment are the three 'E's that have occupied the prominent place in every individual's life. Whatever education a man may possess or no matter what position he may have attained, his happiness would not be fulfilled until there is enjoyment in his life. Being a part of the society, he always finds happiness from his associates. In the global era it has become difficult for a man to find a companion to share his feelings. Loneliness is deadlier than any other disease in the world. In the present scenario, most of the people, especially in their fifties are worried about a leading a solitary life as their children are living miles away from them. How can they enjoy their life? Apart from social gatherings, theatre shows, the source of entertainment that relieves them from their loneliness is a book. May be that could be the main reason for books to retain their position amidst the face books, WhatsApp and twitters. A good story is more than anything else in the world because it travels with us and within us. Even in this busy world, children are still reminded about the authors of their yester years through their stories. The prescribed textbooks for the schools choose the stories written by the veteran writers because they knew well that these writings would surely help the students to dwell in the past and learn about their cultural roots. The present article is going to focus on the identified memories hidden in unidentified worlds as portrayed in Khushwant Singh's Short Stories.

**Keywords:** *Partition, Intolerance, Superstitions, Sentiments.*



### REFERRING TO THE HISTORY

There is an idiom 'Short and Sweet' which literally means surprisingly short in a way that is pleasing. In today's world, where people are so busy with their schedules, they want anything to be done at a quick pace. The processed and readymade foods stand as the best example to show that we have left the tastes of traditional foods and replaced them with tin foods. In this scenario where would one get time to read a voluminous book. Though we may be interested in it, we give more importance to short texts. That could be the main reason why the short stories occupy a leading place in the race. The other reason could be that the tempo in reading would not be distracted much.

William Boyd, the award-winning British author and short story writer rightly remarks in this regard. He says, '[Short stories] seem to answer something very deep in our nature as if, for the duration of its telling, something special has been created, some essence of our experience extrapolated, some temporary sense has been made of our common, turbulent journey towards the grave and oblivion', May be that could be one of the reasons for the increase in the sales of the short fiction. Khushwant Singh, a Pakistani born scholar, journalist and author also had a good number of short stories to his credit. He is famous for his frankness, dispassionate and deeply considerate nature which is mainly seen in his works. The present article is going to focus on the Khushwant's Singh's famous short stories and the stories translated by him.

### A SATIRE ON IRRATIONAL VIEWS

The first story *The Mark of Vishnu* is a satire on the superstitious beliefs of innocent people. In a country like India, people follow the roots of their ancestors. Though science has brought about many changes in the lives of common people, they still carry their cultural origins in many aspects. They strongly believe that they are protecting their culture amidst the mishmash of old beliefs and modern thoughts. We do agree that old is gold, but we should never forget that change is inevitable. In the present story, Khushwant Singh portrays Gunga Ram's

character as an embodiment of perfection and kindness. Being born in an orthodox family, he can never think beyond the narrow confines of his background. Everyone believes in God; belief is nothing but a kind of acceptance of whatever happens, accepting it without repentance.

Gunga Ram has a strong faith in God. To prove his religious faith, he offers a saucer full of milk to the Kalanag. Though the sophisticated generations of the present days argue with him about the scientific perspectives, he turns a deaf ear towards them. They said, 'The teacher told us that a snake eats only once in several days' (*Famous Short Stories*, 51). Will people like Gunga Ram believe in such facts? When one designs one's lifestyle and lives according to some set of principles, it is hard to come out from strongly built opinions. Gunga Ram was in the same position. 'The most dangerous the animal, the more devoted Gunga Ram was devoted to existence' (*Famous Short Stories*, 51). The other problem he had to face was the humiliation of the higher-class people towards the working class. The main aim of the children was always to disgrace him.

Like all Hindus, Gunga Ram believed in the existence of the trio's power. Of these he was most devoted to Vishnu, the preserver. He used to paint a V mark on his forehead with the sandalwood paste. Irrespective of the animal, his religious faith and the concern towards protecting it was one and the same. Being too superstitious, he could not accept that however powerful the snake is, it is a poisonous animal. Kala Nag or Cobra is a more potent venom. The neurotoxin present in it can kill twenty people or an elephant just in one bite. The naïve Gunga Ram could not think of such things nor was he able to heed to other's words.

The children at last traced the Kala Nag and brutally broke its back. Before they took it to school, they let the cat out of the bag to Gunga Ram that the snake was caught and locked inside a container. The illogical sensitive minded Gunga Ram had no second thoughts and he rushed towards the school to save the life of the Kala Nag but in turn it took away his life. The agitated snake could not control its anger and when Gunga Ram stood with a saucer full of milk,



it bit him all over his head. 'On his forehead were little drops of blood. These the teacher wiped with his handkerchief. Underneath was the V mark where the Kala Nag had dug his teeth' (*Famous Short Stories*, 55). What does this imply to simple innocent mind? The preserver himself preserved his life safely under his mark. May be if Gunga Ram can utter his last words he would tell the same. Khushwant Singh ironically brings out the fate of such people who are still killing themselves in the name of delusory theories.

### FATE – THE DESTINY OF LIFE

The second story which is taken from Khushwant's pen is *Karma*. The word karma has its own deliberations as people perceive it in different angles. There is one million-dollar question that could never be answered, Is one's fate or karma designed by someone else or by oneself? A typical question. The present story is also a conflict between the educated and the illiterate to maintain their own dignity. Sir Mohan Lal, who is well educated lives far away from reality. As anything too much is dangerous, too much knowledge is also risky. Sir Mohan Lal, who treated his fellow Indians as unsophisticated could never think there were some people who would also treat him as an uncouth country man. How can a brother treat his brother in such a way?

Sir Mohan Lal's stay in England should make him an English man in his manner not in his attitude. Every country has its own culture. It is the responsibility of every citizen to protect his culture because in turn it protects him. Sir Mohan Lal could make out what the books had taught him but missed to comprehend the sensitive issues that would help him to lead a peaceful life. On his journey he experienced a valuable message that life gives back from what it receives. Sir Mohan Lal got the same. He never respected his countrymen. He was fond of something which is beyond his confines. Sir Mohan Lal and his rustic wife, Lachmi are two contrasting characters. Though Lachmi had not much formal education like her husband, she knew well how to lead life. As she was a woman with submissive nature, she tolerated and respected her husband.

Her innocence helped her to lead a happy life. An unknown mask of pride made her husband to degrade his own life. Wherever we are, human relations are important. We need to live in a society where we find people with similar attitudes alike us. Apart from education from elite institutions, we should never forget to learn from life experiences because life never stops teaching. Great intellectuals like Sir Mohan Lal would never think of such simple issues. What makes a man a Gentleman? Is it character or attitude? According to Sir Mohan Lal, "Those five years of grey bags and gowns, of sports blazers and mixed doubles, of dinners at the Inns of Court and nights with Picadilly prostitutes. Five years of crowded glorious life" (*An Anthology of Short Stories*, 36) made him a gentleman. Wherever you are, you are surrounded by people, be with them, live with them.

When it comes to his own country he feels, 'Worth far more than the forty-five in India with his dirty, vulgar countrymen with sordid details of the road to success and with obese old Lachmi, smelling of sweat and raw onions" (*An Anthology of Short Stories*, 36). When Sir Mohan Lal decided to travel in the train in a first-class compartment, he was totally humiliated by two English soldiers. Though he shouts for help no one comes to his help. On the other hand, innocent Lachmi was comfortably travelling in her Zenana compartment. What a disgrace! 'Sir Mohan's feet were glued to the earth and he lost his speech. He stared at the lighted windows on the train going past him in quickening tempo" (*An Anthology of Short Stories*, 38).

### TRANSFORMING THOUGHTS INTO FEELINGS

The third story *A Punjab Pastoral* is taken from his translated stories *Land of Five Rivers*. Khushwant Singh's style of writing is not simply concerned to raise his voice against violence and injustice but is also filled with wit, sarcasm and gentle humor. This narration is about Peter Hansen, a young American from Illinois. Though life gave him everything beyond the comfort zones, he was fascinated to the serve the humanity. He moved from a fairyland to a dreamland. He came to India following a vision of spreading Christianity among the



Sikhs in Punjab. He chose Amritsar to spread his humanitarian business. If anything comes from the heart, it naturally follows the brain. Within a few days, Hansel became an Indian more than an American. He became a popular figure among the residents of different villages spreading his social, economic, educational and moral reforms.

He used to rightly comment, 'Once you get to know them,' he used to say, 'you can make them do anything' (*Land of Rivers*, 189). As like poles attract each other, Hansen and Khushwant Singh were drawn together on a common line connecting them with humanity. A rare combination of a Marxist and a Socialist. In order to preach people, they wanted to have a social interaction with them. So, they set a journey towards the villages. When they came to village called Soorajpur, Hansen tells him how personal contacts bring about a lot of change in the attitudes. He was happy that Moola Singh could make the Christians enter the Hindu temples. With much enthusiasm both reached Moola Singh's house but were disappointed as the old man was fully drunk and was out of senses.

Hansen was cultured, so he did not lose his temper. With heart filled optimism they moved towards the Christian's habitation. When Hansen forced the narrator to observe the Christian houses, he found all Hindu deities on their walls. Hansen, who was hostile towards the Sikh's uncleanliness expected a positive response from his Christian friends. Baffled by the situations he feels, "Queer country this! You do not know where to start. When you've begun, you are not sure if you are going about it the right way. When you look back to see how far you've got, you find that you've got nowhere. It's like a stream losing itself in the desert sand. It dries up so quickly that you cannot even find its traces'. (*Land of Five Rivers*, 194).

## CONCLUSION

A doctor cures his patients with his medicines, a teacher teaches his students with his words and a writer educates his readers with his thoughts. Maybe it is difficult to change a society, but it is not impossible. When one goes through the life of others, one has his own calculations and assumptions

to be or not to be like them. We learn from everyone, what we learn depends on our consciousness. So, the writer's vision is always crystal clear that he tries to send a message to the society. A two-hundred -page novel or a five-page novella, both aim to entertain and educate people. It's the readers' choice to visualize and understand it. An old hand like Khushwant Singh writes from experiences, the experiences gathered from real-life incidents which make the stories to be more authentic and practical.

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