

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The realism of Khushwant Singh is of an earthier variety. He has declared that his 'roots are in the dunghill of a tiny Indian village' and his fiction reeks with the odour of his roots. Khushwant Singh also appears to take a markedly irreverent view of Indian life and character (Naik 1989:220). Although his stories tend to be episodic in structure and intent, a conflict between the characters and situations are created, developed and thereafter resolved through a succession of scene (Singh 2005:98). He has become one of India's most celebrated authors, its most widely read journalist, and its most outspoken public figure of international reputation as a creative writer (Permanent Black 2001). Social realism is the soul of Khushwant Singh's thematic pattern.

The present study is an exhaustive attempt to highlight the manifestations of 'gender relations' in the collected short stories of Khushwant Singh. The aspect of 'gender relations' is important not only because it is one of the least explored subjects but also because in modern times, with rising aspirations of women coupled with increasing opportunities, the relationship between men and women has become very frail. This warrants a close scrutiny of how the sensitivity and sensibility of the modern man and woman gets constructed. There are various art forms especially literature has tremendous potential for shaping human sensitivity. So the scrutiny of what messages are sent out from literature gives us the pointers to the kind of sensibility they are going to shape up.

As a major short story writer Khushwant Singh has elicited critical responses which range from praise to outright condemnation. His treatment of empiricism made him extremely popular with the Indian readers. In his short stories, Khushwant Singh appears sometimes as a direct commentator and sometimes as a masked narrator. His stories are the outcome of his social, political and moral concern for various kinds of problems. The popularity of Khushwant Singh and his outreach to a very diverse readership makes his writing an ideal target for a close scrutiny from gender perspective.

All the short stories from *'The Collected Short Stories of Khushwant Singh'* have been analyzed and divided into different categories such as the patriarchal or antifeminist stories, stories where women are totally invisible, stories with some traces of gender sensitivity or gender equality, gender biased and sexist language.

Firstly, most of the stories are patriarchal in nature. Patriarchy offers freedom to men only and women have subordinate positions. Nearly eighteen stories out of thirty-two stories are very much patriarchal where men are dominant. Sir Mohan Lal in 'Karma' didn't like his illiterate wife and her company. He went to her once in a while at night and stayed for a few minutes. He just ordered her about in anglicized Hindustani, and she obeyed him passively. The overpowering personality of Sir Mohan Lal in relation to his wife becomes vulnerable in relation to the British soldiers who in spite of their low military rank are able to dominate Sir Mohan Lal due to their racial and colonial supremacy.

The story 'The Voice of God' is wholly patriarchal in nature with men's monopoly of the political arena. The author has not taken cognizance of women as citizens with political rights on par with men. Women are faceless, powerless and invisible persons. The three candidates for the election are men and voters are also men who drink and go by a truck to cast their votes. None of the three candidates take any notice of women who have voting rights on par with men. The story depicts entire public sphere as a totally masculine space. Peter Hansen and the protagonist are dominant in the story 'A Punjab Pastoral'. They discuss about different religions like Christianity and Sikhism. Serving humanity by spreading Christianity is Hansen's motto. Hansen criticizes Sikh religion. He is disgusted and demotivated with Sikh community because of their appearance and behaviour. But this does not stop him. The girl from the same community attracts him feeling infatuation for her. The girl is presented as a sex symbol, sex object. Hansen's look towards the girl is the description of a typical 'Male Gaze'.

The story 'Kusum' is based on patriarchal notion that beauty alone can make women's life meaningful. The character of Kusum is portrayed in such a way that denies any intrinsic value of a woman as a person if she is not beautiful

or if she is not noticed by men. She has a very low self-esteem which makes her too desperate even for a lustful advance of some lecherous passer-by.

Dalip Singh in 'The Rape' is a representative of male dominance. The story projects rape as a form of male dominance over women. Bindo is shown as a typical example of traditional woman who tolerates each humiliating experience. She tried everything possible to stop Dalip Singh but because of patriarchal situation that stigmatizes the victim of the rape and not the rapist. She is not able to speak against Dalip Singh in the court.

John Dyson in 'The Memsahib of Mandla' is the example of male chauvinism. He has power over all the persons in the story. All the time Dyson dominates Mrs Dyson. He is not considerate or sensitive about her feelings. Though she doesn't like the place he says that in any case he is going to stay there. Mrs Dyson, Memsahib, and Jennifer are considered subordinate.

The Swamiji, the Maulana and the protagonist from 'The Great Difference' represent patriarchal views of the author. Though women are supposed to be very religious, performing rituals, not a single woman is shown to bid them farewell. All the three of them leave no stone unturned to meet the French lady who is curious about their religion. They are eager to meet her in isolation and spend some time with her.

Gender relations are hierarchical relations in the context of patriarchy. Men have power over women. In patriarchy, particularly, husband-wife relationship, it is believed that men do not nag. But women have to tell the same thing repeatedly. The relation between Daulat Ram and his wife in 'Death Comes to Daulat Ram' is portrayed to represent 'nagging': If his wife as much as raised her eyebrow, he wanted to know why she nagged him (78-79). The sister of Ranga is shown as representative of tradition for example women go for shopping which is minor work and men do some important work like attending conferences. The story represents the condition which was dominant in 1960s. The same condition is still continued even after fifty years.

Women are dependent on men. It is portrayed through the example of Mr Swami in 'The Insurance Agent'. There is only one reference to the wives:

‘How’s life? How is the wife?’ Women have not given importance in the story. There is only description of the late wife of a retired president:

He has taken your dear wife – may her soul rest in heaven – but spared you to look after your children and grandchildren. See what a catastrophe it would have been if you had go first and the burden of providing for the family had fallen on your wife!’(88)

Sunder Singh is accustomed to doing nothing in the government office in ‘Man, How the Government of India Run!’ He is patriarchal in his behaviour at his home. He has hierarchical power relation with his wife that tends to disadvantage his wife. He pours his wrath on his innocent children and wife. He typifies an Indian father and husband. As Sunder Singh has power for greater access to resources inside and outside the home, he dominates not only the chaprasi but also his wife. Though he does nothing for a whole day, he behaves with authority.

Lalkaka and the protagonist have freedom for greater access to resources because of their position in the society in ‘The Bottom. Pincher.’ The behaviour of Lalkaka with the female beggars and the protagonist’s with Missy Baba show how women are disadvantaged because of patriarchal license. In both cases, men see women as sex objects. The author is not sensitive to the effects of such act on women nor does he have the notion of any emotions other than lust even when he thinks about the relation between Lalkaka and his daughter. Observing physical structure of women is a widespread tendency. There are many people like Lalkaka who take the disadvantage of the situation. They have only lust for women. It happens only because of patriarchal attitude and freedom to men.

Mr Sen from ‘A Bride for the Sahib’ is a typical example of patriarchy. He listens to his mother. He marries Kalyani only for the sake of his mother’s happiness. He has no interest in her. Kalyani is typical example of traditional Indian woman. She is totally helpless. She has committed suicide because of the behaviour of her husband. In patriarchy, once the girl is married she cannot expect any support from her parents. Kalyani is also sent for the home of father-in-law

against her will and the result is her suicide. The same situation prevails in India even today.

The protagonist in 'The Morning After the Night Before' is very much patriarchal. Patriarchy allows him adultery. He thinks of adultery whenever he gets the chance. But he doesn't like the adultery of his wife that shows the patriarchal view. He is afraid of the warning given by his wife: 'If you do it once – I'll do it a hundred times' (182). The description of women's dress in this story is also patriarchal.

Chisti from 'The Red Tie' is representative of patriarchal sensuous pleasure seeking men. He defines 'marriage is like chewing gum, sweet in the beginning, sticky in the end'. He is as anglicized as Sir Mohan Lal in 'Karma' but very much lecherous. Though a woman loots him, Chisti boasts. Men never consider them timid. Chisti is one of them. Though he is timid, he doesn't show his timidity. On the other hand, he tries to boast over the others. He is very much patriarchal in his views.

Mr Sethi and Mr Ali are patriarchal in their behaviour in 'The Convert'. They do not take women seriously. They consider women as an object of ridicule. Mr Sethi doesn't pay attention to Sarla's views. Mrs Sarla Sethi is frustrated over his behaviour. Mr Ali is also very much patriarchal. He also doesn't take seriously what Sarla tells him. He makes a fun of Sarla's visit to him. It causes to the quarrel between Sarla and her sister-in-law. The character of Sarla Sethi emerges as most vulnerable initially, to the feelings of anger and hatred then subsequently to the desire for overcoming anger and hatred and finally to the same condition again.

Thus, patriarchy gives freedom to men that causes disadvantage to women. Such portrayals like Sir Mohan Lal, Charles alias Romesh Chandra, Hansen, Dalip Singh, Chisti, Mr Sethi and Mr Ali present patriarchal attitude. All of them consider women as an object of ridicule. They believe that patriarchy has offered them freedom to dominate women and consider them subordinate. They believe, as their behaviour shows, that men are superior to women and act accordingly. So all these characters are male chauvinists.

Secondly, there are a few stories in which women characters are totally invisible. Women are cultural ciphers for Khushwant Singh in these stories. These stories are evidence that how little space is offered to women in the literary creations. These stories are 'The Mark of Vishnu', 'The Voice of God', 'The Riot', 'The Insurance Agent', 'The Fawn', 'The Man with a Clear Conscience' and 'Rats and Cats in the House of Culture'.

The story 'The Mark of Vishnu' is very popular in Indian writing in English for exposing the folly of superstition and blind reverence. But it does not serve the purpose of gender relations as women characters are totally absent. Women are generally portrayed to be superstitious. Patriarchy expects to perform various rituals. It was possible for the author to introduce such women characters. Similarly the 'The Voice of God' is also without women characters. Though the story deals with election process and at least 50 percent women are voters, women have no place at all in that electioneering. So the question arises: What about female voters? Not a single female character or situation is presented to show the value of female voters. Even the author is not sensitive towards the negligence of women as voters. It shows that women are powerless, faceless and valueless. Again in 'The Riot' the author has presented gender relation between animals in detail and not of human beings. There is conflict between Ramzan and Ram Jawaya. They are portrayed as victimizers and women as victims. Human patriarchy is projected on the animal world through two dogs, Rani and Moti. But not a single woman is featured important in the whole episode.

The story 'The Insurance Agent' is also without any female character. Mr Swami is a central character who speaks as an authority on any subject. He holds power over all people. The woman is referred only as a dependent person. Though the story presents a big canvas of evidence, not a single woman character is portrayed as important character. Then the story 'The Fawn' like 'The Riot' is also focused on animals like the doe and the fawn. Mother-child relation is projected through them. The protagonist and his friend like Ramzan and Ram Jawaya are portrayed. There is no woman character with any importance in living life.

The protagonist and the thief are only important male characters in 'The Man with a Clear Conscience' and women characters are totally invisible. There is only traditional reference to women by means of verbal abuse using swear words that portray women as an object of rape. The expression of Sikh driver, 'This to rape your mother ... this to rape your sister ... this to rape your daughter' is not only derogatory but also dehumanizing to women. This shows that the men while quarrelling among themselves make the use of words related to female for abusing men. Again the story 'Rats and Cats in the House of Culture' is very popular in Indian English literature but it doesn't have any visible women characters. The main focus is on male characters. Women are only referred to describe the stereotype that women are afraid of rats and cats. 'Women in the balcony screamed and stood upon their chairs' is one example of it.

Gender is a socio-cultural and human creation. It refers to the social classification of men and women into masculine and feminine. Gender relations are gender based relations between women and men, women and women and men and men. Gender relations are hierarchical relations of power between women and men that tend to disadvantage women systemically. There are some stories in the collection where there is a potential to enhance gender equality in the society, in real life situation.

The stories that have potential for gender equality are: 'Posthumous', 'The Interview', 'The Memsahib of Mandla', 'Death Comes to Daulat Ram', 'Black Jasmine', 'India is a Strange Country', 'Mr Kanjoos and the Great Miracle', 'Mr Singh and the Colour Bar', 'The Morning After the Night Before' and 'My Own My Native Land'.

Generally, women are expected to engage primarily in household duties. It is a patriarchal notion that creates inequality between men and women. But there are some men who do not believe in gendered division of labour. For example, Khosla is a judge in 'Posthumous' but he makes his own tea. This helps in breaking some patriarchal stereotypes. It is believed that men know everything and know how to deal with any situation. There is no hierarchical gender relation between Mr and Mrs Towers in 'The Interview'. Mr Towers' behaviour brings all

persons i.e. his wife daughter, the secretary and the protagonist to the strange equality. Though the relation between Dyson and his wife is patriarchal in 'The Memsahib of Mandla', they have similar experience related to Memsahib's ghost. This creates gender equality with respect to their relationship with the supernatural. Supernatural experience depicted in this story is gender neutral.

In patriarchy, it is believed that only son takes the care of parents. Son has exorbitant importance in patriarchy. The story 'Death Comes to Daulat Ram' nullifies this notion and prepares ground for gender equality. When Ranga meets the beggar, he asks him: 'Have you no relation? No sons or daughters to look after you? The words 'sons' and 'daughters' show that daughters are also capable of taking care of their parents. It crosses over the concept 'sons take care of parents. As per Indian tradition son is considered as the helping hand in old age. But the author has shown that not only sons look after old parents but also daughters. Here the author has given equal importance to both men and women that is helpful in nourishing gender equality in the age where female infanticides occur largely because of the preference for the son as the heir of the family.

Because of a patriarchal ideology and system, women are subordinated and discriminated against. The story 'Black Jasmine' proves it wrong. The Bannerjee's relation with his wife is not hierarchical. Bannerjee behaves favourably and treats his wife on equal footing. He gives importance to his wife's views. Though Martha is old friend of Bannerjee, his wife doesn't envy either Martha or her husband. Martha also doesn't feel jealous of Manorama. So all the characters are brought on equal footing to dilute patriarchal view and increase gender equality. Similarly, in 'India is a Strange Country' the gender relation between Tyson and Indian ladies also plays an important role. Though Indian ladies have bad opinion about Mrs Tyson, they are kind enough to Mr Tyson. According to them, Tyson is not a bad chap; he accepts drinks from the blacks. Tyson does not mind the difference between the blacks and the whites. This kind of attitude is very important to increase gender equality as well as racial equality.

Traditionally, the father of a bride is always in agony and miserable condition. He is humble, submissive and mostly vulnerable. The story 'Mr

Kanjoos and the Great Miracle' deconstructs the whole traditional idea of bride's father. Kanjooses, both father and mother of bride, get the way out easily. They never bother about the situation. They are real survivors. The mother of the bride is miser but checkmates the whole situation. She does every possible thing to save money. She is always with her husband and bold enough to make all arrangement of daughter's marriage. Both are on equal footing. This sends out the message of gender equality. So there is strange equality.

The character of Mr Singh and his views from 'Mr Singh and the Colour Bar' are very interesting from the point of view of gender relations. He is of the view that anyone who rapes anyone should be hanged ten times. He considers Indian women as *devis*. He also asks not to forget the priest's advice to regard all women other than one's wife as mothers, sisters or daughters. The gender relations between the protagonist and the brunette are very useful to develop better gender relations at any place. Generally, women are considered to be submissive, meek and shy in patriarchy. But the wife of the protagonist from 'The Morning After the Night Before' is portrayed totally different. She is not a traditional woman who never speaks against her husband like Lachmi in 'Karma'. She warns her husband regarding adultery: 'If you do it once – I'll do it hundred times'. Her aggressive response deconstructs the patriarchal notion of *pativrata* and has significant potential for redefining gender relations.

Khushwant Singh seems to create a very strong image of women who dare to challenge patriarchy in his some of the short stories. Lachmi in 'Karma' is submissive and assertive. But she leads life without confusion or any inferiority complex. She is well composed character and emerges as a far more powerful character as compared to the vulnerable Sir Mohan Lal. The character of the grandmother from 'A Portrait of a Lady' is strong as well as sensitive. Her behaviour emphasizes importance of nurturance not simply in case of relations of human beings but also with all living beings. Kusum in 'Kusum' is portrayed on the patriarchal notion that beauty alone can make woman's life meaningful. She dares to call the hawker as pig and ass. Memsahib in 'The Memsahib of Mandla' is portrayed as a professional lady. Portraying a woman as a working woman in

those days challenges patriarchal image of woman as the housewife. Martha from 'Black Jasmine' is so bold that she takes initiatives. She never imposes her decision, views and ideas on others. Her behaviour with Bannerjee and his wife stands for female strength and identity. Her initiative and his failure show the breakdown of the traditional concept that men are active and women passive. All the women characters from 'Maiden Voyage of the Jal Hindia' that is, Mrs Tyson, the blonde, Miss Oxford are proactive and assertive, some of them even peacemakers. They break the stereotype that women are mostly quarrelsome. Mrs Kanjoos from 'Mr Kanjoos and the Great Miracle' is confident and independent enough to make all arrangements of daughter's wedding. She never feels shy or uncomfortable to go anywhere. She is not submissive. She even makes an appeal to get wedding gifts. The wife of the protagonist in 'The Morning After the Night Before' is again not traditional. She is aggressive. She is presented as a wife who warns her husband regarding adultery. Her response and aggressiveness serves as a check on patriarchal notions about promiscuous behaviour of male. Kamini in 'A Love Affair in London' is an activist. She goes to jail and not guilty of her act. Thus, all these women characters have potential to strengthen the power of women by breaking patriarchal stereotype of femininity. Khushwant Singh has depicted them in way that may serve as the source of strength for an average woman.

It is also important to know how the male characters of Khushwant Singh view women. The male characters depicted by Khushwant Singh have their own fantasies regarding women and their physical appearance. As Charles in 'The Butterfly' has spent the days with his Anglo-Indian friends, he asks his friends if they had ever slept with a white woman. He also fantasizes that there is nothing to them (white women) except their white skin and Indians are much better. In 'A Punjab Pastoral' Hansen fantasizes the daughter of Moola Singh as a flower in the desert that always smells sweet and imagines 'She walks in beauty like the night'. In the story 'The Great Difference', the Swamiji, the Maulana and the protagonist view Mlle. Dupont, a French lady as a creature of the flesh to be seen in spiritual realms. Her steatopygous behind for them is an invitation to

The men sat on their haunches, staring blankly at the mud walls, listening to the music of the mill. The women sat on their string cots gossiping and rubbing clarified butter into each other's scalps (34).

Similar expression is also used in 'A Punjab Pastorale':

... we saw his two wives sitting under the shadow of a wall. One was rubbing clarified butter into the head of the other (43).

Another expression of similar kind is used in 'The Rape':

His womenfolk found time to sit and gossip into the late hours of the night while his own mother scrubbed the pots and pans with ash and gathered cow dung for fuel (53).

The line 'The men smiled, the women whispered' from 'Maiden Voyage of the Jal Hindia' also shows gender bias. It is considered that all women are generally gossip-mongers. They are at the front in spreading the misunderstanding. The same attitude is presented through many stories. 'The Convert' is one example of it. Sarla Sethi is the victim of the misconception that women are gossip-mongers.

Khushwant Singh has used sexist language in some of the stories like 'The Butterfly', 'When Sikh Meets Sikh', 'Man, How the Government of India Run!', 'The Man With a Clear Conscience', 'The Bottom-Pincher' and 'The Red Tie'. The expressions like '... had ever slept with a white woman,' '...nothing to tem except their white skin,' '...signs of young womanhood had appeared on her bosom'; 'the incestuous sistersleep,' 'Baby tell the gentleman what I taught you'; 'sister-sleeping office,' 'woman,' 'issueless virgin widow'; 'This to rape your mother ... this to rape your sister ... this to rape your daughter'; '...her buttocks were like two nicely rounded, unripe water melons. Besides her was older woman in a bright red sari. She was massive like one big pumpkin'; 'Chisti shut his left eye in a lecherous wink and ...' and 'He shut one of his eyes in a long, lecherous wink and made the sound of a loud kiss' have sexist attitude which is derogatory and dehumanizing for women.

Khushwant Singh is also gender sensitive in some of his stories such as 'The Portrait of a Lady', 'The Riot', 'The Memsahib of Mandla', 'Black Jasmine', 'A Love Affair in London' and 'My Own My Native Land'. The traces

of gender sensitivity of the author is seen through the characters like the grandmother, Rani and Moti, Mr and Mrs Dyson, Mr and Mrs Towers, Martha and Bannerjee, Kamini and the office lady. The views of these characters are mostly gender sensitive.

Thus, as a story teller, Khushwant Singh has presented subtle variations of characterization within these patterns that testify to the rich fertility of his imagination. The percentage of women portrayed in the short stories is proportionate to that of men but women occupy subordinate position and too little space, with many stories depicting no women character at all. Stereotypically, the difference between women and men is that women take care and men take charge. Khushwant Singh has falsified this notion through some of his stories. Women characters in his short stories prove conclusively that women play a major role in his literary world – a role as important and pivotal as that of men. Still the stories like 'Bottom Pincher' holds Khushwant Singh guilty as an antifeminist if not a pornographer.

References

- Naik M.K., 1989. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi p.220.
- Singh P.K., 2005. *The Novels of Khushwant Singh: A Critical Evaluation*. Jaipur: Book Enclave p. 98.
- Singh Khushwant, 2001. *The Collected Short Stories of Khushwant Singh*. New Delhi: Permanent Black p. cover page.
