

A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF KUSHWANT SINGH'S SHORT STORY 'LIFE'S HOROSCOPE'

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonial discourses, in general, stem from the historical experience of colonialism. The postcolonial writers all over the world assert that their countries possessed a prestigious history, culture and heritage; and they also valorised the past from which they have drawn the raw materials for their works. Postcolonial discourses cease to be mere adaptations of the West. the post-Independence period has seen the advent of a number of short story writers articulating their impressions of current topics: Independence and its aftermath, East-West relationship, and the alienated individual. Prominent among them have been Khushwant Singh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Jhabvala, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas and a few others. In the post-Independence era there is a feeling of unhappiness because of the fairly widespread social injustice, rampant corruption, and political duplicity. The feeling of disillusionment generally overshadows the progress that has been achieved in the country. The conflict that has been going on between modernity and tradition, science and religion, fact and superstition hinders the march of the country towards progress. The basic purpose of this study is to present, analyse and assess short story Khushwant Singh's literary achievement of short stories. "Life's Horoscope" is one of the short stories. Khushwant Singh is one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation. Kushwant Singh's short story "Life's Horoscope" depicts the postcolonial themes such as the loss of culture, an anti-colonial challenge to western dominance, and one's superstitious beliefs after the colonization. At first Kushwant Singh's short Story "Life's Horoscope" was a story which describes the postcolonial theme "Loss of culture".

Keywords: *Khushwant Singh, Life's Horoscope, Postcolonial, Loss of Culture.*

Postcolonial discourses, in general, stem from the historical experience of colonialism. The postcolonial writers all over the world assert that their countries possessed a prestigious history, culture and heritage; and they also valorised the past from which they have drawn the raw materials for their works. Postcolonial discourses cease to be mere adaptations of the West. A radical dismantling of the European codes and a postcolonial subversion and appropriation of dominant European discourses become visible in the process of cultural decolonisation. The traditional view that all ethnic and cultural groups as having unique characteristics and those they are bound with their own territorial entity and cultural roots has been interrogated in postcolonial discourses. Moreover, it has been asserted that the roots, the unique character and even the territorial entity are generated through their migration from one region to the other or from one settlement to another settlement. The search for food and shelter is the primary motive of migration, but the materialistic pursuit for resources and ideals also nurtures migration by exploring routes to remote lands and cultures. Hence 'routes' too influence, determine and produce culture.

The colonial invasion in general and the British invasion in particular over the Eastern regions like Asia and Africa were inspired by their urge to conquer and appropriate the rich resources of the East. The imposition of European culture, the teaching of the English language, the emergence of new branches of learning and knowledge, institutions of administrations and judiciary and the introduction of trade-links helped to establish the Empire of the West. The middle class educated elite who had internalised the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity emerged as a new corrective force and they questioned and resisted the colonial power policy and its supporting manifestations. The postcolonial school of thought such as *Orientalism* and New Historicism and other different branches of learning opened up new vistas of enlightenment to the oppressed. The newly enlightened generation made an attempt to translate the dreams of the oppressed into reality by organising nationalist movements which in turn were supported by postcolonial writings.

Postcolonial enlightenment tried to help the marginalised people to move from the margins to the centre. The necessity for providing the due share to the subaltern groups by creating new options and opportunities led to the emergence of subaltern studies which gave an intellectual fillip to the Tribal's, Dalits' and secluded women. The present era witnesses a new hybrid school of global theory known as globalisation in which knowledge and information, goods and services move freely across the borders. In this context, it is highly interesting to study the literary works of writers, whose emerging postcolonial voice in a 'Globalized Perspective' 'in which the global is transformed at the local level'.

Postcolonial literature is the literature of countries that were colonized by European countries. The postcolonial literature addresses the problems and consequences of the decolonization of a country, especially questions relating to the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people and themes such as the fusion of east and west, the loss of culture, the Hybridism, the issues of identity, an anti-colonial challenge to western dominance, racialism and colonialism, and etc.,.

The only literary form which had its roots in tradition, and could avail itself of the vast opportunities opened up by printing and the rapidly increasing demand for literature, was the short-story. (“On the Short Story”, The Collected Short Stories of Khushwant Singh, ix). The unmistakable voice of Khushwant Singh the artist is distinctly heard in his short-stories. He earned great reputation as a short story writer with the publication of “The Mark of Vishnu” and “Other Stories” in 1950. As an individualist to the core, he offers a definition of the short-story, based on to his own conception. A glance at the origin and growth of short-story as a genre, will be throwing more light on the tradition, and the individuality of Khushwant Singh as a writer. Hence a brief survey is attempted. A few definitions are in vogue in terms of length and structure. A few other definitions are reader oriented, talking in terms of effect. A few more definitions are theme-oriented. They are all briefly discussed with a view to explaining the tradition and individuality in Kushthwant Singh’s definition of a short-story. Over the last 150 years the short story has come to figure conspicuously in the literature of several countries. But it is not a modern invention and it must have existed thousands of years before the art of writing was known. The birth-tales of the Jataka, the fables of the Panchatantra and of Aesop, the stories of Daniel, Jonah and Ruth in the Old Testament and the Parables of the New Testament, Apuleus story of Cup id and Psyche, the bawdy tales of the Gesta Romanorum, the Arabian Nights and the Decameron are, in one sense, short-stories. In another sense, the term -- short story -- is less inclusive; a distinction is made between the folk tale, table, parable etc., and the carefully contrived literary form known as the short story. The short-story as a distinct literary form began to attract the attention of serious writers in large numbers from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the United States the publication of Irving’s “The Sketch Book” In 1819 marked the beginning of a long tradition of the American Short Story. “Rip Van Winkle” one of the tales in that collection is regarded as the first American short story. The magazines provided the publishing outlet for Hawthorne and Poe. Reviewing some of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s fiction in 1842, Edgar Allan Poe asserted that the chief formal property of “the short prose tales” was “unity of impression” which he regarded as a product of conscious artistry. But Poe's tales of effect lacked a moral ingredient; and Hawthorne and Melville added it to the short story.

In France, Marimee, Balzac and Gauter established the art of short story in 1829-31 with the magazine publication of a dozen contests. They based their work on realism and emphasised such clarity of observation,

vividness of detail and precision of statement that the incidents reveal the meaning of the work implicitly and the writer remains impersonal and objective. In the nineteenth century two different approaches to the short story appeared; Poe laid stress on “total effect” and Turgenev on “character.” This basic distinction could be seen again in the French writer Guy de Maupassant and in the Russian writer Chekov in the beginning of the twentieth century. Maupassant mastered the method of Poe and Chekov, like Turgenev, focussed on revealing moments in the lives of his characters. In England the masters of the English novel - Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, George Meredith and Thomas Hardy occasionally attempted short stories.

The genesis of the Indian short story can be traced to the Puranas, Jataka tales and the Panchatantra. The Indian fable and the Indian tale have helped the Indian short-story writer in English in giving his stories a definite shape. The Indian writer in English also came under the influence of the short-story writers of the West to a considerable extent. The Maupassant tradition reached the Indian short story writer in English through the translations of the stories of Maupassant and also through writers like O.Henry, Galsworthy and Maugham. Moreover, the Maupassant short-story has certain basic qualities of the ancient Indian tale - Uninterrupted narration, preservation of curiosity and the resulting clear picture of life. As H.E.Bates puts it, Maupassant rather tended to fill in the picture.... In consequence, he is more direct; the colours are filled in; his points are clearly made; The post-Independence period has seen the advent of a number of short story writers articulating their impressions of current topics: Independence and its aftermath, East-West relationship, and the alienated individual. Prominent among them have been Khushwant Singh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Jhabvala, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas and a few others. In the post-Independence era there is a feeling of unhappiness because of the fairly widespread social injustice, rampant corruption, and political duplicity. The feeling of disillusionment generally overshadows the progress that has been achieved in the country. The conflict that has been going on between modernity and tradition, science and religion, fact and superstition hinders the march of the country towards progress.

Kushwant Singh has an important place among the post -Independence Indian English Writers. Kushwant Singh (2 February 1915-20 March 2014) was an Indian novelist, lawyer and journalist. As an Indian English writer, Singh was best known for his trenchant, secularism, his humour, and abiding love of poetry. His comparisons of social and behavioural characteristics of westerners and Indians are laced with acid wit. He served as the editor of several literary and news magazines, as well as two newspapers, through the 1970s and 1980s with a wide collection of short stories, novels and literary treasures; he was the recipient of Padma Vibhushan Award in India. Kushwant Singh short story is not flamboyant but modest, restrained, well-crafted and his

greatest gift as a writer is a wonderful particularity of his description. He has first established his reputation as a writer through the short story. His stories are wry, poignant, erotic and human.

In this background Khushwant Singh made his mark as a short-story writer in 1950 when his first collection, “The Mark of Vishnu” was published. He pursues the art of the short story in its early twentieth century narrative form. All the available definitions did not satisfy him. Maybe he reacts to the Western definitions as an Indian and his reservation about the Indian folk tales may be attributed to his Western education and life. In this connection Shaharie observes: His [Khushwant Singh’s] stories reveal a distinctive narrative structure and an almost Traditional development of the plot which recalls, and approximates, the early phase of the Italian novella or German novellum. (Khushwant Singh 32). Khushwant Singh in his essay "On the Short Story" prescribes rules for any writer who wishes to express his thoughts in a short story. His first guideline is in terms of length. A short story must in fact be short. It cannot be a short novel, any more than a novel can be a long short story.... A novel is on a large canvas, a story is like a miniature painting. Personally, I would fix 3500 words as the outside limit for a short story. (The Collected Short Stories xii) His second priority goes to the plot structure: a short story must be built around one incident or a series of incidents illustrating one theme or portraying one character or the equation between that one character and others. (xii) Finally he insists on the punch which will have long lasting effect on the reader: a short story must have, like a scorpion's sting in its tail, a curlicue which sums up the story. (xii) Khushwant Singh's stories derive their structure from the plot which is based on conflict or crisis in character and situation. The development of action displays a linear development in sequence and is marked by progression in time rather than in space. The stories are to some extent episodes which often seem to dominate other elements in the story like character and theme. A series of complications are unfolded in the action. This arouses curiosity and creates suspense. Ultimately the conflict is resolved; and the resolution brings out either a surprise or an unexpected tragicomic outcome or revelation.

It is interesting to note that while Khushwant Singh's novels deal with problems of wider and national perspective, his short stories deal with problems at the micro level-at the individual level-While his novels reveal how the problem at the macro Level affects the individual, his short stories implicitly convey how the problem at the micro level could affect the society in a wider perspective. His short stories are not for open propaganda. His stories, in keeping with or soothe them, in any way, but to delight and disturb”. In a subtle manner, his stories convey ideas which speak volumes for his commitment. Most often his short stories do not end with finality; rather they would have open endings which provide ample scope for the *imagination* of the readers. With a rich sense of humour, Khushwant Singh satirises various aspects of life. Stories like “Karma” and “A Bride for the Sahib” make fun of the hypocrisy of aping the English manners. “Karma” is a tale about the plight of the Oxford-

returned Sir Mohan Lal. He looked down upon anything Indian, his wife not excluded. Whereas he, as a successful barrister travelled first class, his Illiterate wife travelled interclass. In the train he was looking for a pleasant conversation with British officials. But quite unexpectedly he was thrown out of the first Class compartment of the train unceremoniously by two English soldiers who were entitled to travel only in the second class. Ironically his wife was travelling in comfort in her interclass compartment. As Shahane rightly puts it, Sir Mohan Is a study in alienation; he deliberately dissociated himself from his native soil and cultural roots. However, except in his dress, he is not English at all. (Khushwant Singh 36) Apart from these short stories which deal with individual's eccentricities and follies, a few of Khushwant Singh's short stories reveal his sociological commitment on the part of the writer. The story "tan, How the Government of India Run!" presents a realistic picture of how the Government offices function in India. The story is based on three characters Sunder Singh, Sambamurthy and Ghosh. They are stenographers in the secretariat. They while away their time without doing a bit of work. One day, for being late, the boss mildly warns Sunder Singh. This makes the three stenographers angry. They go for tea, discuss world affairs and read the matrimonial advertisements. At the stroke of 5 O'clock the office closes and they make their way towards their homes in their cycles. They reach home with the satisfaction of having "helped" the Government In its successful functioning. Khuswant Singh picturises the style of functioning in government offices candidly: the secret of success in government service is simple. You only have to get on with the man just above you and forget everyone else. It has nothing to do with work or ability or anything like that. (Short Stories, pp.101-102).

The basic purpose of this study is to present, analyse and assess short story Khushwant Singh's literary achievement of short stories. "Life's Horoscope" s is one of the short stories. Khushwant Singh is one of India's distinguished men of letters with an international reputation. A brief account of his achievement as a novelist, short-story writer, historian, essayist, sketchiest, journalist and editor are sufficient enough to establish him Indian Writing in English as a versatile genius. He has produced two novels, a considerable number of short stories, an authentic history of the Sikhs', biographies of Sikh leaders and many articles which reveal his thought and feeling of a great writer. His presentation of the real and the comic makes him stand as a pillar and peer among modern Indian writers on subjects of concern to contemporary man.

Kushwant Singh's short story "Life's Horoscope" depicts the postcolonial themes such as the loss of culture, an anti-colonial challenge to western dominance, and one's superstitious beliefs after the colonization. At first Kushwant Singh's Short Story "Life's Horoscope" was a story which describes the postcolonial theme "Loss of culture". Protagonist of the story was Madan Mohan Pandey. Hari Mohan Pandey, the father of Madan Mohan, was a Brahmin. It was a custom of Hari Mohan wearing coat and trousers even in the height of the summer. Hari

Mohan, who had joined in Indian civil service, went to England in 1928. In England he discarded his sacred thread the *Janeu* and also had committed the abominable crime of eating beef and he plainly said to the Indian students, 'if you like to eat meat, there is nothing tastier than a juicy beefsteak. Try it with a glass of red vintage wine and you'll know what I mean.' (Singh, p.34), and he also had the opinion that the cows in England were not sacred. He said "Here the cow is our mother, we drink its milk". We cannot kill and eat our *gaumata*. It is different in Europe. European cows are not sacred (Singh, p.34). He made himself adjusted according to the western culture in all manners. After returning to India, he did marry of his own choice, a woman by name Parvati. When he was in India he behaved differently, he discarded his Indian customs and beliefs, completely behaved as one who was from western country. Though Hari Mohan Pandey was born and brought up in India, he had lost his own Indian culture and followed Western culture. Not only Hari Mohan Pandey, but his wife Parvati too suffered from loss of culture. She too changed her Indian customs and habits for her husband. She discarded her custom of eating the food with fingers and had started eating with spoons. She not only had lost Indian culture but also struggled between Indian and Western cultures, because she had to follow the Western for her husband; and the Indianism for her son. Thus the story "Life's Horoscope" at one point portrays the post colonial theme, "the loss of culture".

Then secondly, the "Life's Horoscope" portrayed the theme of the anti-colonial challenge to western dominance. The Protagonist of the story, Madan Mohan was a Brahmin by birth, but when he was born both his mother and father were changed to westernization. Hence, Madan was born and brought up by westernized parents. His father Hari Mohan Pandey insisted that everyone in the family should follow to speak in English language. Because English was a language spoken by the ruling people but Hindi was used to control and call the servants. Like his father, Madan Mohan used to wear a custom made dress dhoti-kurta, and since his youth a saffron-and-gold *angavastra* around his neck. But his father had changed his habit of wearing the custom made dress but Madan Mohan never changed it, and while talking with his wife Hari Mohan said to his wife about his son 'I agree he is a bright fellow, but why doesn't he move with the times?'(Singh.p.39) and his wife Parvati answers 'Because he believes we Indians had a great past of which our generation knows little. He wants to make us all aware of it' (Singh 39). Though his father was interested in English, Madan had the dominant interest in Hindi and Indian scriptures like Ramayana, Mahabharata and etc. In his study he had selected Hindi, Sanskrit and Indian History while he sat for the Civil Service Exams (ICS). Madan scored one of the top three ranks in ICS, but he rejected the idea of attending interview, and he had joined in the lecturer post where he could teach his favourite subjects. While teaching he had expressed his feeling about the importance of reviving the past-Indian heritage in all fields including science. His opinion is that "Don't accept what is written in English textbooks as

gospel truth; they belittle everything our ancestors did only to glorify their own tiny achievements” (Singh, p.42). Due to this he was got into a situation of leaving the lecturer job, and doing the social work of Hindu sangathan. When he got married he could not love the truth that his wife Mohini had participated in the Beauty contest while she was studying at the college. His opinion is that like all Indian girls she should be very modest. In home while other members of his family were eating the food with spoons, he followed to eat with his fingers. Though the Principal of the college in which he was working was ready to accept him again, he never returned to his lecturer post due to he would not accept the dominance of western ideas and beliefs and he said ‘now that British rule in India was over, it was time Hindus regained their cultural and scientific inheritance, and for this it was necessary to suppress the Muslims or throw them out of the country.’ (Singh,p.41). In this way the short story the “Life’s Horoscope” was a story of Madan’s anti-colonial challenge to the dominance of western culture.

Thirdly, Kushwant Singh's short story the “Life’s Horoscope” portrayed the theme of superstition after colonization. Hari Mohan Pandey who was the father of the protagonist never had the interest in superstitious belief such as believing horoscope. So he did not carve horoscope for his son after his birth. But Parvati’s father had made the horoscope for his grandson. But the horoscope was untouched for two decades. But when Madan Mohan had grown up he was very eager to study the horoscope and he got it from his mother and started reading it. He had believed all the things had written in the horoscope because everything happened to him in the past life as started in the horoscope, so he had the hope of future would also be happened as said in the horoscope. The horoscope had stated that he should be very careful in selecting his wife. So Madan’s parents approached him about his marriage, and he was ready to marry any girl which was suitable to his horoscope. He expressed his opinion as: “No, Ma. I don’t want to see them or their photos. You choose. But I would like to examine the horoscope of the girls you shortlist. I am in no hurry” (Singh, p.44); and he also said ‘I would like to know the exact time and place of their birth so I can make my calculations and check if their horoscopes have been properly cast’ (Singh, p.46). Even though many alliances come for him he had selected only three horoscopes from them. Finally he had selected the horoscope with the Sign Taurus, in his opinion, was a perfect match for his Leo. He selected his wife as said in his horoscope but he failed to fulfill his wife. When he failed he thought that it happened to him due to vastu, and had changed the things in the house according to the vastu ;when he is asking by his father Hari Mohan for changing the things he answered ‘It does. Vasstu says so. Our Sangathan office opened to the south. Our membership Dropped. A Vasstu expert told us to change our entrance to the east and our membership picked up.’(Singh 71). But after changing the vastu nothing had happened, finally his wife left him. Thus the story talks about how Madan Mohan had wasted his marriage life by believing the sayings of the horoscope and failed to realize the reality in life.

Fourthly, the short story “The Life’s Horoscope” evolved around the theme the fusion of East and west. The Eastern countries have their own customs and traditions in which they could identity their uniqueness, likewise the western countries have their life fusion of East and west cultures helps to connect the unconnected countries throughout the world with amity. The fusion of different cultures helps to unite two or more countries to have great understanding among them and also there is a possibility to arise equality among different countries and fraternity among different people. Many of the postcolonial writers try to unite the East and west cultures into one a times through their writings because they think that the East and west cultures are link the two sides of a same coin and one side must connected with the other for the fulfillment through this short story “The Life’s Horoscope” Singh has achieved this effect of the East and west culture into mixing one. The father of the protagonists of the story Hari Mohan was born and brought up in India, the eastern country, at the same time, when he went to England. He ran into the situation of to follow the western cultures. Though it seems he had supported only the western culture, one would find his indirect love for his own eastern country, when his son was willing to study through the Hindu college by taking the main subjects Hindi, Sanskrit, Philosophy and Mathematics. Hari Mohan had in his mind the idea that his son would study the English language instead of Hindi but he did not force his son and he left his son for his own decision to take his own subjects. Through this one can find Hari Mohan his ready to face the east and west cultures.

Modan Mohan’s mother Parvathi is an example of one who connects the east and west. parvathi was born and brought up wholly through life Easter family when she got married she is ready to accept the western culture too. For her husband she speaks with English at the same time for her son she speaks with Hindi. When Parvathi’s daughter-in-law Mohini was struggled to eat with spoons, Parvathi readily starts eating with fingers to unite the family from differences. “Mohini was faced with a tricky situation at the breakfast table. Should she defer to her father-in-law or her husband? Should she first try and power that she could handle forks and knives (which she could not with ease, but had got her friend Alice Carvalho from college to teach her) and then switch permanently to Indian food and use her finger? The issue was decided for her when her mother-in law instructed the servants to *serve Bade sahib* the usual and everyone else *poori-aaloo*. They all ate in silence.” (Singh. pp.64-65) And another character of the story Mohini also ready to face to different culture in her life. Mohini was completely born and brought up Bhramin family of eastern country, while participating in the beauty contest in the college; she readily accepts the western culture. And finally, the protagonists Modam Mohan also had his love for east and west cultures. Though he openly supported the eastern culture, he had selected his wife who was educated from St. John’s College, Agra-a Christian missionary college. For the recent why he had selected was Mohini as his wife and desire to have help from her while meeting foreigners and people who could not speak Hindi. “Two had

been educated in *Indian paathshalas*, one was from a convent and had taken her BA degree in English Literature from St. John's college, Agra-a missionary college- on a scholarship. Madam Mohan thought over it. Though he set no store by knowledge of English Literature, he felt that his future wife should have a good command over the language, as most books in his personal library were in English. It was also a useful asset when meeting foreigners and people who could not speak Hindi" (Singh.pp.46-47). Thus I have analyzed some of the postcolonial themes as found in Kushwant Singh's short story "Life Horoscope".

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