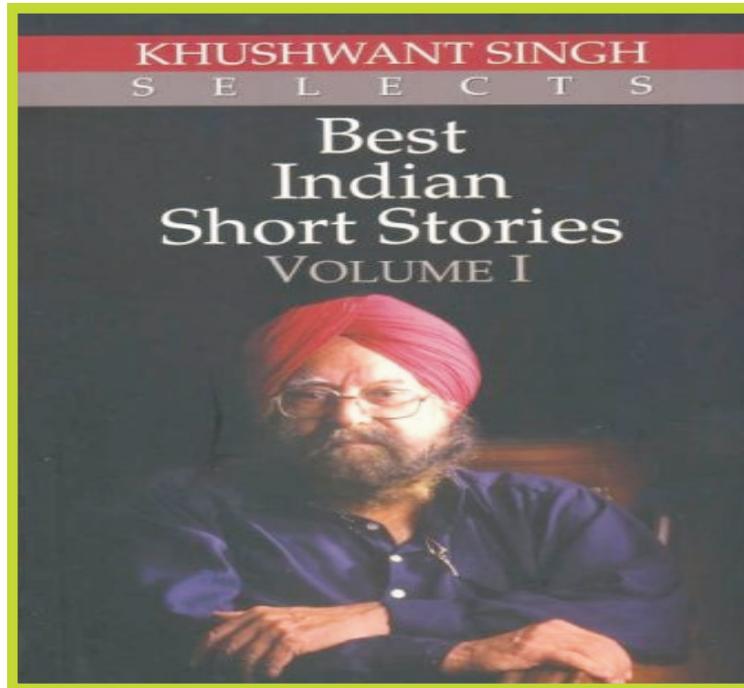


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TREATMENT OF THE MARGINALIZED IN THE SELECT SHORT STORIES OF KHUSHWANT SINGH



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Abstract :

As a prolific and India's best-known writer, Khushwant Singh has multidimensional view towards life. When Khushwant Singh writes anything it attracts immediate attention and has also potential for tremendous impact, positive or negative. His genius as a writer has been recognized all over the world. He has touched almost all the forms of literature. He began his career as a short story writer and published *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories* in 1950. Khushwant Singh is also the best known for his novels. His masterpiece, *Train to Pakistan* (1956), was produced with a brilliant cast. It is necessary to analyze Khushwant Singh's short stories to see either his female characters are marginalized or he has given them due credit to them. It is because marginalization or social exclusion is generally a curse to woman at individual level and society at public level which is a hindrance in the welfare of women. Mostly, the mindset of women is made to understand oppression and marginalization as a problem of system (male dominance) and not as the individual fault.

Key Words:- marginalization, social exclusion, feminism, minority, deprivation, oppression, inferior complexity, discrimination, social alienation.

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INTRODUCTION

Marginalization or social exclusion at the individual level results in an individual's exclusion from meaningful participation in society. Social exclusion affects individuals or communities differently. For example, individuals and communities can be socially excluded on the basis of their religious beliefs. It emerges because of different reasons such as insufficient access to social rights, material deprivation, limited social participation and lack of normative integration. Sometimes it emerges because of personal entities like age, gender, religion, race, behavior, etc. According to feminists, men and women should equally participate in the work force in the home, in the private sector as well as in the public sector also. But this is not so about women in this modern age. Some chores are assigned to women only and are expected to be done by women only. For example, cooking, washing clothes, child-rearing, etc.

Firstly, most of the stories of Khushwant Singh 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, marginalized.

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 portrayed as dependent on men. It can be seen 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.

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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.

MrSen 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 as women are suppressed and suffocated.

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.

MrSethi 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. MrSethi doesn't pay attention to Sarla's views. MrsSarlaSethi 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 SarlaSethi 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, MrSethi 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. In other words, women are treated as marginalized in literature. 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'.

Thus, as are there the consequences of social exclusion like crime, inferior complexity, health, etc., it is not necessary to take a stance on naming and labeling of the chores done by individuals. Not a single chore is of man or woman only. It can be carried out either by man or woman. And it is possible only through social work raising the consciousness of the marginalized person i.e. woman. Otherwise the same psyche of male dominance and female subordination would not cease though we want to stop it.

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