

Treatment of Love and Sex in Khushwant Singh's *The Company of Women*

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Abstract

The present research paper aims to deal with love and sex in Khushwant Singh's novel *The Company of women*. The paper depicts the love life of Mohan. Through the protagonist, Mohan Khushwant Singh shows the elite life of Delhi. The paper not only deals with the treatment of love and sex but also deals with the social problems of our Indian society like domestic rape, problem of divorcee woman. The paper also shows the hypocrisy of Indians regarding sex.

Keywords: Love, Sex, Sexual Encounter.

Introduction

Here lies one who spreads neither man nor God
Waste not your tears in him, he was a sod
Writing nasty things he regarded as great fun
Thank the Lord he is dead, this son of a gun.

(Khushwantnama)

The above lines were written by Khushwant Singh himself. He is criticized for his love for wine and women. In all his novels we find abundance of sex and love. In the present research paper I have taken his novel *The Company of Women*.

Objective of The Study

The aim of the research paper is to depict the hypocrisy of Indians. The paper also aims to project the drawbacks of repression of sex that results in sexual crime.

Main Text of the Paper

Born in Hadali, (Pakistan) on 2nd February, 1915 is one of the most prolific and popular novelists of the contemporary writers of Indian English Literature. He was interested in English literature and Urdu poetry. He started his career as a journalist with the All India Radio in 1951. He was also editor of *Illustrated Weekly of India* (1979-80), *Hindustan Times* (1980-83) and chief editor of *New Delhi* (1979-80). He was awarded Padam Bhushan in 1974 but he returned the award as a protest against operation Blue Star, in which the army raided Golden Temple at Amritsar. In 2007, he was awarded Padam Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award of India. He died on 20th March, 2014 at New Delhi.

He has written six novels- *Train to Pakistan* (1956), *I shall not hear the Nightingale* (1959), *Delhi* (1990), *The Company of Women* (1999), *Burial at Sea* (2004) and *The Sunset Club* (2010). Apart from writing novels he had also produced the collection of short stories like *The Mark of Vishnu and Other stories* (1950), *The voice of God and other stories* (1957), *A Bride for the Sahib and other stories* (1967), *Paradise and other stories* (2004). His non fictional works include *A History of Sikhs* (1966), *Ranjit Singh: The Maharaj of the Punjab* (1963), *We Indians* (1993), *Women and Men in My Life* (1995), *The End of India* (2003), *Death at my doorstep* (2005), *Why I supported the Emergency: Essays and Profiles* (2009) and *Agnostic Khushwant: There is no God* (2012). He has also written his autobiography, *Truth, Love and a Malice* (2002). In all, he has more than 75 books to his credit.

The present research paper intends to explore the theme of love and sex in his novel *The Company of Women*. Though the writer has written a lot about sex but if we read his novels seriously then we will find that through his novels the writer exposes the hypocrisy of Indians regarding sex.

In the novel *The Company of Women* Khushwant Singh depicts the love life of Mohan Kumar, an affluent businessman of Delhi. Mohan is

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an intelligent child who lost his mother at the time of his birth. His father is a clerk. Mohan being a bright student gets scholarship and he goes to Princeton University, U.S.A for further studies. He lives in U.S.A for six years. He is offered job there but he returns back to India for his father.

Mohan loses his virginity with Jessica in U.S.A. After he returns back to India, his father starts searching a bride for him. His search ends with Sonu who is the daughter of a rich businessman and her father supports Mohan in establishing his business. Sonu is a haughty girl who does not respect her father in law. The marriage of Mohan and Sonu is attended by all the rich people of Delhi. After they both leads a happy life but Sonu soon gets pregnant after their honeymoon. The birth of their first child creates chaos in their married life. Sonu goes to her parents' house after the delivery and when she comes to Mohan, she brings two nurses with her to take care of the child. Mohan makes sexual relation with two of the nurses named, Mary Joseph and continues his relation despite of Sonu's objections. The marital conflict between the two increases. Mohan's father leaves Mohan's house and goes to Haridwar to save his son's married life but fails to save it. One day Mohan receives a post card regarding his father's death and he feels Sonu to be responsible for the death. One day in a fit of anger he slaps Sonu and she calls police. After this episode both of them get divorce and Sonu leaves Mohan's house with her two children.

Now Mohan remains alone and devoid of sex. He gives advertisement in a newspaper for a companion. In response he receives a lot of letters. And one by one woman comes in his life. Once Mohan goes to Mumbai and gets involved sexually with a prostitute who is AIDS patient. The disease is transmitted to him and eventually he dies leaving his property in the name of his two children.

The novel shows that Indians wants to enjoy sex but without the knowledge of the society. In his book *Khushwantnama* he writes:

We Indians are very interested in sex, have the curiosity and The appetite but pretends to very prudish and conservative.

It's time we stooped with holding our wages and expressed ourselves.¹

Mohan, the protagonist accepts his urge and hunger for sex and he believes that love is incomplete without sex. Sonu denies sex to him after delivery. Mohan starts sleeping in the study to avoid the disturbances of night due to the cries of the baby. But Mohan feels restless without sex, so he makes relation with the nurse Mary Joseph, who too desires sex because of the absence of her husband. Khushwant tells his readers about this essential body need of human beings which is natural. Though Mary makes relation with Mohan due to the compulsion of her body but feels guilty.

I justified what I did with Mary Joseph the same way

Mary Joseph justified her adultery: only one life to live. Sex is important.²

The birth of Mohan's son made his marital life worst and his quarrels with Sonu increases. He continues his relation with other women because he is not satisfied with his wife. After his divorce he longs for a woman and makes relation with his sweeperess, Dhanno. Mohan loves to make love with variety of women.

Each time Mohan love to a new body, it was like exploring a new landscape. Women were much the same in their essentials but enchantingly different in detail.³

Mohan feels to have a companion so he gives an advertisement. Sarojini is the first lady who becomes his live in partner. She is a professor who is deceived by an N.R.I who leaves her after some time of their marriage. She is divorced and has a child from her husband. Though she enjoys sex with Mohan but she is afraid to reveal their affair in the society as it would bring shame to her and her family. When one of her student meets her in Delhi and asks her local address, she refuses to give it. This proves that she does not want her student to come to Mohan/s house and sense their affair. Even Mohan introduces Sarojini as his distant relative at home. Sarojini initially hesitates but afterwards she enjoys sex freely even in the open.

They made love not in the privacy of their bedrooms but in the moonlit balcony.⁴

Khushwant Singh's details of man-woman encounter are erotic. He writes the minute description of it to give a realistic look but for this he was termed as a 'dirty man'. Sex in India is a taboo and a man who talks about it so boldly is bound to be criticized. The writer while portraying the relation of Sarojini and Mohan tells us an important feature of Indian society in which men are forgiven for their lecherous life but a woman is not. Sarojini while leaving Mohan says:

The world is more forgiving towards men. You will be envied;

I will be condemned as a slut.⁵

The Indian social ethos forces women like Sarojini to lead their life alone because an Indian divorcee mother fails to get a good matrimonial match. The other women characters like Molly Gomes, Mary Joseph and Susanthika are the daring women of the society.

Molly Gomes belongs to Goa who is an expert in body massage. Molly's views regarding sex are similar to Mohan. They both make compatible sexual partners. Molly tells how she was deflowered by her own maternal uncle. The story of Molly is the dirty reality of our society where women are not safe even at their home. Khushwant Singh says that all these sexual crimes are due to the repression of our sexual desires. In his book, *On Women, Sex, Love and Lust* he quotes Rajneesh;

Because sex has been condemned and suppressed it has become an obsession, a disease, a perversion.⁶

Molly is a bold girl, who has made physical relation with many men. Mohan feels as if he is in heaven with her. Once she gives him massage and during the massage they had sexual encounter. When Mohan asks for the same again Molly replies that it

was divine and one should not try to repeat it .She says:

This kind of love-making in which every part of your body makes love to every part of your partner's is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Dwell on it in your mind never try to relieve it in action. It will be a great disappointment.⁷

The above statement of Molly is inspired by Rajneesh's views of sex.Her says that once you achieve that divine love you will achieve satisfaction and will not desire more. After Molly leaves Mohan, he feels alone and remembers her all the time. Initially Mohan's affairs were not known to society but later people start doubting Mohan's regular lady visitors and start questioning him. This made Mohan tense and he start avoiding going to club. According to Mohan, he does not bother about his reputation .He hates people looking him like a sex maniac, who exploits women for his own fun which was not true. Though Mohan has affairs with many women but no sexual relation was established by force but with mutual consent. Mohan says;

There was nothing dirty in what I did, but their looks and remarks made out to be a filthy sex maniac.⁸

After Molly, Mohan meets Susanthika Goonatileke from the High Commission of Sri Lanka.She goes to Haridwar on the suggestion of Mohan. Mohan also accompanies her. In Haridwar they made physical relation and it continues when they return to Delhi. After three years Susanthika is transferred to New York. In the first six months she used to write and call Mohan but gradually the calls became irregular. After six months she informs Mohan that she is engaged to a Sri Lankan diplomat so she wants to discontinue their relation because she does not want her future husband to know about her past affair. The writer attacks such type of duality of character. People do not want to reveal their sexual encounters because they are afraid to be condemned for it. They know that after their secrets are opened they will lose their reputation in the society .After the affair of Mohan with Sususanthika ends, he loses his sexual zeal. He tries many medicines but does not regain the power. Once he goes to Mumbai for official work and to test his sexuality, he calls a prostitute .He gets AIDS after his physical intimacy with the prostitute .After coming to Delhi he feels ill and his physical examination confirms that he is H.I.V positive .After two years of the infection ,he gets AIDS .The infection brings depression in his life and he takes

away his life by taking thirty sleeping pills together .A healthy man like Mohan dies only because of unsafe sex.Mohan all through his life enjoyed sex.It was his life-cause of his happiness and cause of his death.

The present research paper aims not only to depict the sexual life of the protagonist but to make people aware of the actual sexual behaviour of people, especially the elite class .Though, *The Company of Women* of Khushwant Singh is full of love and sex yet at the end it gives his readers an important message that unsafe sex can lead to death. This novel created a sensation in the market. It was condemned as a porn novel by critics. Despite of so much criticism it did well commercially. Rahul Singh in his *Khushwant the Legend lives* comments on the book by writing:

Delhi and *The Company of Women* got such scathing reviews that I decided not to read them, though I know that Delhi was the culmination of several years of research, mainly on the history of the city. Both the books did well commercially though Khushwant didn't gloat in their success. They get penned but they sell was his constant credo.⁹

Conclusion

In the conclusion we can say that the novel like his other novels is full of sex and love. But it realistically shows the life of the elite people of Indian society. It also depicts the social evils like domestic rape, condition of Indian divorcee mother, marital problems, hypocrisy of religious leaders and the problem of AIDS.Khushwant Singh's motive is not only to entertain his readers but to spread social message through his novels. We can say that through his novel, *The Company of Women*, he has been successful in his motive.

Endnotes

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4. *ibid*.p.46
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