



RESEARCH ARTICLE



RETRIVING KEY INSIGHTS FROM KHUSHWANT SINGH'S SHORT STORIES

N.S.Rajaneesh

*Lecturer in English, New Government Degree College for Women, Golconda, Hyderabad-500008.*Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10207>

ABSTRACT



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Khushwant Singh was a prolific Indian writer, best known for his novels and short stories. Khushwant Singh's short stories often incorporate humor to lighten up serious themes. He uses satire, irony, and wit to criticize social norms and practices. Humor is a key tool in his storytelling, and it helps to engage readers while also conveying a message. Singh's short stories often focus on human nature and the complexities of human relationships. His characters are flawed, and he portrays their struggles, aspirations, and contradictions with empathy and understanding. Singh's short stories often explore social issues, including gender roles, class disparities, and religious tensions. He highlights the problems and challenges faced by individuals and communities in Indian society and sheds light on their experiences. Khushwant Singh's short stories often use symbolism to convey deeper meanings. He uses objects, events, and even characters to represent abstract concepts and ideas. Khushwant Singh's short stories often deal with sexuality, including taboos and sexual desires. He is known for his frank portrayal of sex and the human body, which was considered controversial in his time.

Keywords: *Humanism, Realism, Gender Roles, Religious tensions etc.*



The people from their fictional worlds, their attitudes, their emotions, whims, relations with each other, their individual and societal behaviour, and patterns of life, ideas and many other things are immortal. These establish a lasting bond between the readers and their characters and milieu. What bestows immortality to this fictional universe created by these writers, has always been a subject of curiosity for researchers. As far as a brief history of short story is concerned, it developed slowly in all the major languages of the world, in the respective countries from stories like the legends of ancient Greece, Rome and Scandinavia, Aesop's Fables, and the tales told by Chaucer, Boccaccio and others. There were also the stories contained in the Bible and those of the *Arabian Nights* Entertainments. Similarly we have had in India stories which lie embedded in the hymns of the *Rigveda* or scattered in the Upanishads and two epics, the stories which constitute the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesha*, the *Suka Saptati*, the *Dashakumara Charita*, the *Katha Saritsagara* and the *Vetalpanchavimshati* in Sanskrit, the Buddhist Jataka stories in Pali and a host of similar stories in our modern Indian languages. Most of these ancient and medieval tales were didactic in purpose and moral in tone. These series of events loosely strung together with no attention paid to the artistic principles of plot or characterization. They gave rise to short story first in the regional languages of the country and with the coming of English Education System, short story as a literary genre in English.

Short stories of the modern type are a product of the 19th century. Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne were its masters in America.

French and Russian masters of this art like Maupassant, Chekhov and others propelled the short story further on its way of progress by introducing into it naturalism and realism. Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens Mrs. Gaskell Thackeray, Antony Trollope and R. L. Stevenson made the short story firmly established form of art in England capable of communicating varied impressions of life and evoking all kinds of emotions. Even writers like O' Henry and Katherine Mansfield made their mark in literature only with their short stories. Hoffmann and Grimm made short stories popular in Germany. Thomas Hardy, Kipling, Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, Hemingway, Faulkner were its principal practitioners in the 20th century. All these writers, so different from one another in their outlook of life; their temperament and their methods, have yet found in the short story one of the finest vehicles for communication of their experiences of life.

Khushwant Singh's literary world is very razor-sharp and extremely reflective in his thinking. He is excessively extensive and extensive in his approach. He gets stuck at the humorous shell of life, and finds it difficult to investigate deeper to get at the finer essence of things. All his short stories are noteworthy and considerable in their own way. He is exclusively dissimilar from other short story writers like R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Ruskin Bond. Narayan takes a slice of life incident and narrates touching the heart of the readers. His purpose is not to encourage any ethics or values. He holds a sense of suspense, irony, humour and simplicity throughout his narration. The readers have the choice to decide what to be taken and what to be denied. Mulk Raj Anand holds different view in his narration. He very



often touches 'isms' like materialism, humanism and other social doctrines. He reflects the issues but he arrives to no concrete decision. All his short stories as mentioned in the previous chapters taken up for the study are significant and unique reflecting his micro-world. It is an observable point that the narrator of these stories is a Sikh, bearded and be turbaned. That he is no one else but Khushwant Singh himself is clear from such stories as 'The Great Difference', 'Posthumous', 'The Interview', and 'The Portrait of a lady.' In fact, the writer does not want to hide himself behind his creation. His stories are autobiographical in the sense that

In this paper, an attempt has been made to view the fictional world of his creation from the available literature on journalistic works. Khushwant Singh short stories assessed to get a preliminary picture of the critical works done by different scholars. He has been projected as a columnist, to the exclusion of his rich personality and varied interests reflected amply in his journalistic writings and as the editor of reputed periodicals and newspapers like *Yojana*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and *The Hindustan Times*. The editorship of these papers showed him in the light of an eminent art critic, reviewer of films and books and focusing his attention on the finer aspects of life.

The Collected Short Stories of Khuswant Singh was published first in 1989 and had gone into six other impressions declaring the popularity of the collection. Out of his vast output, there are thirty two stories which marked the matter and manner. Each story, presents the delicate storyteller and the obligatory smart listener which can never be eradicated. His stories are perplexed with blend of

history, romance and sex. They give the vivid picturisation of events wrapped up with sex and romances. The stories are heart rendering description with its peculiar style of its own. The stories give the voyeuristic view of male and female anatomy. He presents various social evils, oddities and eccentricities of society and one of the frequently recurrent themes is the expression of the lacerated psyche in man-woman relationship.

Religion in its ritualistic form is a symbol of corruption in Khushwant Singh's articles and columns, as he believes it to work in league with the power structure in society. Khushwant Singh explains that religion functions as an authoritarian system with the rich and powerful to suppress the poor and deprived classes. No faith - Islam, Sikhism, Christianity and Hinduism - has remained immune to corrupting influences and they are all debasing human life and social institutions instead of enriching them, commercialization of places of worship has given the heads an authority and privilege to the detriment of religious values. Khushwant Singh makes fun of the people who are hypocrites in religious beliefs. In personal and professional life, they are immoral but play tricks to please the Almighty. He marked the cause of significance of religion in the lives of Indians by going into details of baneful possessions of faith. He has set different ethical standards by rejecting the acceptance of God and supernatural, and emphasising the potential of man to create a society based on love and goodwill where every person has the right to enjoy all freedoms. He attempts to weed out the cancerous growth of superstition and blind faith, which rules out all scope for individual growth and development,



and emphasizes a fatalistic, abject and passive attitude. He is highly critical of racial discrimination as it is another link in the chain of exploitation, preceded by casteism and class-consciousness in the Indian society. It breeds a system, which equates race with more rights and facilities for a selected group. His opposition to propagation on grounds of race, caste and class chimes in with his humanistic outlook on life revealed in his writings on religion. Readers look at the society with journalist's perspective and through theirs. He forces them to think against the established norms and orthodox conventions of religion, family, and caste-brotherhood, appreciated the tenor of changes. However, at no stage does he ever try to give the impression of a philosopher writer. His style remains discursive and loosely connected.

For Khushwant Singh, arts and crafts merit the same meticulous attention and seriousness as editing a magazine or newspaper. He is a great admirer of art in every form - be it painting; be it poetry or any other form. He promoted art in every form in the journals he worked for. His journalistic writings are marked by an emphasis on the synthesis of the modern and the traditional. Through *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, he underlines the idea of channelizing creative output for enriching social institutions. He scans the entire art and cultural field to emphasise their importance in the development of man and society.

Khushwant Singh is rationalist at heart and carries a strong conviction for each statement that he makes. His approach towards rationality in all matters is essentially liberal. His writings reveal a happy blending of scientific rationalism and liberal

humanism. In rational theme, book reviews, human behaviour, social behaviour, Gandhism, language and history are included. He has reviewed innumerable books during his long career as a journalist. Khushwant Singh has written maximum book reviews in later part of his career. He has reviewed books from various genres like biographies, autobiographies, fiction, history, religion, art and culture, poetry, non-fiction and translations. Khushwant Singh, being an observer of human behaviour, the readers experience complexity and diversity of human behaviour that is brought out in his columns. Khushwant Singh satirises people for their habit of trying to impress others by hook or crook in social and personal contexts. He comments upon sycophancy, behaviour of the people when they get success in their lives and social life of the people. He condemns the people who drop names of the well-known personalities to make a mark in the society. In contrast, he confesses that he is a big name dropper yet he hates others who use it for their stakes. Khushwant Singh condemns people who indulge in self-praise.

Social and political concerns in his writings amply demonstrate that he has been a great admirer and follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He supports Gandhi's principle of non-violence but he has an altogether different approach towards celibacy. Celibacy is an issue Gandhiji followed throughout his life whereas Khushwant Singh is in disagreement with Gandhi's negation of sex but he leaves it on personal wish of an individual and he himself has celebrated sex in his novels.

Being a famous novelist, writer of sharp short story writer and a journalist he shows great



concern towards the use of language in communication. He comments upon richness and usage of English, Hindi, Urdu and other regional languages of India. Khushwant Singh realises the language issue merits a serious attention, since a generation has grown which is handicapped by lack of proficiency in any language.

The relation between literature and society is integral and pervasive. Great critics and philosophers like Plato and Aristotle have the opinion that literature is essentially social - has social causes, contents, and effects. To the naturalist, literature is a social criticism and to some Marxist critics', literature is an ideological instrument. In fact literature not only reproduces life but also influences it. So an artist must have a sense of social awareness for presenting the real picture of society.

The researcher in this paper has viewed that Khushwant Singh's short stories have proved that they were not ostentatious and showy but they were all modest, well-crafted. His great gift as a writer is a wonderful style of description. He established his reputation as a writer through the short story writer. His stories are ironic, poignant, erotic, and, above all, humane bear testimony to his remarkable range and his ability to create an unforgettable fictional world. His literary extended over a span of half-century. His stories enthral all his readers giving enlightenment and delight. The Indian short story is exceptional in its quality adhere to the conventional rules of the craft and quietly exhibit significant quality. It moves around a limited number of characters, confines itself in time and space, and has a well-plotted narrative that drives its central theme. Within the traditional

framework, however, creativity flowers and a fresh and imaginative story emerges.

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