KEYWORDS
Mimicry, Alienated, Existentialism, Nowhere etc.

ABSTRACT
A short story published in 1989 in Khushwant Singh's The Collected Stories, Karma is all about a native Indian Mohan Lal who lived under the British rule. The attitude of the Indians towards the British masters may broadly be divided into three categories: blind admiration, strong abhorrence and mixed feeling. And Mohan Lal belongs to the first one. According to Bhabha, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” Yes, Sir Mohan Lal has left no stone unturned to become an Englishman. The very title ‘Sir’ is suggestive of that, it being “used before the first name of a man who has received one of the highest British honours (=a KNIGHT)”. The story opens with Sir Mohan looking at his own image in the mirror of a ‘first class’ waiting room at the railway station:

Distinguished, efficient - even handsome. That neatly-trimmed moustache - the suit from Saville Row with the carnation in the buttonhole - the aroma of eau de cologne, talcum powder and scented soap all about you ! Yes, old fellow, you are a bit of all right.

He considers himself to be an emblem of Western culture and therefore efficient and different from other Indians. A middle aged man, he even looks handsome in Western suit and expensive cosmetics. In this regard, Lacsan says, “The effect of mimicry is camouflage...it is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background.”

A blind admirer of the western culture, Sir Mohan strongly abhors whatever is native. When he finds that the mirror, which is in a bad condition, does not reflect a ‘first class’ image, he readily sums up: “The mirror was obviously made in India.” Metaphorically, it is the mirror of his fate, showing that he is a blind admirer of Western culture and language had had an impact of certain Englishness. Even today, when the decolonization is in its late sixties, India cannot claim to be free from the legacies of colonialism, which is generally termed as postcolonialism. While critics like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayathri Spivak, R. Siva Kumar, Dipesh Chakrabarty and many others have come forward with different theories, postcolonialism is essentially a study that relates to the colonizer-colonized issues. This paper briefly discusses Khushwant Singh's Karma through the lens of postcolonialism.

Research Paper

Khushwant Singh's Karma Viewed through the Lens of Postcolonialism

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A short story published in 1989 in Khushwant Singh's The Collected Stories, Karma is all about a native Indian Mohan Lal who lived under the British rule. The attitude of the Indians towards the British masters may broadly be divided into three categories: blind admiration, strong abhorrence and mixed feeling. And Mohan Lal belongs to the first one. According to Bhabha, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” Yes, Sir Mohan Lal has left no stone unturned to become an Englishman. The very title ‘Sir’ is suggestive of that, it being “used before the first name of a man who has received one of the highest British honours (=a KNIGHT)”. The story opens with Sir Mohan looking at his own image in the mirror of a ‘first class’ waiting room at the railway station:

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nizer-colonized experiences. In a sense, Lachmi, ‘obese’, ‘old’ and ‘smelling of sweat and raw onions’ (his wife) hardly exists for him. Naturally, the ‘illiterate’ relatives and the ‘dirty, vulgar countrymen’ have no significance in his life.

Having been thus alienated from his own wife, own people and own culture, he desperately tries to identify himself with the English people whom he thinks himself to be a part of. Far away from any traditional attire, say, a ‘white sari with a red border’, he wears foreign suit and Balliol tie only to fly in fancy to “the fairy land of Oxford colleges, masters, dons, tutors, boat races and rugger matches”, where once he had perhaps existed. He always carries with him the English daily The Times, English wine whiskey and English cigarettes in handsome gold case only to impose an Englishness on himself. He is always ready to express the long suppressed “five years of grey bags and gowns, of sports blazers and mixed doubles, of dinners at the inns of Court and nights with Piccadilly prostitutes”, but there is no Englishman to listen to him.

Sitting in the empty compartment, Sir Mohan looks out of the window, as if for getting disillusioned. When he sees two English soldiers coming, he decides to welcome them and even speak to the guard so that they can travel with him in the ‘first-class coupe’. But to his utter dismay, he finds that he is none but a ‘nigger’ in their eyes. He is asked to get out of the compartment, of course in ‘anglicised Hindustani: ‘Ek Dum jao’. Mr. Lal tries hard to protest in his ‘Oxford accent’ but in vain: “They picked up Sir Mohan’s suitcase and flung it on to the platform. Then followed his thermos flask, brief-case, bedding and The Times.” Hoarse with rage, he shouts again in British tone: ‘Preposterous, preposterous,’ but only to be slapped and thrown out of the train. And he “reeled backwards, tripped on the bedding and landed on the suitcase.”

In striking contrast to Mohan Lal, Lachmi is presented as a simple woman representing the ordinary native Indian during colonial rule. Short fat and in her middle forties, she is found sitting on a small grey steel trunk, chewing a betel leaf and fanning herself with a newspaper. As a typical Indian woman, she loves to wear ornaments. She is also fond of chatting with people, irrespective of any social status. She likes to travel where she fits and has the guts to admit it without any hesitation: “I can’t understand English and don’t know their ways, so I keep to my zenana inter-class.” She has no pretension. She is always true to her self. She is a devoted wife either. Though her husband has no time to spare for her, she never complains. She always tries to be happy with what she has or she is. She enjoys a simple meal of chapattis and mango pickle. The portrayal of this simple, straightforward image of Lachmi thus serves to bring out the sustenance of essential Indianness amid colonial influence. Side by side, the bearer and the porter are the representative of the working class of the then society, whereas the two soldiers stand for the ruling class. All these constitute the postcolonial flavor of the text.

REFERENCES