

THE HUMAN TOUCH IN THE SHORT STORIES KUSUM AND THE RIOT OF KHUSHWANT SINGH

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Abstract— This paper delves into the realm of psychoanalytic analysis to explore the significance of the human touch in the short stories *Kusum and the Riot* by Khushwant Singh. Through a detailed examination of the characters, themes, and narrative structures in these two stories, this study aims to shed light on the profound psychological implications of physical touch and its impact on human behaviour. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this paper investigates how touch serves as a catalyst for emotional and psychological transformations in the lives of the characters. It explores the complexities of touch as an embodiment of love, desire, power, and violence, and how it influences the characters' relationships, self-perception, and actions. In *Kusum*, the narrative revolves around the eponymous protagonist and her emotional journey of self-discovery. By analyzing the significance of physical touch in *Kusum's* relationships with various individuals, including her husband, lover, and the eunuch, this paper uncovers the hidden desires, conflicts, and repressed emotions that shape her character. *The Riot* delves into the aftermath of a violent religious conflict and its impact on the lives of the characters. Through a psychoanalytic lens, this study examines the role of touch in the characters' responses to trauma, their attempts to heal, and their reestablishment of human connections amidst the chaos and despair of the riot-stricken world. By employing a psychoanalytic framework, this term paper aims to unveil the underlying psychological motivations and effects of touch in these stories. The analysis of *Kusum* and *The Riot* offers valuable insights into the human psyche, providing a deeper understanding of the characters' behaviours, desires, and struggles within the context of Khushwant Singh's narrative world.

Keywords— Khushwant Singh, psychoanalytic analysis, human touch, short stories, psychological motivations

I. INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh, an eminent Indian novelist, lawyer, journalist, and politician, is widely celebrated for his trenchant secularism, humour, sarcasm, and love of poetry. While he is

primarily known as a writer, Singh's collection of short stories showcases his versatile and insightful storytelling abilities. With his first short story published in 1950, he quickly established his reputation as one of India's most celebrated authors and an outspoken public figure. Singh's stories often incorporate diverse themes, Indian settings, irony, humour, satire, and elements of folklore and the supernatural. His narratives feature characters from various strata of society, highlighting their psychological motivations and actions.

Khushwant Singh's short stories draw inspiration from various real locations across India, such as Indian railway platforms, schools, colleges, villages, offices, houses, and prominent landmarks like Bombay Harbour and the streets of Calcutta. These settings reflect the author's emphasis on portraying the authentic essence of India. While Singh occasionally introduces characters from foreign places like England and Australia, the overall focus of his stories remains centred on the Indian context (1). The stories of Khushwant Singh are undeniably humorous and enjoyable, while also being grounded in reality. The majority of his stories draw from the author's personal experiences and offer a reflection of Indian life. With the exception of supernatural elements, everything depicted in his stories can be encountered in real life (7).

Two of Khushwant Singh's notable short stories, *Kusum* and *The Riot*, provide compelling examples of his skilful exploration of human psychology.

In *Kusum*, the protagonist, an eighteen-year-old girl named Kusum, embodies goodness and intelligence despite her physical appearance, which society deems unattractive. Singh delves into Kusum's psychology, revealing her self-imposed boundaries and rigid adherence to a traditional and orthodox lifestyle. However, a chance encounter with a hawker stirs previously unknown emotions within her, leading to a transformative realization of her own attractiveness.

The Riot depicts a small town paralyzed by fear during communal riots. Singh presents the psychological impact of suspicion, fear, and tension on the townspeople. A minor incident involving dogs triggers a chain of events that ultimately result in violence and destruction. Through this story, Singh highlights the role of psychological imbalance and the consequent havoc it can wreak on individuals, communities, and society at large.



Psychoanalytic analysis, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, focuses on exploring the unconscious mind, motivations, desires, and conflicts that shape human behaviour (2). Applying this analytical approach to literature allows us to delve deeper into characters' psyche, unravel their hidden motivations, and gain a profound understanding of their actions and reactions. By examining the psychological intricacies of fictional characters, we can unravel the complexities of human nature and explore universal themes and experiences.

In this paper, the aim to analyze Khushwant Singh's short stories *Kusum* and *The Riot* through a psychoanalytic lens to gain insights into the psychological workings behind human actions. Our objective is to demonstrate how Singh's narratives provide authentic portrayals of human behaviour and motivations, showcasing his prowess as a psychoanalyst. By delving into the characters' psyches, we will explore the impact of psychological factors on their decisions and shed light on the transformative experiences that shape their lives.

Through this analysis, we aim to highlight the significance of understanding the human touch in literature and how psychoanalytic insights enhance our comprehension of characters, their interactions, and the underlying themes of Singh's stories.

By employing psychoanalytic techniques, we can unravel the profound depth of Khushwant Singh's writing and appreciate his ability to capture the complexities of the human mind. Through an exploration of *Kusum* and *The Riot*, we will unravel the psychological nuances that contribute to the richness and authenticity of his storytelling.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The article "Study on Khushwant Singh's Portrayal of Women Characters Conform to the Theories of Psychoanalysts" by Shikha and Dr. G. Mohana Charyulu discusses the portrayal of women characters in the works of Khushwant Singh from a psychoanalytical perspective. It explores how Singh's depiction of female characters aligns with psychoanalytic theories proposed by scholars like Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Carl Jung (6). The study aims to understand the workings of the human psyche and analyze the characters' experiences, including their anxieties and sexual constraints. The researcher primarily focuses on the women characters in Singh's fiction but acknowledges that there are other aspects that need further exploration (6). They suggest that future research can extend the psychoanalytical analysis to include Singh's male characters and also explore the works of other Indian English writers through a psychoanalytic lens. The article emphasizes the importance of understanding the author's own perception of the character's behavior and the motivations behind their actions. It highlights the role of psychoanalysis in interpreting literary texts, examining the conscious and unconscious mind, and understanding character actions and behaviors in different situations. The article suggests that Singh's depiction of women characters in his works reflects their inner thoughts and unconscious selves (6).

The women in his stories are portrayed as expressive individuals with sexual desires and a willingness to indulge in sensual pleasures (6). While Singh's works have been examined from various perspectives, there has been limited research on his female characters, as his books primarily feature male characters. However, the article suggests that women in Singh's works offer great potential for psychoanalytic exploration, as they embody different roles such as mothers, wives, friends, and casual acquaintances. The article also discusses the concept of narcissism and its relevance to Singh's works (6). It highlights how the characters in his fiction are focused on the self and driven by self-esteem. The characters' obsession with themselves is depicted as the primary driving force in their lives (6). The article suggests that this obsession with the self is a reflection of the contemporary age and its emphasis on individualism and self-discovery.

The article titled "Depicting the Grotesque Characters and Settings in Khushwant Singh's 'Kusum' and 'The Great Difference' Short Stories" by P. Gopikrishna and J. Anil Premraj explores the presence of grotesque elements in two short stories by Khushwant Singh. The authors highlight Singh's distinct voice in creative writing and his ability to aggressively point out social, political, administrative, and religious conflicts through his works. Singh's writing style often portrays the actions of common people in a sardonic manner, causing readers to smirk at their behaviors. The article emphasizes that Singh's fictional works may initially appear obnoxious, charming, nostalgic, and bitter. However, a closer examination of the text and the context reveals that Singh fearlessly exposes society's foolishness, idiocy, unorthodox habits, and bureaucratic blunders of various magnitudes. The study aims to explore the grotesque aspects in Singh's works, specifically focusing on the short stories *Kusum* and *The Great Difference*. The authors analyze the bizarre characters, themes, settings, and symbols associated with the grotesque in these stories. They also delve into the motivations of the characters and the underlying messages conveyed through their actions. Additionally, the article examines the use of strange and unconventional settings in Singh's stories. The article draws on concepts such as the absurd, body, Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque, caricature, Indian society, and satire to analyze and interpret the grotesque elements present in Singh's works (5).



III. RESEARCH QUESTION

The central research question that will guide this paper is:

"How does Khushwant Singh employ psychoanalytic analysis in his short stories 'Kusum' and 'The Riot' to explore the complex motivations and psychological depths of his characters?"

The choice of psychoanalytic analysis as the research approach is justified by its ability to delve into the deeper layers of human psychology and motivations. Khushwant Singh, known for his astute observations of human behaviour, skilfully employs this approach in his short stories to unravel the intricacies of his characters' minds. Psychoanalytic analysis provides a framework to examine the unconscious desires, conflicts, and defence mechanisms that drive human actions, shedding light on the underlying psychological forces at play.

By applying psychoanalytic analysis to Khushwant Singh's short stories, we can gain a deeper understanding of the characters' thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. This approach allows us to explore the hidden aspects of their personalities and the complex interplay between conscious and unconscious forces that shape their actions. Through this lens, we can unravel the layers of their motivations and gain insights into the human condition. The research question directly relates to the chosen short stories, *Kusum* and *The Riot*, as they serve as prime examples of Khushwant Singh's adeptness at employing psychoanalytic analysis. In both stories, the characters' actions and behaviours are influenced by deep-seated psychological factors, which can be explored and understood through a psychoanalytic lens.

In *Kusum*, the eponymous protagonist's outward appearance and conservative beliefs serve as protective barriers against her insecurities and desires. Through psychoanalytic analysis, we can uncover the underlying reasons for *Kusum*'s self-imposed boundaries and the transformative moment that leads her to reassess her self-image.

Similarly, in *The Riot*, the communal tensions and suspicions among the characters are amplified by their unconscious fears and prejudices. Psychoanalytic analysis can shed light on the psychological processes that contribute to their heightened emotions, the projection of their anxieties onto others, and the tragic consequences that ensue.

By examining these two short stories through a psychoanalytic lens, we can gain a deeper understanding of the characters' psychological motivations, their inner conflicts, and the ways in which their unconscious desires and fears drive their actions. This approach allows us to appreciate the richness and complexity of Khushwant Singh's storytelling, highlighting the psychological dimensions that underlie his narratives.

IV. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The psychoanalytic approach is a valuable methodology for literary analysis due to its focus on understanding the subconscious elements of human behaviour and the intricate workings of the human mind. By applying psychoanalytic

principles to the study of literature, scholars gain insights into the psychological motivations, desires, and conflicts of characters, as well as the deeper symbolic meanings embedded in the narrative (3).

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) seems to have had a significant impact on not just psychology, as well as contemporary society as a whole and the occidental mentality in particular. His psychoanalysis has come under fire in the academic community. He has received praise for his explanation of the three mental forces—the id, ego, and superego—but he also attracts criticism (4).

Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the human psyche, motivations, and behavior, making it highly relevant to the analysis of literature, including Khushwant Singh's short stories *Kusum* and *The Riot*. Freud's concepts can offer valuable insights into the characters' psychological makeup and the underlying themes and conflicts in these narratives.

In *Kusum*, Freud's concept of the unconscious mind becomes pertinent in exploring the protagonist's suppressed desires and fears. The story delves into the emotional turmoil experienced by *Kusum*, who is torn between her duties as a wife and her repressed longing for passion and self-fulfillment. Freud's notion of the Oedipus complex can also be applied to analyze the complex relationships and power dynamics among the characters, shedding light on the underlying psychological tensions.

Similarly, in *The Riot*, Freud's concept of repression and the subconscious mind can be employed to examine the psychological aftermath of the violent communal riot. The story explores the collective trauma and repressed memories experienced by the characters, which influence their actions and relationships. Freud's theory can help uncover the deeper psychological motivations behind the characters' behaviors, such as their defense mechanisms and the manifestation of their repressed desires and fears.

Moreover, Freud's concept of symbolism is highly relevant in analyzing the narrative devices employed in both stories. Symbolic elements, such as specific settings, objects, or recurring motifs, can be interpreted through Freud's theory to reveal hidden meanings and the characters' unconscious desires or fears.

By integrating Freud's psychoanalytic theory into the analysis of these short stories, a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations, conflicts, and the underlying themes related to the human touch can be attained. This theoretical background provides a solid foundation for examining the psychological dimensions of the narratives and enriching the interpretation of the stories within a psychoanalytic framework.

V. CHAPTER1: PSYCHO-ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORIES KUSUM AND THE RIOT

Understanding the intricate workings of the human mind has always been a fascinating endeavor for scholars and psychologists alike. Literature has often served as a window



into the depths of human psychology, offering insights into the motivations, desires, fears, and underlying factors that drive individuals' actions. In the short stories *Kusum* and *The Riot* by Khushwant Singh, the author skillfully delves into the psychological aspects of the characters, unraveling the complexities of their minds and their intricate interactions with their environments. This chapter aims to provide a psychoanalytic analysis of these two stories, exploring the deep-seated psychological factors that shape the characters' thoughts, choices, and actions, and shedding light on the transformative power of external events on individual and collective behavior.

In the short story *Kusum*, Singh presents the eponymous protagonist as a socially marginalized and physically unattractive woman. Kusum's appearance is portrayed as a significant factor that shapes her self-perception and behavior. The story highlights how her physical attributes, which are conventionally considered unappealing, have led her to develop a defensive mechanism as a coping strategy. Kusum adopts a conservative lifestyle and withdraws from the realms of romantic and sexual relationships, safeguarding herself from potential rejection or ridicule. This psychological defense mechanism manifests in her rigid adherence to social norms and her judgmental attitude towards others. However, when a hawker's lewd gesture disrupts her carefully constructed world, it triggers a profound psychological shift within her. This encounter challenges her negative self-image and prompts her to question her own attractiveness and desirability. Kusum's journey reflects the transformative power of external validation and the deep-rooted need for acceptance and affirmation in shaping an individual's self-perception.

The Riot explores the collective psychology of a community engulfed in communal tensions. Singh delves into the psychological dynamics that underlie fear, suspicion, and prejudice within a volatile social context. The story portrays how individuals become susceptible to the influence of group psychology, wherein their fears and anxieties are magnified and distorted. Singh highlights the impact of rumors and misinformation, which can easily trigger a collective emotional response, leading to an escalating cycle of violence. The characters' actions

are driven by a heightened sense of self-preservation and a skewed perception of threats. Singh skillfully illustrates the erosion of rationality and empathy as fear, anger, and mob mentality take hold. Through the portrayal of the characters' psychological states, Singh offers profound insights into the destructive power of collective psychology and the detrimental effects it can have on individuals and communities.

Drawing upon psychoanalytic theories, we can gain further insights into the psychological dimensions of *Kusum* and *The Riot*. Sigmund Freud's concept of defense mechanisms can be applied to analyze Kusum's character. Her withdrawal from intimate relationships and her judgmental attitude can be understood as manifestations of defense mechanisms such as

repression and displacement. Kusum's journey can be seen as an exploration of her unconscious desires and a confrontation with her repressed sexuality.

Additionally, psychoanalytic theories shed light on the collective psychology depicted in *The Riot*. Freud's concept of the id, ego, and superego can be applied to analyze the characters' internal conflicts and their struggle to balance their primal instincts and societal norms. Moreover, Sigmund Freud's theory can provide insights into the dynamics of the mob mentality portrayed in the story.

In *Kusum*, Kusum's withdrawal from intimate relationships and her judgmental attitude towards others can be seen as defense mechanisms employed to protect herself from potential emotional pain and vulnerability. Freud's concept of repression suggests that individuals may unconsciously push distressing thoughts, desires, or memories into the unconscious mind to avoid confronting them. Kusum's self-imposed isolation and disinterest in forming close relationships could be a result of repressed desires or past traumas. Furthermore, her judgmental attitude towards the hawker may be a displacement of her own inner conflicts and insecurities onto others. Psychoanalysis invites us to explore the underlying motives behind Kusum's behavior, unearthing the unconscious forces that shape her psyche.

The journey of self-discovery in *Kusum* can also be examined through the lens of psychosexual development, a central concept in Freudian theory. Kusum's encounter with the hawker awakens her dormant desires and challenges the boundaries of societal expectations. Freud's stages of psychosexual development posit that individuals progress through different stages, each characterized by the focus on erogenous zones and the resolution of conflicts.

Kusum's exploration of her desires and aspirations can be seen as a manifestation of her movement towards the adult stage of psychosexual development, where she confronts and reconciles her sexual and romantic longings.

In *The Riot*, psychoanalytic perspectives offer insights into the collective psychology and internal conflicts of the characters amidst the communal tensions. Freud's structural model of the psyche, consisting of the id, ego, and superego, provides a framework for understanding the characters' struggles to balance their primal instincts, societal norms, and moral values. The id represents the unconscious and instinctual drives, the ego mediates between the id and the external reality, and the superego encompasses societal norms and moral standards. The characters in *The Riot* grapple with the clash between their instinctual desires for violence and revenge (id) and their adherence to societal norms and values (superego). Their internal conflicts reflect the broader societal struggle between individual desires and collective morality.

Both *Kusum* and *The Riot* depict how external events can act as catalysts for profound psychological transformations. In *Kusum*, the encounter with the hawker disrupts Kusum's carefully constructed world, forcing her to reevaluate her self-perception and challenge her own beliefs. This pivotal



moment triggers a process of self-discovery, where Kusum confronts her desires, aspirations, and insecurities. Similarly, in *The Riot*, the outbreak of communal violence serves as a triggering event that unleashes a torrent of deeply rooted fears, prejudices, and aggression within the characters. The external environment becomes a mirror through which individuals confront their innermost fears and desires, often leading to drastic shifts in their psychological states and behavior. These stories serve as poignant reminders of the transformative power of external events on individual and collective psychology, urging us to examine the profound influence of our surroundings on our thoughts and actions.

Both stories touch upon the complex interplay between gender dynamics and societal expectations, providing insights into the psychological effects of these influences. In *Kusum*, Singh portrays the restrictive social norms and beauty standards that contribute to Kusum's self-perception as an unattractive outsider. Her journey highlights the psychological impact of societal pressures on individuals, particularly women, and the internalized beliefs that shape their sense of self-worth. Similarly, in *The Riot*, gender roles and expectations influence the characters' responses to the communal tensions. The male characters embody traditional notions of masculinity, characterized by aggression and the need to protect their community, while the female characters grapple with the fear and vulnerability associated with their gender. These stories shed light on the intricate relationship between gender, societal expectations, and the psychological well-being of individuals.

VI. CHAPTER 2: FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The psychoanalytic analysis of Khushwant Singh's short stories *Kusum* and *The Riot* not only provides valuable insights into the characters and narratives but also carries implications for future research and understanding of human psychology and literature.

Firstly, the application of psychoanalytic theories to literary analysis opens up new avenues for studying the psychological dimensions of literature. By delving into the unconscious desires, defense mechanisms, and internal conflicts of the characters, we can uncover deeper layers of meaning in literary works. This approach allows us to explore the complexities of human psychology through the lens of storytelling, enriching our understanding of both literature and the human mind.

Moreover, the psychoanalytic analysis of these stories highlights the universality of certain psychological themes and struggles. The exploration of repressed desires, defense mechanisms, and the interplay between instinct and societal norms resonates across cultures and time periods. As such, future research can build upon this analysis to investigate how these psychological dynamics manifest in different literary works and how they relate to real-life experiences.

Furthermore, the psychoanalytic approach to literature can contribute to our understanding of social and cultural phenomena. By examining the collective psychology portrayed in *The Riot*, we gain insights into the dynamics of group behavior, mob mentality, and the unleashing of repressed desires within a collective setting. This understanding can be applied to studying various social and historical events, such as riots, revolutions, and mass movements, shedding light on the psychological factors that shape collective actions and behaviors.

The psychoanalytic analysis of *Kusum* sheds light on the implications of societal expectations and gender dynamics. *Kusum*'s journey in the story portrays the psychological impact of restrictive social norms and beauty standards on individuals, particularly women. Her self-perception as an unattractive outsider reflects the internalization of these societal pressures and the consequent shaping of her self-worth.

The exploration of *Kusum*'s character highlights the relevance of examining the psychological effects of gender roles and societal expectations in literature and beyond. Future research can delve deeper into the portrayal of gender dynamics in literary works, analyzing the internal struggles, defense mechanisms, and identity formation influenced by societal norms. This approach can contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of gendered experiences and the ways in which they intersect with broader psychological themes.

By incorporating *Kusum*'s story point into the discussion, the implications of psychoanalytic analysis extend to the examination of gender dynamics, the effects of societal expectations, and the exploration of individual and collective psychology within the context of gendered experiences.

The implications of this research extend beyond literary analysis and into fields such as psychology, sociology, and cultural studies. The integration of psychoanalytic perspectives with the study of literature can enhance our understanding of human behavior, motivations, and social dynamics. It encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and invites scholars from different fields to engage in dialogue and exchange insights.

VII. CONCLUSION

Khushwant Singh's short stories *Kusum* and *The Riot* provide a rich ground for psychoanalytic analysis, offering a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations, conflicts, and the intricate workings of the human mind. Through the application of concepts such as defense mechanisms, psychosexual development, the id, ego, and superego, and group psychology, we have gained valuable insights into the psychological dimensions of the stories. These psychoanalytic perspectives shed light on the characters' unconscious desires, their struggles to balance individual instincts with societal norms, and the impact of collective psychology on their actions. *Kusum* takes us on a journey of self-discovery as *Kusum* confronts her repressed desires and explores her



sexuality. Her withdrawal from intimate relationships and judgmental attitude can be understood as defense mechanisms employed to protect herself from emotional pain. The story invites us to examine the underlying motives behind her behavior and delve into the depths of her psyche.

The Riot delves into the collective psychology of a mob, portraying the internal conflicts faced by the characters as they navigate their primal instincts and societal norms. The concept of the id, ego, and superego illuminates the characters' struggles to balance their desires with moral standards. Additionally, the exploration of group psychology offers insights into the dynamics of mob mentality and the unleashing of repressed desires within a collective setting.

By analyzing these stories through a psychoanalytic lens, we gain a greater appreciation for the complexities of the human mind and the forces that shape our thoughts and behaviors. The stories serve as a reminder of the importance of self-reflection, empathy, and understanding in navigating our own psychology and the psychology of others.

Kusum and The Riot stand as testament to the enduring power of literature to explore the mysteries of the human psyche. Khushwant Singh's masterful storytelling invites us to introspect, challenging us to unravel the depths of our own psychology and gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of human nature. Through the lens of psychoanalysis, these stories serve as a catalyst for self-awareness and empathy, reminding us of the profound impact of our psychological states on our thoughts, actions, and relationships.

VIII. REFERENCE

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