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**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K. N. Shelke**

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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Author	Title of the Paper	Page No.
1	Prof. Mahmoud Qudah	The Role of L2 Proficiency in the Word Association Behavior of Jordanian EFL Learners	1
2	Dr. Archana Durgesh Ms. Ekta Sawhney	Love Conquers All: <i>Train to Pakistan</i>	12
3	Mr. Chaitanya Mahamuni Dr. KTV Reddy Ms. Nishan Patnaik	Study of Meta-Materials as an Emerging Technology in Microwave and Millimeterwave Wireless Communication	20
4	Dr. Archana Durgesh Ms. Shobhna Singh	A Tribute to Khushwant Singh's <i>Love: Delhi</i>	26
5	Mrs. Deepti Mujumdar Ms. Shaguftaa Seher Rehmaan	Treatment of Women Characters in Vijay Tendulkar's <i>Encounter in Umbugland</i> and <i>Kamala</i>	31
6	Mr. Chaitanya Mahamuni Dr. KTV Reddy Ms. Nishan Patnaik	Energy Efficient Performance in Wireless Sensor Networks: A Literature Survey	39
7	Dr. Rupal S. Patel	<i>Death in Venice</i> : A Modernist Work of Art	45
8	Dr. Archana Durgesh Dr. Pooja Singh	Is There Honor In Honor Killings? An insight	53
9	Smriti Chowdhuri	Kamala Das in Search of her Grandmother's Land: An Eco-Feminist Study of Kamala Das's Poetry	59

<b>10</b>	Dr. Archana Durgesh, Dr. Pooja Singh & Nigar Alam	Sex as an Elemental Passion in ' <i>The Company of Women</i> '	<b>64</b>
<b>11</b>	Shomik Saha Kalpak De	Tourism Potential in Dooars Region: An analysis and the way ahead	<b>70</b>
<b>12</b>	सुधीर कुमार डॉ० स्नेहलता शिवहरे	अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय सद्भावना तथा शिक्षा	<b>77</b>
<b>Short Stories</b>			
<b>13</b>	Relations	Dr. Archana Durgesh	<b>84</b>
<b>14</b>	A Mother's Promise	Dr. Archana Durgesh	<b>86</b>
<b>Poems</b>			
<b>15</b>	Dr. Archana Durgesh	Prayers for My Dear One	<b>90</b>
<b>16</b>	Dr. Archana Durgesh	ME & YOU	<b>90</b>

**Sex as an Elemental Passion in ‘The Company of Women’****Dr. Archana Durgesh, Dr. Pooja Singh & Nigar Alam***BBD NITM, Lucknow, (U.P.) India***Abstract**

Mr. Khushwant Singh was a brilliant storyteller. He did a wonderful job through this story, his humor lacks in writers of his genre in Indian literature. The Company of Women is the story of a man's sexual exploits, and how it defines his life. As a young academic, he is sent abroad to study, and thus begins his sexual experiments in the company of women. After losing his virginity to the seductive Jessica Browne, there is no stopping Mohan. His next tryst is with a Pakistani, Yasmeen Wanchoo, who teaches him the exhilaration of satisfying older women, who are known to be notorious for their heady lust for younger men. Coming back to India, he is forced to settle for a marriage and a woman he has absolutely no interest in. She is perpetually cranky, and it seems like she was born with a long face. Sure, the wife was ill-tempered, but Mohan wasn't exactly a loyal husband. From sexual relations with the maid Dhanno, to their baby's nurse, Mohan's carnal desires knows no bounds. Very soon, their marriage disintegrates. Thus, having found his single status again, he must overcome his loneliness, and thus begins a string of affairs. While this story may seem like the racy tale of a young man who just couldn't keep his hormones at bay, it does have a twist in the plot. Mohan's relationship with his father, and the change in his character after his death tweaks the image of the protagonist in the minds of the readers' as an otherwise immoral man. Coupled with humor and a compelling narration, Khushwant Singh takes us on a journey of what it means to succumb to the desires of the flesh.

**Key Words:** Women, sex, loneliness

*The Company of Women* is a story of Mohan Kumar, a man giving in to the enticements of youth without a concern for anything in the world. His debauchery began with his college life in the US. He slept with a score of women, easily available in plenty. Eminent author Khushwant Singh tried portraying through this blunt and stereotypic sexual comedy picture of an Indian man, and the relations he shared with his counterpart women which were basically sexual. The title *The Company of Women* is apt, as this is a sexual prance through a whole ‘the company of women’ by the chief character,

Mohan Kumar. The protagonist Mohan a gifted academic, completed his graduation abroad (U. S) and after rejecting many lucrative offers came back to India, where his aged father awaited him. When he confided that he had *badamaas* his father took him for a holy bath to cleanse his mind and soul of profane thoughts but, “The water of the Ganga had done nothing to cleanse my mind of libidinous desires.” (p. 131) Mohan just by looking at women taking bath in diaphanous *sarees* got stimulated.

Mr. Singh, in a very humorous tone, depicted the auctioning of a man in an

Indian marriage. Even through humor, he successfully connected the readers with the ongoing issues of the Indian society. Mohan does settle down with a handsome dowry and on a sad note, a cranky, jealous and mediocre wife, “Sonu was quick tempered, possessive, and wanted attention all the time. She was jealous, though she herself had no love to give him. And she began to resent his father’s presence in their home, for it was, after all, a gift from her father. ‘Will your old man live with us all his life?’” (p.5) His marital bliss had its short comings which eventually ended up with a divorce, his loyalty being the best conceivable reason.

Sonu created humiliating situations for her father-in-law and kept fighting with Mohan even over trivial issues. Without thinking even once the impact it would make on their little son. “But even as baby he reacted to our quarrels by turning to my father for company and comfort. This turned Sonu against my father. She made him feel unwelcome in our home. Being a proud and self-respecting man he decided to move permanently to his ashram in Haridwar. Little Ranjit missed him and turned to his ayah rather than to his mother for company. Sonu did not like that. She fired one ayah after another on the flimsiest excuses...” (p. 193,194) Sonu was a querulous and cantankerous woman her perpetual nagging and quarreling followed separation and finally it lead to divorce. Mohan wanted to avert the idea of divorce but he told Sonu, “‘I love the children, but I am happier without you.’” (p. 209) His father died too, and left alone, a high society wealthy business man with all the material wealth in

the world but returning to an empty house every day this made sex the most important preoccupation of his life, he tried to find it one way or another.

The projection of Mohan might seem extremely vulgar at times but on a solemn note, through some light fencing, the character which he played of a devoted son was striking. After the demise of his father, throughout his life till the end he kept going back to Haridwar as a part of his promise to his father and stayed at his father’s room. *The Company of Women* states a laudable *verve* where he literally “ate, drank and made merry.” Mohan never gave importance to fidelity factor as a married man. His promiscuity could be consequential of his diverse relationships with his house maid and his baby’s nurse. His never ending trysts with fair ladies pre and post marriage.

His ravenous libido made him fall for Dhanno the untouchable, “... But he had noticed that as a class the so-called untouchable women were in fact the most touchable. (p. 16) He brought ice cream and balloons for her kids, gave her extra money after inquiring about her financial problems acting as a savior, but he doubted if the woman was intelligent enough to understand his motive., “... Had Dhanno got the message?” she did understand what was on her master’s mind as, “He got his answer the next morning. She was later than usual – after the cook had left for bazaar to buy the day’s groceries and the bearer had gone to his quarter to have his bath. She wore a freshly washed and ironed *salwaar-kameez* and had *kajal* in her eyes.” (pp. 20-21) Mohan waited for a couple of days, “Dhanno sensed what was on the *saheb*’s



mind. She let him choose the day and time for their tryst..." (p. 22) And then finally he made all his servants run errands for far off places, making sure they wouldn't return early, "Each time Mohan made 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. (p. 23) Finding his sweeper woman Dhanno very convenient, he gratifies himself with her. After sometime, he devised means more convenient.

The results were exciting but he distances himself from his sweeper-woman, and enjoyed different characters. The story proceeds as Mohan, in an attempt to overcome loneliness, starts having contractual trysts with women, which included an English professor Sarojini Bharadwaj, Molly Gomez, a masseur and Susanthika, a Sri Lankan Diplomat. He being a very young millionaire gives in to lust and then to love, exotically and unnervingly. Just less than a month his wife left him he drafted an ad, "...seeks a live-in companion for a mutually agreed time-duration...Rs 10,000 per month...Religion no bar. Relationship to be without strings attached on either side..." (p.11) Women responded to his advertisement and one after another moved to Delhi to live with him; money and perks thrown in, one liaison followed another. What he needed was a short-stay, live-in relationship with no strings attached.

On the roll first came Sarojini Bharadwaj, she was married to an NRI after a week's acquaintance, after fifteen days and nights of rigorous, fulfilling sex and impregnating her he went back never to come back and later it

came to light that he was already married to someone else in Canada. But she made herself clear in the first letter she wrote that, "Whatever you give me will be of help in getting him (her son) a better education." (p. 28) They met and decided that they can give it a try. On the first night of her stay as stated Mohan got intimate with her, in the heat of passion she didn't realize but later, "She clawed Mohan's face and arms and chest and began to sob. 'I'm a whore, a common tart! I'm a bitch,' she cried. Mohan held her closer and reassured her, 'You are none of those; you are a nice gentle woman who has not known love.' She knew his words meant nothing but they were strangely soothing." (p. 48)

Sarojini was not the kind of woman Mohan wanted in bed but amazingly she soothed his persona, due to Sonu's father's death and the insult he experienced at the last rites made it indispensable for Sarojini to leave, but Mohan didn't want to hurt her. He took her out for dinner as a friend should be treated and extended a token of affection and said, "it is no longer a commercial deal,' he said taking her hand. 'This is to assure you that I value your friendship more than your body.' He took out a small blue velvet box from his pocket and opened it he took out a gold ring and slipped it on her third finger.... I don't understand you. (p. 67) Sarojini couldn't understand him at all, a moment ago she felt he was eager to get rid of her at the earliest and the other moment he made her feel as if he wouldn't let her go. After her departure he felt alone and it came to his mind that, "He should be missing her: he did a little but not too much. The house looked emptier; curiously, he liked its emptiness...." (p. 75)



Next came Molly Gomez a *masseuse* from Goa, she added a new flavor to his life; a companion fit for a man like Mohan free spirited good at cooking, excellent in bed and above all cultured. This woman proved that looks never matter and sex could be so gratifying, “Nothing in life gives greater sense of fulfillment than the satisfying coupling of male and female.” (p. 222) Molly too had a bad experience as she was deflowered by her own kith and kin, “It was my own uncle, my mother’s younger brother, a good twenty years older than me. Beast! Took advantage of poor, innocent me.... ‘Anyways, it happened one afternoon when he came to call on my parents and they were not at home.’ (p. 229) The usual that happens due to parents’ negligence and lack of intuition. Molly gave all Mohan needed but she told him that whatever he experienced with her was, “...once-in-a-lifetime experience. Dwell it in your mind, never try to relive it in action. It will be a great disappointment.” (p. 246) Molly left for Goa but she left a vacuum in Mohan’s life.

All his life he had a lustful relationship with many women but Susanthika was his last one, she delved deep in his life and kept a steady comfortable sex life for three long years with him without a single piece of gossip. She even shared her dark experience of deflowering, without a trace of emotion she narrated, “Nothing romantic about the deflowering. My own uncle, my father’s younger brother. The usual thing...” (p. 266) She was a diplomat from Sri Lanka after her term was over she left for the States and after some time told him that they couldn’t keep in touch anymore as she was getting

married. This last woman left a void in his life; he tore away all other alluring responses he received from women who answered his ad and were eager to get in bed with him.

Mr. Khushwant Singh was a brilliant storyteller. He did a wonderful job through this story, his humor lacks in writers of his genre in Indian literature. The characters are very genuine and pertinent. Mohan was looking for love, commitment but if not then physical was his best concern. In the author’s note, Singh confessed ‘what Mohan Kumar does is something he’d have liked to have done,’ and says the title could just as well have been *Fantasies of an Octogenarian*.

Of course, there’s much more to Mohan Kumar than just sex. The terms Havana cigar and Mercedes on the initial page itself points out how well this son of a railway official has fared in life. He won a scholarship to Princeton. Out and out an Indian at heart his love and loyalty to his widowed father made him discard the option of Green Card and return home. He gets into import-export and, owns a whole house in Delhi’s Maharani Bagh. He is, though, conservative. He is unswervingly gracious, treats women as ladies, and thinks a fine night out is going to the Delhi Gymkhana. This is, after all, a sexual biography so personal details of business and too much of family go missing. The sexploits don’t start until he’s a student in the US where he scores with scores of women, partly due to his reputation for having the largest penis ever seen. When Jessica Brown abed with him he is a virgin but he retorts, “‘I’m a

man!' I protested. 'Only girls are virgins.'" (p. 93)

There is a cartoon quality about the scenes when women see it for the first time, and express their admiration. *Veni, vidi, vici* change order in his case - he sees, he comes and he conquers. Mohan Kumar is meticulously secular in his loom; all that is required is for his conquests to be female. He buttressed the SAARC spirit even-handedly by intimacy with the wife of a minister from "Azad Kashmir" Yasmeen, taken aback by her advances and fervor he asked her about her eagerness, she shamelessly remarked, "I haven't had sex for six months. I am famished," she said. He further enquired her, what she thought of their intimacy; if it's a sin, she solemnly answered, "...What I did was sinful.'... 'A sin punishable with death by stoning?' 'Doesn't your conscience bother you?' I asked. 'The body has its compulsions,' she said." (pp. 110,111) Mohan's life was influenced by all the women he took to bed, the theory of sin and penance didn't bother him much as when his wife gave birth to his son, there arrived two nurses to take care of the child, one of which, Mary Joseph, he took to bed secretly. When he sought her opinion she plainly blurted out, "...How can such a nice thing be sin? ... 'For me this was heaven,' she said when she had regained her breath, 'and for you saar?'" (p. 183) Every now and then Mary kept on saying 'we get only one life to live, so it's up to us how we live it.' Mohan did what he thought was the best.

Once during a visit to Bombay, where he stayed in a five star hotel, he sent for a 'bai' one night. His first experience turned out to

be totally mechanical and lacked any softness and love. But next night he felt so gratified due to the extra perks paid to the woman that he asked her how to contact her if he ever visited again, she told him plainly, "No name. I am a married woman with children. I do this *dhandra* because my husband does not earn enough. You ask the same bearer to get the same *bai* he got for you last time." (p. 282) He used no protection and after a month or so, his otherwise robust health began to deteriorate. A visit to a doctor revealed that he had AIDS. Not willing to live until his condition grew worse, until his shameful disease be discovered, he committed suicide. Before swallowing 30 sleeping pills of compose, "He thought about his children. What would they make of it all? But perhaps they would be better off without him. Besides, hadn't he ceased to matter to them already? (p. 295)

Choosing women of different shapes, colors and sizes made it easier for Mohan to avoid monotony in the many ways and sexual act. Mohan Kumar managed to be fond of all his women. But then that's not difficult - they are all fantasy ones. With the exemption of his wife, they admired having sex with him, and wanted as much as possible, were never repulsive, quizzical or maudlin and chose their own moment to say goodbye. He never even had the hassle of having to chuck them off.

Sex is still considered a taboo, if a man is not having extra marital affairs it's good but most men commit debauchery in their mind. Thoughts can easily get translated into action. Well the idea is not to support what Mohan did but to prove that what Mary Joseph, Sarojini, Molly, Susanthika even

Dhanno provided Sonu could have easily provided. A child in marriage acts like a bond, but even after having two wonderful kids, marital bliss, financial stability their marriage collapsed due to Sonu's incessant nagging, bad disposition, she had no desire either to develop or continue their marriage. She found faults with him, never responded to any of his pains to make them happy and content. As a consequence, Mohan Kumar got awfully crestfallen. She made his life miserable. He couldn't even enjoy his evening drinks and TV. He slowly drifted away from her. It's true that Mohan Kumar had an exceptionally strong urge for sex. But due to his troubled nuptial life, he could not enjoy sex even for months and well to a certain extent Mohan is even responsible he could have easily nipped the matter in the bud and confronted her at the outset of troubles.

Sex is elemental sometimes happy married life is just a façade; partners think that by making babies it what sex was all meant for, it's much more and frustrations in married life can lead to the thought of having

multiple partners, or best easy sex with maids, colleagues or anyone available. Though sex is a physical act, it is also connected to human mind, and persona as a whole. It is not the camaraderie that Mohan Kumar sought; only the company, not of a human being of opposite sex, but of female body just for sex. As a consequence, this extended line of paramours point to no progress or consciousness in Mohan Kumar. It only substantiates his belief that lust rather than love shapes human life. 'Love cannot last very long without lust. Lust has no time limit and is the true foundation of love and affection.' But Mohan Kumar consciously lived only on the level of lust, safeguarding himself from any affection. As soon as he sensed that the girl he was dating was getting emotionally involved, he dropped her. Mohan Kumar's approach to sex and his recognition of manhood with sex drive unfortunately ended his life. In brief, *The Company of Women* celebrates the universal and the undying story of man's affiliation with woman; the relationship of adore, sex, and obsession.

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