



## **Consequences of Actions in Khuswant Singh's "Karma"**

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### **Abstract**

Khushwant Singh's short story "Karma," first published in his collection *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories*, offers a poignant exploration of identity, colonial mimicry, and the consequences of one's choices. This paper examines the actions and decisions of the protagonist, Sir Mohan Lal, as emblematic of postcolonial anxieties and the interplay between personal pride and cultural alienation. It delves into the moral, social, and existential repercussions of his actions, analyzing the symbolism and narrative techniques employed by Singh to underscore the theme of karma—the inevitability of reaping what one sows.

The concept of karma—a central tenet in many Indian philosophical traditions—underscores the idea that actions have consequences, both immediate and cumulative. In Khushwant Singh's short story "Karma," this concept is brought to life through the tragic downfall of Sir Mohan Lal, a man torn between his Indian heritage and his obsession with British culture. The story examines how choices informed by arrogance and self-delusion can lead to alienation and humiliation. This paper explores the consequences of Sir Mohan Lal's actions, providing insights into the postcolonial identity crisis and Singh's critique of cultural mimicry.

"Karma" is centered on Sir Mohan Lal, a self-proclaimed anglophile, and his wife, Lachmi, a traditional Indian woman. While traveling by train, Sir Mohan Lal's disdain for his own culture and his efforts to emulate the British elite are evident in his mannerisms, dress, and speech. In stark contrast, Lachmi's simplicity and connection to her roots highlight the cultural divide between the two. The climax occurs when Sir Mohan Lal, confident in his cultivated Englishness, attempts to engage with British soldiers on the train but is met with rejection and physical humiliation. This moment serves as a brutal reminder of the consequences of his disconnection from his identity and community.

Sir Mohan Lal's actions are deeply rooted in his desire to distance himself

from his Indian identity. His meticulous grooming, preference for Western attire, and disdain for anything "Indian" reflect his internalized colonial mindset. This alienation, however, comes at a cost—his inability to truly belong to either culture. The British soldiers, whom he seeks to impress, see through his pretensions and reject him, while his own people, represented by Lachmi, are estranged by his condescension.

- The humiliation suffered by Sir Mohan Lal is not merely physical but existential. His rejection by the British soldiers underscores the futility of his attempts to assimilate into a culture that views him as an outsider. Simultaneously, his alienation from his own culture leaves him without a sense of belonging, illustrating the personal cost of cultural mimicry.

Sir Mohan Lal's pride in his perceived superiority over his compatriots is central to his downfall. His arrogance blinds him to the realities of his social position and the inherent racism of the colonial system. Singh's portrayal of this hubris is both tragic and satirical, emphasizing the disconnect between Sir Mohan's self-perception and how he is perceived by others.

- The rejection by the British soldiers serves as a karmic retribution for Sir Mohan Lal's arrogance. His hubris, which led him to dismiss his own culture and people, is ultimately the

very trait that exposes him to ridicule and rejection.

The juxtaposition of Sir Mohan Lal and Lachmi highlights the gender dynamics of the story. While Sir Mohan represents pretension and alienation, Lachmi embodies authenticity and resilience. Her simplicity and acceptance of her cultural identity stand in stark contrast to her husband's vanity and insecurity.

- Lachmi's unaffected demeanor and traditional values allow her to navigate her world with a sense of dignity and self-assurance, unlike

Sir Mohan Lal, whose affectations lead to his humiliation. This contrast serves as a subtle critique of the gendered expectations and consequences of cultural assimilation.

Khushwant Singh employs various literary devices to underscore the theme of karma and the consequences of Sir Mohan Lal's actions:

- **The Train Compartment:** The first-class compartment symbolizes Sir Mohan Lal's aspirations and his misplaced confidence in his social mobility. His expulsion from this space signifies the collapse of his illusions.
- **Mirror:** The mirror in which Sir Mohan Lal admires himself serves as a metaphor for his self-absorption and delusion.

Singh's use of satire is evident in his portrayal of Sir Mohan Lal's exaggerated mannerisms and speech. This mockery highlights the absurdity of cultural mimicry and the protagonist's lack of self-awareness.

The stark contrast between Sir Mohan Lal and Lachmi underscores the themes of authenticity versus pretense. This juxtaposition serves to amplify the consequences of Sir Mohan's actions and choices.

"Karma" can be read as a critique of colonialism and its psychological impact on colonized subjects. Sir Mohan Lal's actions reflect the internalization of colonial attitudes and the resulting identity crisis faced by many in postcolonial societies.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry is particularly relevant in analyzing Sir Mohan Lal's behavior. His attempts to mimic British culture result in a distorted

identity that is neither fully British nor fully Indian. This hybridity, while intended to grant him prestige, ultimately exposes him to ridicule and rejection.

Lachmi's character, though secondary, represents a form of passive resistance to colonial influence. Her acceptance of her identity and culture serves as a counterpoint to Sir Mohan Lal's alienation, illustrating the resilience of

traditional values in the face of cultural imperialism.

Khushwant Singh's "Karma" is a powerful exploration of the consequences of actions rooted in arrogance, cultural alienation, and identity crisis. Through the downfall of Sir Mohan Lal, Singh critiques the futility of mimicry and the psychological toll of colonialism. The story serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of authenticity and the inevitability of karma—the principle that one must ultimately face the consequences of one's choices.

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