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COMBINING EAST AND WEST: AN ANALYSIS OF DEMANDS AND REPRIMANDS OF
KHUSHWANT'S *MOHAN KUMAR* AND UPDIKE'S *OWEN MACKENZIE*

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Abstract

Light is not valued until one experiences darkness. Similarly, to appreciate knowledge and nobility in nature one has to undergo disgraceful feelings born out of ignorance and betrayal. In this way, every contrasting element in nature enhances the aura of its opposite counterparts. Human nature, though born as virtuous yet tends to be evil. Literature assists us in evaluating this nature by placing the virtuous or evil elements in point scale for proper comparison. Most of the time, mankind descends into such shameful abyss that even reminiscent virtues are not able to bring the scales in equilibrium. In such cases no option is left except to analyse the contrasting traits or elements in nature. Our only hope is to subject the evil to shame and moralise it, if, at all possible. It depends on the level and intensity and extent of that element in nature as to how to compare it and to what. Literature being an instructive art enjoys the freedom and license to eulogise, comment, criticize or compare any one or more artistic pieces and point out the contrast as well as human follies. This quality of literature entitles it to be the supreme manoeuvre.

The proposed study analyses the outcome of the greedy sexual ventures of the protagonist Mohan Kumar in *The Company of Women*, the literary piece produced by one of the leviathans of the Indian world of letters – Kushwant Singh. The paper also undertakes a minor comparison with Owen Mackenzie, the protagonist and the sex maniac of a western novel *Villages* by John Updike. Both the protagonists are natives of their own countries but one of them is allegedly influenced by the other's culture which affects former's life adversely.

Keywords: East, West, maniac, sex, medieval, lechery, transience.

Mohan Kumar vs Owen Mackenzie

The life-story of Mohan Kumar, an Indian middle-class descendant, gets its kick-start at its most collapsing point – his separation from his rich wife Sonu, the daughter of Delhi based mill-owner. Khushwant Singh's protagonist, Mohan Kumar, unlike other central male characters of Indian fiction, is not a victim of grinding poverty or exploitation or diseases, not childless or ugly, not a

melancholy lover and not even burdened with the stigma of casteism. In fact, he is an intelligent product of Ivy League College (USA) with degrees in Computers and Management, middle-aged and a successful businessman in the world of textiles with his international export bulk and variety increasing manifold in terms of an impressive turnover that has allowed him to be a 'part of the charmed circle of Delhi's super rich'. Moreover, he is father to two

normal and healthy kids and husband of a typical Indian possessive and demanding wife. What more a family man would desire?

Surprisingly, Khushwant's Mohan is always restless with his family life and with the passing time the couple experiences more frequent quarrels and spats. Initially the quarrels sound like every next household debates as Sonu feels uncomfortable in the presence of her father-in-law who moves in with the newly wedded couple into the house gifted by Sonu's wealthy father. Though Mohan comes up with a generous solution and purchases a bungalow in Maharani Bagh, a posh locality in Delhi, yet his 'sad and diminished' father moves to Haridwar. To his horror, Mohan realises that his wife is a bitter woman and incapable of showering their house with happiness. Her biggest problem was her jealous and possessive nature as she could not tolerate her husband's liberal attitude with 'other women'. Several years after their marriage, even after begetting two children, there are no signs of mutual adjustment. Quarrels, disputes, communication gap, bodily compulsions, loveless sex and fragmented exchanges become their routine affair.

Gradually Mohan is fed up of his wife and reminiscences of his early youth begin to nag him – his sumptuous sexual layouts with his female partners back in States. Sexually garnished thoughts begin to feed upon Mohan's psyche and he longs for sexual liberty out of the domains of wedlock:

'Mohan was not given to introspection. But his stormy marriage had made him an amateur philosopher of marriage and love. Marriages, he concluded, are not made in heaven. . .made on earth. . .for earthly reasons. . .first priority is money. At the time.sex urges are of explosive dimensions. . .urge begins to abate. . .loses its urgency. . .routine affair. . . No matter how close. . .a married couple. . .possibility of a pleasant diversion in an adulterous relationship is never far from their minds. . .Occasional adultery, Mohan was convinced, did not destroy a marriage. . .often proved to be a cementing factor. . .where husband could not give his wife. . .sex she needed. . .where wife

was frigid. It was silly to condemn adultery as sinful. . . often saved marriages from collapsing. . .could have saved his. (*Company of Women*, 06-07)

After going through this thirteen years long ordeal, what Mohan cannot understand is how 'he had allowed himself to be offered for sale' when his father, proud of his US educated only son, advertised the photographs and bio-data in several newspapers for matrimonial column, following which, during a series of invitations, introductions and temptations, Rai Bahadur Lala Achint Ram made the highest bid and gave Sonu's hand in marriage. But what Mohan does not understand is that he had and will always fall prey to his selfish desires willingly or unwillingly. Basically, Mohan Kumar is symbolic of cowardice and lechery who gives in at the apparent prospects of any life project but he lacks farsightedness. He is also symbolic of most Indian flourishing next door youth who give in easily to their parents' desires of having ties with high class families.

For a better insight into Mohan's mindset and how his motherless childhood as well as the western culture changed his behaviour, Khushwant Singh takes us into several flashbacks where a five years old motherless Mohan greedily devours his babysitter's breasts while his father is away at work. Later on, an extraordinarily intelligent student Mohan graduates from his degree college with excellence and wins a scholarship to Princeton University. America with its in-campus frankness and undue liberality almost shocks a conservative upper caste Hindu from India. This technique of flashbacks reveals a friendly relation between *The Company of Women* and *Villages*. John Updike's '*Villages* skips back and forth between an old age of second childishness and memories of Owen's prolonged sexual education, a task seen to by a number of women. . .' (LRB, Thomas Karshan)

In America, Mohan loses his virginity to a black American athletic student, Jessica Browne and he leaves the readers wonderstruck with his juicy relationship with a Pakistani student Yasmeen Wanchoo, a life-jerking episode which results in creating a friendly corner in Mohan's heart for

Pakistanis, may be a ray for across-border friendly relations that Khushwant desires to present his readers with. Mohan realises that the American society never objects at sexual relationships of any kind except those which lead to racial issues. An illusionary strong chemistry turned fleeting affair with Jessica hurts Mohan and lets loose a reign of 'sexploits' in US and 'scores with scores of women':

Within few months of joining the university, I made some good friends. . had no interest in sports. . .my American friends. . .persuaded me to take up games. . .try my hand at tennis. What followed the first game changed the course of my life. After. . .tennis court. . .went along with the boys to take a shower. . .shocked to see them strip naked and exchange obscenities about the sizes of their penises. . .I undid my towel. . .became the centre of attention. .my penis was thicker and larger. . .any other boy, white or black. . .Girls were curious to see. . .started going out with girls. . .ran into Jessica Browne. . .best woman tennis player. . .tall, slender, chocolate brown, big bosom, narrow hips, protruding buttocks. . .introduced ourselves. . .became my regular date. . .started with a peck on the cheeks, progressed to kissing on lips, and then full blooded mouth kissing. . .she took me to her bed. . .lost my virginity. . .blissful days. . .honeymoon without wedding. . .no sooner had the first cherry. . .come into flower. . .our relationship soured. . .Jessica got irritated . . .over small things. . .snapped at me. . .began to drift apart. . .stopped dating. . .I saw her go out with another boy. . .I felt a stab of jealousy. . .something that Americans disdain as medieval emotion. . .plenty of girls. . .I . . .went on the rampage like a stud bull in a herd of cows on heat. . .lost count of girls I bedded. . .
(*Company of Women*, 70-75)

Thus, comes back Mohan from the States after six years richly smelling of blonde, Jewish, European, Mexican, Caucasian and Latin American girls after taking his degree in Management and Computers along with an advance diploma in Finance. Unfortunately, Mohan's psyche suffers because he

becomes used to unabashed and unrestrained sexual encounters, develops a feeling of vanity and complex due to his extraordinarily big penis and he comes to India a victim of 'narcissism' but these facts, to some extent, remain hidden from the Indians' eyes.

In this way, once Sonu is back to her parents' house for ever, Mohan Kumar, deeply convinced that 'lust is the real meaning of love,' starts sniffing for a sperm depository where he would give an outlet to his desires. In fact, he remembers that once he served a temporary sexual outlet with one of the two South Indian baby nurses appointed to look after the needs of his newborn child while Sonu still needed to recover and asked him not to expect any intimacy for six months. Coming back to present, till he finds a solution, he would not have to spend his days in gloom as he has enough business and sport in life – his textiles business with its monthly turnover of twenty lakhs, membership of three elite Delhi clubs and himself being one of the most charming single men in his own social circle. All he lacks is a female companion to share his bed temporarily so that any question of possession or claim would not arise. As a matter of fact, he avoids sleeping with his friends' wives, an adventure that could get the life out of him in a conservative society like India. The idea of visiting brothels, peeping into prostitutes' quarters and begging for sex the way it pleased him is too humiliating and far from safe. Scanning through the matrimonial columns of the national dailies, he attempts to hawk for something to match his demand but everything is matrimony-obsessed. After much thinking he decides to turn the natural way the things go in this world, into his own favour. Instead of pursuing females he decides to invite them to him. He goes ahead and creates a space for his own demand. He drafts an advertisement for the kind of urgent need that torments him and surprisingly, it is printed in more than one newspaper with the widest reading score. A relieved and triumphant Mohan celebrates his newly found freedom at night by urinating noisily in the garden and would not mind to be compared to a 'dog marking its exclusive ownership' over some territory.

In the meantime, not able to withstand his feel, he targets his housemaid, Dhanno, with whom, apart from an unabashed and unrestricted sexual pleasure, he has the privilege to toss her into and out of his bed as per his cravings and retreats. Dhanno is an easy access – housemaid, greedy, easily gives in and too weak to point him out publicly.

He could double her salary, give her children toys. . .sweets. . .master-servant liaisons were not uncommon. . .menials welcomed second income. . . their spouses were not very particular. . .infidelity provided. . .some more money. No messy hassles. . .demanding attention. . .presents. . .parties. . .advantage of convenience: sex on the tap. . .(*Company of Women* 13)

His trysts with Dhanno go unexpectedly juicy and flavoured and he grabs the chance to explore her tactics in detail which, obviously, vary from woman to woman. It is with Dhanno that Mohan Kumar typically starts his journey with women in India. No doubt, Yasmeen Wancho of Kashmir holds the first position taking into account the 'SAARC spirit' of Mohan Kumar when he completes the full circle with Susantika from Sri Lanka. Moreover, Khushwant Singh ties the East and the West of the world and grabs the opportunity to slam the West in its face for belittling Indians allegedly for their poor percentage in sexual fervour.

Around the same time Mohan gets his first and favourable response for his advertisement of seeking a live-in companion – a highly educated college teacher from neighbouring state of Haryana, Sarojini Bharadwaj – a single mother, disappointed in marriage with an NRI from Canada. Once things are settled between them, Mohan looks forward to the spicy life he has framed for himself. Preparing for a concubinage life itself seems exciting – Mohan weighs everything – answering machine for his home telephone, signboards for his house warning people not to approach without appointment and to be wary of the 'dogs' inside and introducing Sarojini as a distant relative to his own servants.

Sarojini is the third woman (in India) and the first live-in partner to provide paid sexual services to Mohan. The reader feels absurd when a connection

is sought between her respectable status, noble job, motherhood and feminine consciousness as compared to her reckless venture to get laid with a stud seeking bed-partners on rental basis. For Sarojini, wantonness can be an acceptable part of life if there is no other legal and emotional choice available. In spite of being overcome with shame several times at such a filthy deal, she manages to lighten her burden of guilt in the shadow of the liveliest god Krishna who loved Radha and other married/virgin females and even then commanded respect.

As for Mohan, lechery and irony become inseparable elements of his personality which is driven by lust, greed, betrayal and escapism at every step. He manages to tell lie very fluently when he denies any prospect of sexual relationship with his sweepress in front of his friends. His tagline, 'I'm not a sex maniac', is his slogan in public while in private his only way to live is through having sex and being proud of his exceptionally big penis. On the other hand, Sarojini, initiating the deal with reluctance turns out stronger and more demanding partner than Mohan when it comes to their nightly feasts. Not so 'endowed', Sarojini becomes the goddess of elation once touched by the lustrous magic of Mohan's libido which she momentarily mistakes for real love. She also tries to conquer Mohan's household after her first night with him but soon comes to terms with Mohan's permanent world where he knows how to value his possessions ranging from his business to his servants. Sarojini soon realises that she is there only to gratify Mohan's fleshy cravings though at times he ends up experiencing the emotional face of love through her courage, literariness, friendliness, passion and cooperation with his dog-like freedom.

The sumptuous spouse-like life of Mohan and Sarojini is shattered before the deal is over due to the death of Sonu's father. As Mohan feels obliged to attend the funeral, the heart-burn and sarcasm of Sonu's brother makes it clear that the not-very-loyal servants leaked Mohan's inner life out. Mohan could figure out how Sonu must have banged it right that this 'cousin' is none other than a whore who must have responded to his dirty advertisement, Sonu

being the first to respond with a card spelling out 'bastard' in capital letters.

Sarojini realises the 'enormity of the folly' only when Mohan shares with her the level of ancestrally rich Sonu's power, contacts, tactfulness, wit, jealousy, nimbleness and her blazing revengeful instincts which could ruin Sarojini's career and her relations with her own son and parents. Sarojini's response that they 'had been living in a fool's paradise' becomes the most clever response that Mohan ever gets from a female but he never ponders over it. The response carries in it the worldwide wisdom of a literary person and sums up all the spider's-web of Mohan's life. Thus, Sarojini leaves Mohan for good and retreats into her lonely but real life taking with her enough books to last a lifetime indicating that permanent and non-toxic love can be fulfilled only in the company of the books.

The interim period till Mohan finds a new partner is a great opportunity to get a glimpse of his materialistic social life which is typical of the rich and the able. Mohan belongs to the circle of young millionaires and frequents clubs where membership is purely based on making first or second million-goal before completing forty years of age. Organising young achievers' club, Millions' club or Trade U.S, all are inspirations or imitations of American life style which the graduates from U.S picked to create an American aura on their Indian soil. Mohan attaches himself from one club to another due to his rocketeering success. Also heavily coded home parties garnished with wine and silver cutlery, hypocrisy of men and diamonds of women are an integral part of the routine. Drinks and eatables exist just to fuel gossips and news crackles. Mohan's hypocrisy also knows no bounds when at such a party, as Dhanno comes to collect the table scraps to feed her family, male guests suggest him to use his sweepress 'for bad purposes' and he easily pretends to shrug off the idea disgustingly. A kaleidoscopic view of Mohan's business-class life would remind the reader of the society of Restoration England – show buzz and glamour parties, gluttony, see-through dresses and doted-on pet animals. Mohan's temporary seclusion is also accompanied with a momentary desire to cherish his

'loneliness', which symbolises something more than mere a word. For Mohan, his 'emptier' house (save its inanimate deluxe accessories) with its enchanting 'emptiness', where he occasionally misses his mistresses in its ominous 'silence', is a sign of his absolute kingship. His cosy evenings with their sips of wine take him over the wings of his college memories.

Mohan resorts to sexual reliefs with his sweepress Dhanno till he settles for a Goa massage girl Molly Gomes, whose estrangement from religion proves a common factor in her sexual relationship with Mohan. Her talkative nature, carefree attitude, nostalgic reveries and her obligatory urge to hurry back to Goa brings Mohan closer to her; something that Sarojini longed for but failed to attain. The narrator shows us these two faces of Mohan simultaneously to clarify the fact that a self-dependent, confident and self-sufficient person enjoys more respect and dotage no matter what his morals are. Molly lands in Delhi impersonating a lady doctor from Goa and a guest at Mohan's house. She enjoys more freedom, friendliness and the least interference from the servants who have already learnt their lesson at Sarojini's time. Molly spends a blissful time lavishing Mohan with indoor and rooftop massage treats, making his sperms run crazy all over under his skin, not just through his penis. Molly doesn't shy away or coil inside herself. She is outspoken, outpouring, assertive and never hides her past. Instead, she cries out her feminine spirit, her disturbed childhood and her ideas against orthodoxy. As compared to Sarojini whose desire to cook for Mohan irritated him, Molly took to cooking liberally which amused Mohan. Her repeated emphasis on this relationship being a temporary one and that she would never prefer to cling to it for long, kept Mohan relieved and cut him to his right size. Also Molly sensed Mohan's unease when she jokingly fantasized about their future together.

I wasn't sure what Molly would think of a long-term commitment. . . way she talked....she missed Goa very much. . . enjoyed her being with me better than the company of all other women. . . she wrote to her mother every week. . . (*Company of Women*, 193)

I know you won't marry me, and I don't want to marry you either. It would never work. . . Cut out the crap about love. . . you just enjoy being fucked by me. You'll soon tire out of it. I have an insatiable appetite for sex. . . (Company of Women, 194)

Though some topics discussed between Kumar and Molly are thought provoking such as menstrual cycle in women and strange 'menopause' in men after fifty when some start 'behaving oddly', 'have final bouts of womanizing', 'paw young girls' while others 'waste' their time in worshipping. According to Kumar, as long as a man sparkles sexually, he can proudly identify himself with his own race and can claim to earn and fuck as his birth right. Some philosophical puzzles that Mohan faces with each partner indicates towards the temporariness of every pleasure on this earth, even life. This theory of transience tries to prick its way into Mohan's conscience but his obsession with libido overthrows everything.

Woman after woman satiated Kumar's lust and 'filled his life to overflowing' till his experiment 'of taking on mistresses' earned him a 'reputation of a compulsive womanizer', 'loafer', and 'a filthy sex maniac' and Mohan becomes an object of 'stare and remarks'. His ex-wife, Sonu is shown to have never failed to prove that Mohan Kumar has 'money' but 'no class'. Through her 'gossip-mill' she always manifests that she has been ancestrally rich and that Mohan has only recently stepped into the money-world and that he is not made to handle himself through it. On the other hand, Mohan wonders why he has not been able to apply his right to free sex and that also on a dignified platform, in the eastern part of the world. To cut short the list of Kumar's mistresses, Susantika, a diplomat from Srilanka, joins him on Haridwar trip. During this trip she makes her body accessible to Mohan Kumar, revealing her exceptionally large cunt; a manifestation to have gone through a lot of penises – the only thing that Mohan likes in a woman and craves for – no strings, no commitments, no obligations – just squirt and deposit game.

Short conversation between Mohan and Sue (Susantika) regarding practicing a religion gives

us a glimpse into life-code and religious beliefs of our male protagonist. Before Susantika's appearance, the reader mistakes Mohan's libidinous approach as a result of his motherless childhood, his acquired values of the West and his jealous and above all his rich and arrogant wife. Surprisingly, Mohan reveals to Sue that he felt repelled from Buddhist values because Buddhism emphasizes on 'Dukkha' – 'sorrow' and 'overcoming all sorts of worldly pleasures'. Mohan loves Hinduism because to him it is a religion of merriment.

'Our professor laid a lot of stress on Dukkha. . . teachings of the Buddha. . . to overcome desire for food, sex and the good things. . . I found that hard to accept. . . strength of Hinduism. . . it is a happy religion. Our rituals allow lots of fun and frolic, drinking, dancing, gambling, flirting. I go by that rather than fasting, penance. . . (Company of Women, 202)

In spite of being son to an extremely religious father, Mohan did not know Hinduism for its penance and the steadfast values. On the other hand, Sue is not able to defend her religious values because of lack of knowledge and her wavering faith. But at times even her short knowledge gives her space for queries which bring Mohan to a thaw, as when she accuses him of perceiving his own religion as passport for 'fun and frolic' and whether he really has come to Ganga river to cleanse himself of his libidinous thoughts and sins. Mohan's attitude and response show great disrespect towards his own religion for he keeps liquor in his room in the ashram and resorts to unabashed consumption whether 'prohibition or no prohibition'. In an attempt to dive at 'Har Ki Pauri', Mohan's eyes feast upon the tiny built Srilankan's bodily curves which has 'everything in miniature'. Recalling his father's way of worship, he also offers two palms full of water to the sun but when it comes to name the people for whom he is doing the ritual, he has but a few tantalizing names in his mind, ranging from Jessica Browne to most of the women who bedded him. In this way, Mohan's philosophy of life has a western approach where:

'Sex is the top priority. Sex is the greatest thing in a human's life. The more varied it is

the more enjoyable'.(Company of Women, 209)

This is a point where Khushwant's protagonist becomes an Indian version of Updike's Owen Mackenzie. Obsession of Mohan Kumar with females and the sexual intercourse reminds us of the carving seen by the child Owen 'on the back wall of the Willow playground-equipment shed':

There was another kind of sin. . .a child's red crayon had scribbled two penises. . .more knowing hand had incised in a pencil. . .looked like a swollen letter M but. . .was a naked woman, legs. . .spread to reveal between them a slit. . .curls of hair. . .below it a dot. . .woman was opening herself to be fucked. . .certain. . .a woman somewhere had allowed herself to be viewed this way. . .had no arms or head. . .without feet. . .the artist felt that these were inessential. . . (Updike's *Villages*, 18-19)

It is interesting to notice here that the name of Khushwant's protagonist starts with M, an indication that somewhere the initial letter itself has been a big influence on the name bearer, thus his obsession with the fleshy games with women. In America, Mohan gets along easily and is almost the best fitted person for the western society due to its specific societal structure. Only the eastern world cannot accept him the way he is. On the other hand, Updike's Owen Mackenzie's sexual odyssey is adorned with the American women who are all fine ladies and respectable wives or spinsters and with whom he has extramarital affairs. Unlike Mohan's wife Sonu who leaves her house for good and takes away her children, Owen's wife Phyllis unknowingly knows everything going around and how her husband rises as a hot commodity in the male market of *Villages*. Owen's shameful adultery is termed as decently as:

'prolonged sexual education. . .where Owen's first marriage to Phyllis is superseded by affairs with Faye, Stacey, Alissa, Antoinette, Vanessa, and other barely distinguished female names. . .' (LRB, Thomas Karshan)

Back in Delhi, the trysts between Mohan and Susantika continue and this time Mohan has no need to come face to face with his servants, carrying lame excuses to hide his dirty affair. Sue occupies an apartment in Delhi which spares her the image of Mohan's mistress. Moreover, as both are equally willing for this relationship, there arises no question of paid relationship. Having had already spent one year service in India, Sue has two years left. These two years flew on their wings and the Srilankan diplomat is suddenly shaken out of her 'fool's paradise' and directed to go to New York – the next location of her service. Just like the end of every other affair, Sue's last words to Mohan echo every other mistress's last words and they also echo the transience of the worldly activities. Ranging from Sarojini to Susantika each woman has a piece of finality to pour into Mohan's deaf ears.

After Sue's departure, Mohan begins to lose himself and his predatory urges do not overcome him too soon. He loses interest in work, socialisation and his eyes refuse to scan through the responses he got from willing females. He even develops a sort of disinterest in Haridwar visits. For him those trips are useless and void of passion. He starts missing his father greatly. A strange change comes upon him and he craves for the company of his progeny but unfortunately it is too late and the children seem least interested in him or in his property. Instead, they abhor the view of the house which they know has 'housed' many mistresses of their father and everything in the house must have borne and witnessed the touches and the caresses of those filthy hands. For the first time in his life, Mohan takes to one of the most detoxifying activities in the universe – write his own reflections about life and prepare a memoir by jotting down his previous experiences and present emotional upheavals in a diary. This he does to fill his restlessly vacant evenings.

Mohan comes to notice with quite an unpleasant realisation that his sex drive has started losing its fervour but he resolves to drag himself hard to revive it because the idea of developing impotency so soon and that also after such a sweet, savage sex life. The situation simply horrified and humiliated him. So he took to various medicines,

massage treatments and even resorted to wild fantasies but to no avail. Mohan forces his body to go against nature and in his hour of blindness commits a fatal mistake. A business trip takes him to Bombay where he checks in the Taj Hotel and is overwhelmed to see the inviting breasts and buttocks of the young girls in the lounge. He is pleased with the blood trying to run over to his penis. In his room he tips the waiter handsomely and asks him to fetch a woman. The waiter calls on a local prostitute and Mohan goes ahead twice and has unprotected sex with her.

Mohan regains his confidence and once back in Delhi he feels the cheer hues in his life. But in six months he develops strange symptoms such as fever and cough accompanied with itching. Mohan is put under the medical supervision of Dr. Malhotra who soon develops a doctor-patient trust and confidentiality with Mohan. A series of medical tests reveal something wrong with Mohan's blood and confirms him an HIV positive. In his hours of gloom Mohan swears and curses his phallus and drinks heavily. After some days Mohan recovers outwardly but starts dying within himself with each passing day. A painful, discontented and undignified death ahead and a sex crazy past is all he has. Mohan spends sleepless nights brooding over his approaching death, companionless life and his large material wealth which cannot buy him a sound health.

Dr. Malhotra prescribes him sleeping pills and diet regime. Mohan senses a time-limit in the words of Dr. Malhotra so he sets down to prepare his will. He divides his property quite honestly and generously among his children and his servants. For two years Mohan leads a seemingly healthy life, abstains from sex and hops between his works and his old friends. At the onset of the new season, Mohan catches a violent cold and symptoms of TB in his lungs prove a death rattle for his life. Mohan changes his routine; he gives up sleeping pills, turns to Bhagavad Gita and recites his father's copy of Gayatri Mantra from dawn to dusk till sleep has mercy on him and he dozes off. Passages on death prove to be very confusing for the ever flesh craving Mohan who has never had any idea about sublime contentment or communion with God.

'There is no death,' Lord Krishna said, . . . only a passing from one form to another. . . there was no proof. . . to support Krishna saying, 'For one who dies, birth is certain.' Mohan. . . did not understand it. He would soon die but that he would soon be reborn, he could not accept. (*Company of Women*, 231-32)

And so, one night after a bout of cough he spits blood and that is when he takes a decisive step and needs all his sleeping pills. He envelopes himself in the influence of the idea to commit suicide. Therefore in his loneliness and in the dead of the night, Mohan Kumar gulps down 30 sleeping pills, reading Gayatri mantra after swallowing each pill. He prefers to die a death of cowardice which would at least ensure his dignity by keeping everything in suspense. The reader feels a touch of sympathy for the life-loving Mohan who takes such an extreme step, out of tender responsibility, to spare himself the pain of leaking out the concrete proof of his adultery in front of his own children.

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