



SOCIAL ISOLATION IN “SPARROWS” BY KHWAJA AHMAD ABBAS

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ABSTRACT

“Sparrows” by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas is about Rahim Khan a fifty year old man who isolates himself from the society due to the disappointments he gone through in his young life. He vents out his frustration in the form of rage at the society and his own family. Everyone was scared of his anger and ignored him. So, he was socially isolated. Though Rahim Khan is depicted as a ruthless man in the beginning, everyone is deeply moved by his love towards the sparrows at the end. He craves for love and solace and the sparrows in his hut were the only beings he expressed his love and tenderness. According to James S. House social isolation has an adverse effect on the health. Rahim Khan’s isolation leads to deprivation of love and consolation from the society and also his own family which at the end leads to his death.

Keywords: *Isolation, Social isolation, Alienation, Self estrangement*

INTRODUCTION

“Sparrows” is a beautifully woven short story by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas which captures the genuine nature of people in the society without any exaggeration. The story reveals a man’s frustration and disappointment which makes him to drift away and isolate himself from the society. Karl Marx states that alienation is the estrangement of people from all the aspects of their Gattungswesen as a consequence of a dissatisfied social life and personal life. Isolation is a result of a mechanical life where a person feels completely detached from the strings of human bonds. In the short story “Sparrows”, Rahim Khan is an old man of fifty years who isolates himself from the society and his own family. Everyone in the village looked at him

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indifferently. There is an instance where a villager named Kallu looks at Rahim Khan and exclaims, “There goes the hard hearted devil” (Abbas 28). The other villager Zalildar added that Rahim Khan has beaten his mare to death for straying into his field although he did not reveal that, it was a planned act of his sons. He knows how much the people around him hate him for being such a hard hearted person but something in him resists him from showing love.

Rahim Khan had a happy childhood like any other child. He was a charming youth who was good in athletic skill and wrestling. Everyone in the village admired him. As a young man, he had dreamt of joining in a touring circus and wanted to marry the village banya’s daughter Radha. But to his fate, both of his wishes were not fulfilled because of his father’s ego and they both belonged to different religions. In those days working in a touring circus is considered highly immoral for good peasant family in a village. So, his parents crushed his dreams and desires. The disappointments that Rahim Khan faced in his young life transformed him into a hard hearted person. It affects him throughout and rips away the gentleness and happiness out of his life completely.

According to Hegel, Culture was created by people but that distanced the people away as an alien force. Culture and society were created to keep people together and happy but most of the times that becomes the major reason of isolation. When a person fails to fulfill the expectations of the society, he is identified as someone who doesn’t fit the society. Rahim Khan was expected to behave in a way the society expects but he couldn’t because his parents as a part of the society failed to assist him in achieving his dreams. He vents out the failure and frustration in the form of rage at the society and his own family.

Even after marrying another woman and living with her for nearly thirty years Rahim Khan never considered changing his heart and attitude. He was not moved even when his sons Nuru and Bundu ran away from the house because of his arrogance. His wife becomes the only option upon whom he can vent out his frustration against his parents and society. She tolerated him for years but at a point of time she made her mind not to endure this pain anymore. Rahim Khan’s haughtiness towards his wife made her to flee from him one day. When he was informed about this by an old lady from the neighbourhood, he yelled at the lady unable to process his feelings. For the first time in his life Rahim Khan felt the loneliness that night. Even Rahim Khan’s hut was described as something that “stood gaunt and aloof, at a distance from the neighboring cluster of homes” (Abbas 29). In the morning, he wakes up late and curses his wife forgetting the fact that she is not there. He is not only occupied by grief but also by loneliness.

For years Rahim Khan quarrelled with everyone in the village and with his own family members which earned him the hatred of everyone. But being universally detested gives him

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a kind of grim satisfaction. Rahim Khan's loss of faith in the society made him to act sternly. He suffers emotional isolation rather than physical isolation. Social isolation over years and decades definitely started affecting his existence in all aspects. "No one in the village, of course, understood or tried to understand the reasons for this strange transformation of the cheerful and kind young man into the beast that he had become" (Abbas 34). Nobody bothered to know the reason behind his hostile behaviour. "Of understanding and sympathy he received none" (Abbas 34). He never received any sort of comfort from his family or the society when he needed it the most. The villagers looked at Rahim Khan just as a scary figure and shunned him in all the means which made him feel so bitter at the heart. He lets out his bitterness by being so authoritative over his wife and sought solace through that. The deprivation of love and consolation from everyone around makes him to lose faith in humanity and that anger completely isolates him from the society.

Social isolation can begin early in life. Psychological facts states "Some arise from childhood experiences of shame, guilt, inferiority or alienation, which undermine the achievement of personal identity" (Barbara and Newman, 469). Rahim Khan's frustration about his dreams being crushed in his young age has become the key reason for his isolation from the society. Lack of human comfort is yet another reason. Social isolation is most likely a cause and a symptom of emotional or psychological challenges. Rahim Khan's isolation from the society and family is mainly due to his emotional challenges. He was not able to interact with the people around him about the way he really feels. His inability to interact with others has created the emotional challenges in him.

Though Rahim Khan is depicted as a ruthless man in the beginning of the story, everyone is deeply moved by his craving for love and care at the end. His deep love for sons Nuru and Bundu is exposed when he names the tiny sparrows as Nuru and Bundu. He is a man who definitely longs for love and consolation but he feels ignored by the society. He is not able to get along with the society again. He was so used to that loneliness and he doubted his own self about living a normal life with others.

...his last thought was whether he would be able to endure a life without having an opportunity of indulging in what had now become his second nature. It was perhaps the only moment when Rahim Khan had a feeling, not exactly of affection for his wife, but of loneliness without her (Abbas 35).

Rahim Khan's longing for love is portrayed through his love for the sparrows. He was so interested in watching the tiny sparrows growing into young birds. He fed them and took care of them like his own children. Since the sparrows came into his life he appeared to be a peaceful man and the neighbours wondered at his peaceful behaviour. But still they were scared of his resentful attitude and stayed away from him. Nobody realized and accepted the

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genuine change that came in him. The sparrows were his only company and in them, he tried to find all the love and comfort he had lost. Once it rained heavily and the sparrows were completely drenched in the rain. The young ones were shivering and huddled up inside the wings of the mother. Rahim Khan was deeply moved by that and tried his best to repair the damaged roof. He managed to repair the roof but he was thoroughly drenched at the end which got him heavy fever. No one was there to take care of him and he lay without food and care. His health was deteriorating completely and even in that state he was only concerned about the sparrows. He was deeply worried about who will take care of them and feed them if he dies. The sparrows remained a kind of solace for Rahim Khan even though he was completely isolated from the society. He wanted to pour his love and emotions but nobody was there around him except the sparrows. The isolation from his family members and the villagers weakened him both physically and psychologically.

The magnitude of risk associated with social isolation is comparable with that of cigarette smoking and other major biomedical and psychosocial risk factors. However, our understanding of how and why social isolation is risky for health — or conversely — how and why social ties and relationships are protective of health, still remains quite limited (House 273-274).

As stated by James S. House about social isolation, Rahim Khan's isolation had an adverse effect on his health. The villagers had sympathy for him but nobody bothers to go and look after him. They stayed away and called out for his wife and sons. But by the time they arrived, it was too late and they found only the giant body of Rahim Khan without his soul. The short story clearly captures the emotions of an isolated man and how denial of love and solace ruins his life. K.A.Abbas has woven this story with an intense meaning that love and consolation which is not given on time definitely goes squander.

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