

Hello and welcome to a critical
study of Gurdial Singh's
short story, 'A Season of No Return.'

This story has been translated from
Punjabi into English by Rana Nayar.

I'm Prema Rocha from Saint Xavier's College.

Let me take you through an outline
of what we will do in this session.

We will introduce the writer.

We will go through a little synopsis of the story.

We look at the themes, we'll consider
the style of the story and reflect
on a few points in the conclusion.

At the end of this session you
will understand the central
themes emerging from the text.

You will appreciate the style of
the author and you will develop
a critical perspective on the
Indian short story in English.

Let us get to know the writer.

Gurdial Singh was born in Punjab in 1933.

His family was not very well to do.

They were economically not well off.

And therefore he was withdrawn

from school to help his father.

His father was a carpenter and a blacksmith,

and for about 6 to 7 years

he helped his father,

But at the same time he continued

to give his exams privately

encouraged by his school headmaster.

He went on to complete his Bachelors

and his Masters degree and taught in

school as well as in college.

Gurdial Singh says that writing

short fiction was his first love.

He wrote his first short story in 1957.

He is known for his novel 'Marhi Da Diva'

that was published in 1964.

He was influenced by the Russian

masters Tolstoy and Chekhov,

and writers like Hemingway and Steinbeck.

He has been recognized with numerous

awards like the Jnanpith award,

the Sahitya Academy Award,

and even the Padma Shri.

Let us look at the synopsis

of 'A Season of No Return'.

The story is set in an urban

space close to the sea.

In the city you have Santokh with his wife

who is not named in the text and

they have a little son called Kaka.

This family has brought along Santokh's,

mother Kauri from the village in Punjab

to help with the pregnancy and the delivery of the child.

Now she has been in this

city with them for about a year.

Initially Kauri was very

happy living in the city.

She thought it was a paradise,

but slowly she begins to

find that time is dragging on.

She misses her old life and

slowly this depression manifests

in psychosomatic ailments like

she has a persistent cough.

She has backaches.

She feels like vomiting all the time.

She tries to tell her son

Santokh to send her back to the

village. Santokh says, why,

what problem do you have here?

Stay on your not needed there.

But after a while,

Santokh realises his mother's real issue,

that she is missing home and the

story ends with Santokh putting

her on a train to her village

in Punjab and returning home.

Those were the bare bones of the story,

but let's look at the themes a little deeper.

One of the important themes in this story,

'A Season of no Return is the conflict

between the rural and the urban.

You know Punjab was

called the Granary of India,

it was called the bread basket of India.

You have a system where people lived

in agrarian communities in joint families and the child was brought

up by so many hands.

But now Santokh has moved to the city.

They have nobody to take care of the baby.

It's a very common situation today and

therefore they bring the mother there.

But the mother is so rooted to the

earth, to her rural Punjab that she

misses the connect with her culture.

Another important theme in this

text is tradition versus modernity.

Post independence with

industrialization coming up,

you have so many people who

moved to the city.

As Santokh has moved to a place like that,

he has found a girl who is not of

the same caste and the entire 'biradari'

in Punjab and his family are not happy

about him marrying outside the caste.

But those are the demands of moving outside.

So, the text is rather socially realistic.

Yet another theme in this text

is a longing for home.

So much of our literature has

dealt with this nostalgia

for home. They say, 'home is where the

heart is' and 'there is no place like home.'

Similarly, Kauri has all the comforts in this city.

Her son is an engineer,

her daughter-in-law is a lecturer in college.

They live in a government space like a

bungalow, so she has all the comforts.

She doesn't have to do any work,

but still she pines for her own

space back in Punjab.

Other books that deal with this nostalgia

for home are texts like 'The Jungle

Book' and text like 'The Wizard of Oz.'

Lastly, we can look at how this text,

'A Season of no Return' explores

the female psyche.

Gurdial Singh handles the insights

into the woman's mind very sensitively.

So you have the mother Kauri,

who is not your stereotypical mother.

She does not run down her

daughter-in-law when her neighbour,

who she meets at the gurudwara,

talks about her own daughter-in-law badly.

She has nothing negative to

say about her daughter-in-law.

Yes, there may be a little bit of the

warmth missing from the relationship,

but she does not complain about her.

She even misses her daughter-

In-law back in Punjab,

in the village,

and she is not the conventional

mother who clings to her son.

So here you have a very special kind

of character as a protagonist in Kauri.

Let us look at the style of this text.

The title,

'A Season of no Return' seems metaphoric.

At one point in the text,

Kauri tells her son,

'What is this kind of place

where the seasons don't change?'

It's the same kind of season.

She misses the extreme climate of Punjab, which is

very hot or very cold,

and her son tells her 'Maaji' people in Punjab

must be yearning for this kind of climate

that does not turn.

You must have heard the phrase 'a

point of no return' in English.

It is a point from which you can't go back,

you can only finish the journey.

And now Kauri has reached

a point of no return.

She does not want to return to this place.

She simply wants to get back home.

So it is going to be a point of no return

for her and the season of no return.

She doesn't want to come back to this

place where everything is the same, everything is monotonous and

here she feels alienated.

Interestingly,

when her son Santokh puts Kauri

on the train and is returning,

he begins to feel extremely cold,

That's unusual because

this place is a moderate climate.

And he comes home and he pulls two blankets

over himself and he goes to sleep.

And I think that signifies the fact that

the mother who represents warmth and

love in his life. That season has now

gone back and will never return to him.

So the title is very poetic.

Besides the title also being symbolic,

there are other symbols in the text,

like when

initially the daughter-in-law

gives the mother-in-law

her Cup of tea in the morning.

her hand is trembling,

and the teacup shatters and breaks.

It is almost like Kauri has

reached a breaking point.

Let us look at the language.

Gurdial Singh's language is simple, the vocabulary is simple.

The sentences are simple,

Gurdial Singh is known as a microscopic writer.

Ordinary life comes under his microscope

and small things that otherwise

people would ignore come under his lens.

The text is also full of

Punjabi words like 'sarson-coloured tablet' and 'paratha' that Punjab

has given the world and terms like **langar**.

and 'piece of the moon' which is a literal

translation of 'chand ka tukda'.

In conclusion, we see how the text

looks so seemingly simple but how

literature can bring under focus

an entire branch that is sociology.

How literature can also deal with

so much in society. I'd like

to end with a note of

appreciation for the value of translations.

It is because of translations like this,

we have an idea of the richness

of our own cultural writing,

and the world has access to it too.

Thank you.