

Psychoanalysis of Hamid from “Eidgah” by Munshi Prem Chand: An In-depth Character Study

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Abstract

Prem Chand is a renowned fiction writer of the 20th century. He introduced new trends in Urdu short stories by establishing the modern standards of Urdu fiction. "Eidgah" is one of his prominent short stories. In this story, he has made the subject of self-reliance and self-confidence of the characters who grew up in poverty. While describing the character of Hamid, Prem Chand has riddled this character with contradictions. Hamid's character does not correspond to the matter of self-possession, self-confidence and matter-of-factness. In result, his personality has become controversial in accordance with idealism. This research paper is based on the contradictions, gaps and the psychological deviations of Hamid's character.

Keywords: Prem Chand, Eidgah, Hamid, self-possession, psychological deviation

Objective:

The objective of this paper is to analyze the protagonist of the Urdu short story “*Eid Gab*” written by pioneer and well-known Urdu short story writer Munshi Prem Chand through psychological concepts.

Research Question:

How to critically interpret the protagonist in the short story “*Eid Gab*” by applying psychological concepts?

Methodology:

The method used in this research involves textual and behavioral analysis of the protagonist in the short story “*Eid Gab*” by applying the basic concepts of psycho analysis.

Theoretical framework:

Psycho analysis is an interpretive approach that intends to unfold the deeper and underlying meanings of the character and provides a methodology to understand the human behaviors and related discriminative elements. We can say that psychoanalytic theory is primarily a theory of individual mental functioning. Influential scholar Sigmund Freud is known as key figure for his contribution to psychoanalysis as “Interpretation of Dreams” published in 1899. He distinguished between conscious and unconscious realms of the psyche and argued that the contents of unconscious largely determine cognition and behavior. His psychoanalytical work is being taken as the basic source of theoretical framework of this research article. The following are the key principles of psychoanalytic theory which are the inductive elements of this research:

1. Individuals' behavior is influenced by unconscious processes.
2. Individuals conflict with efforts to satisfy their instincts, and their own or societal standards.

Introduction:

Prem Chand is one of the founders of Urdu short stories. Earlier, there were a few translated and some original short stories in Urdu, but according to Urdu fiction criticism, they do not meet the technical standards of short stories. So, Prem Chand is the first regular fiction writer who has not only taken this genre seriously but also kept its technical nuances in mind. The basis of his intellectual attitudes is philanthropy, while he considers beliefs as a personal matter. He seems convinced of social justice beyond all kinds of communalism. His early short stories have a narrative tone, but his later studies of Russian and French literature introduced him to new intellectual and stylistic directions, and he became a supporter of the realist point of view. his realism is not a copy of the West, it was the result of his observation. According to Shehzad Manzar:

“Among the achievements of Prem Chand, the greatest achievement is that he made the common people, especially the rural people and their backwardness, the subject of his fiction and novels at a time when it was almost impossible for the common people to enter Urdu literature. His contemporaries were creating literature in which either the truths of life were missing or else their literature was all romantic and imaginative.” 1

He had a very healthy view of religion and considered all religions to be the source of goodness. A balanced intellectual attitude beyond religious bias can be seen in his short stories. "Hajj Akbar" and "Eid Gah" are important among his short stories written from a religious point of view. The short story "Eid Gah" is also important in the context that in this short story, he has presented poverty not as a weakness of the characters, but in the form of self-confidence and self-righteousness.

"Eidgab is a far greater legend than 'Shroud' in terms of its meaning. The special thing about 'Eidgab' is that the abundance of creativity in it has transcended the Marxism of Prem Chand and his progressivism in such a way that metaphysics has entered the short story, and a transcendental dimension has been created in it. On the other hand, the effect of poverty in 'Eidgab' has been reversed. In other stories of Prem Chand, poverty makes people insensitive and dull-minded, but in 'Eidgab' poverty has made the main character of the story very sensitive, intelligent and independent." 2

Is the main character of this fiction sensitive, intelligent and independent or is that character bound to the author? A psychological study of its protagonist is essential for a better understanding of this short story.

Discussion and Analysis:

The main character of the story is Hamid, who is only four years old and lives in a village with his grandmother after the death of his parents. In the short story, the occasion of Eid is made the basis of the incident where all the old, young and children of the village go. While the rest of the children buy different toys and food items with their Eid money, Hamid buys tongs for his grandmother and then he also informs his colleagues about their benefits.

Hamid's character in the story is shown as an idealistic personality and this idealism is reflected in both his thought and behavior. However, this does not match his age and mental level at all. On the other hand, the self-esteem shown by his colleagues is in accordance with their age and mental inclination. If we critically examine Hamid's personality, it comes out that his environment is of a very general nature, and there is no such factor that makes him possess such extraordinary thinking and understanding. In addition, the text explains that he has perfectly normal intelligence. He does not understand the concept of life and death, so he believes his grandmother's story. Thus, in another place in the text, Hamid's lack of understanding is expressed when Noori (a character) tells him about the bad title of the policemen, he is unable to understand what she is saying.

The author of the story presents him as a character with idealistic thinking as opposed to general intelligence. This contrast is revealed when he is made aware of his mental weaknesses by his peers and he expresses idealistic thinking in response to their sarcastic remarks, while coming across a different psychology at the beginning of the story. This type of serious reaction is not usually seen in children of this age.

"After all, father will come sometime, then I will ask these people how many toys will you get? I will give each one a basket and show that this is how friends are treated." I will give dresses, and I will give books, it is not that if you take herds of a penny, then you start eating it." 3

Similarly, the text also explains that Hamid has a very self-confident personality, but this self-confidence is not at all compatible with his age and social status. The way he interacts with the shopkeeper while buying tongs can be expected from a mature person, but such a choice of words and serious demeanor for a four-year-old child is unusual. This shows that the author has complete authority over the character and is speaking in the character.

"Asked the shopkeeper, "Will you sell this tongs?"

The shopkeeper looked at him and seeing no man with him said, it is of no use to you.

"Is it for sale or not?"

"Yes, it is for sale, and why have I brought it here?"

"So why don't you tell me?" How much money will you take?

"I will take six paisa." 4

This self-confidence is also shown at the very beginning of the story when his grandmother expresses concern about sending him alone to Eidgab. He understands the grandmother's anxiety and comforts her with great confidence. "Don't be afraid mom! I won't leave the villagers. Don't be afraid at all"(5). If Hamid's self-confidence is evaluated in the context of his personal situation, his parents died in his childhood. He has no close relationship except his grandmother, and he is also financially unsettled. Usually, these types of situations create a lack of self-esteem in a child, however the text fails to explain this.

Children see and evaluate the world in the light of their sensory experiences. To them everything is good that enables them to fulfill their desire. Similarly, they avoid anything that does not contain material of their childish interest. All these needs and interests of children are in accordance with natural requirements, but the behavior of Hamid, which the text describes, contradicts the natural inclinations of his age. He is described as the owner of an extremely sensitive nature, on the other hand, he has control over his emotions to such an extent that he is showing very reasonable behavior even in front of older serious characters.

"He can't spend a third of his wealth to have a little spin. Mohsin's father repeatedly invites him to spin but he doesn't agree. The old people say that this boy has already got his old self." 6

Similarly, another contradiction in fiction appears in the form of difference between his mental and emotional age. This child is so innocent that the concept of life and death is not clear to him. His parents died more than a year after each other, but he is too young to realize their death. He is satisfied that his father has gone to earn a lot of rupees for him and his mother has gone to Allah's house to buy sweets. Even so, it is clear because all these things in the imaginary world correspond to his age and mental level, but when this same child reaches the fair, his mental level suddenly rises to that of a mature thinker. Now he starts seeing everything of its utility. He thinks that toys are just a waste of money. He is also aware of his grandmother's pain, so he seems to convince himself of the benefits of tongs.

"What is the use of toys? Money is wasted for free. You are happy for a while, and then no one ever looks at them. Either they will be broken and ruined when they reach home, or small children who are not at Eid Gah. They can take it stubbornly and break it. How useful are tongs. Take the loaves from you, remove the fire from the stove." 7

From the psychological point of view, there are many contradictions in the text. It is human nature that he cannot get rid of desires at any age. These desires can be both material and psychological. Psychic urges are activated at birth and are unforced and uncontrollable, in psychological terms they are called the Id. At the age of two years, the ego begins to form, and it is based on human instincts and creates relationship with external environment. The next stage is the superego, in which the child begins to be subject to morality and becomes familiar with the social rules. If we analyze Hamid's personality in this reference, he exhibits behaviors inconsistent with his age and mental level. Leaving the colorful toys in the fair, the idea of tongs comes to mind, then imagines the joy of grandmother seeing these tongs, grandmother's prayers on it, and then the appreciation from the villagers. All such thoughts can come to the mind of a conscious human being, but the consciousness of a four-year-old child generally cannot afford such thoughts.

"He thought again, mother will run to take the tongs from my hand as soon as she sees the tongs and say that my son has brought the tongs for his mother. Then she will show it to the neighbors. The whole village will be amazed." 8

The concept of good and evil is barely formed in the mind of a four-year-old child, but it is not possible for him to fully understand this concept and consider its far-reaching implications. Usually, the idea of good for him is to indulge his childhood desires which include sweets, toys and fancy clothes. However, Hamid's consciousness draws him to the text as discrete and embodied signifiers such as "thousands of prayers", "vows in the village" and the acceptance of prayers. The indications from these signifiers point to a mature mindset. The critical point that comes out regarding the story also presents Hamid as an exemplary character. Commenting on the story, Dr. Khalid Amin says, "A poor character in 'Eid Gah' promoted a sense of self-conceit, self-abnegation and intelligence in relation to that day, which changed the social and spiritual condition of that day." 9

The expression of Hamid's consciousness also comes out in a contradictory form. His personality describes the antagonisms that naturally manifest between childhood friends. On the other hand, in response to these attitudes, Hamid's good character is also described when he thinks of treating them well in response to their lack.

The landscape in the story reveals that it is a rural settlement where the livelihood of the people is agriculture. The word "farmer" is repeatedly used in the text. Keeping this context in mind, the number of worshipers in the text is stated in millions, thus the number of beggars and the needy is stated in "thousands". Both these significations "millions of people" and "thousands of the beggars and needy" appear to be exaggerated statements because a rural area and its adjoining town or city, no matter how densely populated, cannot contain a population of millions. On top of that, the means of communication were not so common and modern that people from such a distance could gather in such large numbers at one place. Similarly, the confidence and self-discipline shown in Hamid's behavior is also inconsistent with his circumstances. For example, when his companions at a fair display their toys and food in front of him, he tries to find justification for their behavior. When his colleagues brag about him, he thinks, "I don't have much money. That's when Mohsin and Mahmood show their temper." 10 It is unusual for a four-year-old child to analyze personal behavior in such a logical manner. Critical opinions written on the story defend the ideal behavior of this character as being conscious. Research scholar Muhammad Salim presents his opinion regarding story:

"Unlike Prem Chand's other short stories, poverty and destitution in 'Eid Gah' makes his character Hamid conscious and sensitive. Instead of buying toys or sweets with the money given by his grandmother, he buys tongs to use so that his grandma's hand should not burn while baking bread." 11

The analysis of this opinion reveals the position that poverty leads to an increase in human consciousness, although in the class society to which Hamid belongs, the self-esteem and self-confidence of a poor person is trampled in such a way that his confidence rises from one's abilities. In such a case, his character and moral qualities get distorted instead of developing in an ideal form.

Conclusion:

This story is completely different from Prem Chand's stories in terms of its subject. Instead of making poverty a metaphor for poverty and helplessness in this story, he dignified it and tried to convey the message of human greatness. He has described self-confidence and greatness of character in everything from the atmosphere of the story to its characters and ideological statements. However, a careful reading of the story reveals technical and intellectual gaps. He has described the psychology of children as thoughtless and careless, on the other hand, these same children seem to be as understanding and confident. Hamid's character is contradictory in several respects. Sometimes he is so innocent in understanding the issues of life that he is being called short-sighted and stupid, and sometimes he is so sensitive and serious that his behavior shows the mental consciousness of a mature person.

After a critical study of this short story, we can say that Prem Chand has made this character paradoxical in the mirror of idealism. The author does not leave the character free, rather he tries to describe his thoughts and concerns behind the character's thoughts and concerns. The narrator of this story is not a character, but outside the text and is the author himself. Therefore, along with the presentation of events in the story, the author's narrative also appears, which he presents through focalization, in which the central character's thoughts and concerns are present. There seems to be a contradiction between the protagonist's actions and his thoughts. Therefore, this short story becomes author-centered instead of character-centered, due to which the personality of the main character of the story is distorted.

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