

AQA English GCSE

Poetry: Love & Relationships

Singh Song! - *Daljit Nagra*

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SINGH SONG

Daljit Nagra

Brief Summary

'Singh Song' is a poem focused on the love a shop-worker has for his wife, he how he abandons his duties in the shop to make love to her when no one is noticing. It uses comedy to enhance the relationships between husband and wife, but also the secondary relationship between the speaker and his parents.

Synopsis

- Introduces the speaker, who works running one of his father's shops.
- When no one is in the shop, he locks the door and goes upstairs to see his wife.
- They share food and make love.
- The speaker mentions that people complain about the way he runs the shop and the things he sells, describing it as the "worst Indian shop".
- He can hear his wife in the flat above the shop, and she runs a dating website.
- Suggests his wife doesn't get on well with his parents, but he finds it funny.
- Describes as his wife flits between different cultures.
- Goes back to referencing how his customers complain about his shop.

Context

Daljit Nagra (1966 -)

Nagra has Punjabi Sikh Indian parents who moved to Britain in the late 1950s, he was born in 1966. The concept of "Britishness" is a central theme to his work, and he has previously said he uses traditionally English formats in his poetry. His parents owned a shop in Sheffield in 1982, and his family repeated experienced attacks motivated by race, as well as burglaries.

Nagra didn't start writing poetry until he was 30, but did a BA & MA in English at Royal Holloway University. After these degrees, he became an English teacher. When he started submitting work to magazines he did so under the pseudonym 'Khan Singh Kumar', because he didn't actually expect to get anything published. He teaches at Brunel University in London, is the poet in Residence at Radio 4 and 4 Extra, as well as having won the Forward poetry prize.

Summary

Context – has Punjabi Sikh Indian parents, who moved to Britain in the late 1950s, and opened a shop in Sheffield // didn't start writing poetry until he was thirty

Structure - uses refrains and repetition // lyrical structure to mimic a song

Language – dialect-specific and colloquial language // contrasts // time markers & references

Key Points – title is a pun // shows the thriving marriage juxtaposed against the detrimental family relationship.



Singh Song!

Singh Song! Is a **humorous** poem set in a shop, run by the speaker of his poem - he lives above the shop with his newlywed wife. It is often seen as a difficult poem to compare to the rest of the anthology, however Nagra uses a range of poetic devices such as **juxtaposing language and time references**, which are common in many of the other poems. It also has two relationships running throughout it: at the forefront of the poem, there is the relationship between husband and wife, and secondary there is the detrimental and distant relationship between the speaker and his parents. This provides **two different facets of relationship to compare**.



<https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/70737>

KEY THEMES	ROMANCE, CONFLICT, CULTURE,
RELATIONSHIP	ROMANTIC / SEXUAL
LOVE	DESTRUCTIVE, ROMANTIC, SEXUAL, DISTANT

The title “Singh Song!”



Singh Song!

Takes away responsibility and ownership over his work by referencing that the shop belongs to his "daddy". This sets up another relationship, secondary to the romantic and sexual relationship between Singh and his wife - this being the clearly strained father-son relationship.

Displays displeasure towards his father for working him too hard.

Introduces his wife, who he clearly is devoted too, but is also seen as another responsibility Singh has to fulfil alongside running the shop - he has a conflict of responsibilities.

Repeated collective pronoun "vee" / "we" creates a sense of unity within the relationship, alongside the verb "share", and the repetition of this emphasises the closeness of the couple.

Hyperbole adds humour to the poem, and highlights the difference in care he has towards the shop and then towards his wife.

Ambiguous but may mean that she runs a dating website - very modern approach to relationships. Possessive pronoun 'her' suggests she's accomplished, as she owns the site.

I run **just** one ov my **daddy's** shops

from 9 o'clock to 9 o'clock

and he vunt me not to hav a break

but ven nobody in, I do di lock –

cos up di stairs is my newly bride

vee share in chapatti

vee share in di chutney

after **vee** hav made luv

like vee rowing through Putney –

Ven I return vid my pinnie untied'

di shoppers always point and cry:

Hey Singh, ver yoo bin?

Yor lemons are limes

yor bananas are plantain,

dis dirty little floor need a little bit of mop

in di worst Indian shop

on di whole Indian road –

Above my head high heel tap di ground

as my wife on di web is playing wid di mouse

ven she netting two cat on **her Sikh lover site**

she book dem for di meat at di cheese ov her price –

Using the adverb "just" Nagra creates a sense of insecurity and lacking. This implies there is a family pressure for him to work here.

Shows that whilst he has been resigned to the hard, time-consuming work of running the shop, which shows he has some respect at least for his father, he will still go against his wishes because he potentially values his wife more than his work.

"Newly" emphasises the novelty of having a wife, which could suggest they have a good relationship, reflecting the honeymoon phase of the relationship. However, the pronoun "my" is very possessive and implies an imbalance between the speaker and his wife.

Strange similes to use provides comedy and humour to the stanza

Humorous image to reflect his disobedient behaviour.

Creates an lack of professionalism which may suggest that he places a priority on his wife and their relationship rather than his work.

Humorous exaggeration to juxtapose the commitment he feels for his wife.

Constant reminder of his wife above him, high heels as a symbol of temptation and femininity? Influence of Western culture?



Mentioning how his wife mocks his parents in a humorous way suggests he finds it comical, and perhaps emphasises how he doesn't have a very positive relationship with his parents.

Repeating "my bride" through three stanzas suggests he cannot get her off his mind.

Opens the stanza to a sweet and affectionate comment on his relationship with his wife, and then immediately contrasts this with the difficulties he faces whilst running the shop. "Tickle" is quite childish and innocent which further suggests they are newly-wed and enjoying the honeymoon period of their marriage.

References time again to justify himself spending time for his own pleasure.

my bride

she effing at my mum

in all di colours of Punjabi

den stumble like a drunk

making fun at my daddy

my bride

tiny eyes ov a gun

and di tummy ov a teddy

my bride

she hav a red crew cut

and she wear a **Tartan sari**

a donkey jacket and some pumps

on di squeak ov di girls dat are pinching my sweeties –

Ven I return from di tickle ov my bride

di shoppers always point and cry:

Hey Singh, ver yoo bin?

Di milk is out ov date

and di bread is always stale,

di tings yoo hav on offer yoo hav never got in stock

in di worst Indian shop

on di whole Indian road –

Late in di **midnight hour**

ven **yoo** shoppers are wrap up quiet

Possessive pronoun - perhaps to suggest pride for her? Taking her accomplishments as his own.

Juxtaposing description of his wife as both fierce and sweet - she is multifaceted and he appreciates these different parts of her personality.

His wife is wearing a mix of clothes from different cultures and he seems to accept, if not embrace, this element of his wife.

This is repeated throughout the poem, using hyperbole to compare his good relationship with his terrible work.

Directing this at the reader, perhaps suggesting we are part of the issue.



Silver is a precious metal, and seen as connoting modernism and sophistication. Sibilance of "sit" and "silver stool" mirrors the calming language used in this stanza to emphasise how the shop is now void of customers.

Fictional language to retrace the blending of cultures.

Affectionate pet names hints they have a good relationship.

ven di precinct is concrete-cool
vee cum down whispering stairs
and **sit on my silver** stool,
from behind di chocolate bars
vee stare past di **half-price** window signs
at di beaches ov di UK in di **brightey** moon –

from di stool each night she say,
How much do yoo charge for dat moon baby?

from di stool each night I say,
Is half di cost ov yoo **baby**,
from di stool each night she say,
How much does dat come to **baby**?

from di stool each night I say,
Is priceless baby -

Reference to money makes readers consider how much he actually values his work and suggests he values his wife and spending time with her a lot more.

Baby is an affectionate term typically considered part of English or American slang, which demonstrates a melding of cultures again.

Choosing to neglect material goods and suggests that immaterial things such as spending time together, or nature, are much more important than the work he does in his father's shop.



Perspective

The speaker is a recently married man who works in one of his father's shops. He complains about how much he is made to work, and disobeys his father's wishes and often leaves the shop unattended. He narrates the poem with a **humorous tone**. It is written in a **first-person narrative**, and he talks about his wife instead of directly addressing her.

The poem is from the perspective of a man who works in one of his father's shops, talking about his relationship with his wife by comparison to his dedication to his work, in a first person narrative.

The opening

The poem opens on a focus on the speaker's work, his wife isn't introduced until later in the poem. This may reflect how he finds obstructions when trying to spend time with his wife.

I run just one ov my daddy's shops
from 9 o'clock to 9 o'clock
and he vunt me not to hav a break
but ven nobody in, I do di lock –

Takes away responsibility and ownership over his work by referencing that the shop belongs to his **"daddy"** - the implications of his work on his relationship may also imply that it feels like his father also owns his marriage, or has control over it to some extent.

Using the **adverb "just"** Nagra creates a **sense of insecurity and lacking**. This implies there is a family pressure for him to work here. This sets up another relationship, secondary to the romantic and sexual relationship between Singh and his wife, of a **strained father-son relationship**.

The speaker displays displeasure towards his father for working him too hard, and references that he has resigned to the hard, time-consuming work of running the shop. This shows he has some respect at least for his father, he will still go against his wishes because he potentially values his wife more than his work.

Structure

Use of Refrains & repetition

To reflect the title of the poem, there is a **melodic form** to the poem with a stable rhythm and song-esque pace. Refrains such as **"in di worst Indian shop // on di whole Indian road -"**, and **"my wife"**, somewhat mimic the chorus of a song.



REFRAIN | A repeating phrase / line, typically at the end of a stanza.



<https://www.geograph.ie/photo/1332763>

Using the repeated format of **“she say // I say”** in the final four couplets sets up a sense of dialogue and connection between the couple.

Alternatively, it could be argued that because they are separated stanzas the structure reflects the adversity the couple faces when trying to spend time together. The Nagra’s use of **couplets** which are typical of a love poem structure reaffirms the idea that the couple have a loving relationship.

Language

Dialect-specific and colloquial language

The **dialect** and **colloquial language** used in the poem reflects the typical language used by Indians living in Britain, again to situate the poem in the context of a specific community. For example, using **“di”** rather than “the”, **“ver”** instead of “where”, and **“ov”** not “of”.

COLLOQUIALISM | An informal phrase common at its time of utterance.

Contrasts

Juxtaposing language such as **“tiny eyes ov a gun // and di tummy ov a teddy”** suggests that Singh is aware he has a **multifaceted and complex wife** but finds this combination positive in their relationship.

Time markers & referencing

The speaker often **references time** such as **“midnight hour”** and **“9 o’clock to 9 o’clock”** to highlight the time pressure he faces and how he struggles to schedule in time for himself, time with his wife and time for the shop.

Immature language

Nagra uses a range of upbeat, childish language, such as **“red”**, **“silver”**, **“lemon”**, **“lime”**, and these reflect both the new nature of the couple’s marriage and the immature tone of the poem.



Comparisons

Singh Song!	Before You Were Mine
"9 o'clock to 9 o'clock"	"Stands at the close"
"Midnight hour"	"Ten years away"
Changes between types of tense in both poems.	

Singh Song! & Sonnet 29

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both demonstrate the all-consuming nature of love, and how this affects the speaker in the poems: concern the idea of romantic fulfillment. Both use natural and religious imagery to highlight how much they love their partner. Both have an overly positive attitude towards love. Sexual implications of "pinne untield" and "thy trunk all bare" which suggests they have a sexual as well as a romantic connection.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> S29 has a much more traditional structure than Singh Song, though Singh Song doesn't have a rhyming scheme and Sonnet 29 does. In Singh Song the pace flows towards the end, whereas in S29 the rhythm is consistent.

