



REDEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP OF MAN WITH GOD WITH REFERENCE TO ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER'S SHORT STORY GIMPEL THE FOOL

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Abstract:

Injustice is extended to man in different forms and different modes. Literature had always acted as the canvas for literary stalwarts to capture the plight of the humanity. When the pages of the history are turned many such atrocities rendered towards man and humanity can be witnessed. Time has produced many great literary figures who have presented the sufferings of man and the loss of man in humanity. Jews are the race who has witnessed torment, suffering and displacement during nineteenth century. As balm for their pain it is literature that has soothed, consoled and pacified them. Isaac Bashevis Singer is one among such writers, who has voiced for the voiceless Jewish community. In spite of the trauma that the Jews had undergone, their trust in God had always stayed as their ray of hope. By all means Singer has redefined the relationship of man with God. This article discusses one of the poignant characters of Singer- Gimpel and his unyielding love for God.

Introduction:

Isaac Bashevis Singer was born on 14th July 1904 as the second son to Pinkhos Mendel and Bathsheba. As the son and grandson of rabbis, Singer wanted to become a religious scholar. His father was a devoted Hasidic Jew on the other hand his father was a rational thinker. Exposed to two different worlds Singer grew up with both the ideologies intermingled. Singer and his family moved to Warsaw when he was four years old. His days in Bilgoray, had always proved to be the rich source for his imagination.

Singer's characters are replication of the real life. They adorn and glorify the value of relationship. This article enumerates Singer's characters struggle in holding their relationship with fellow humans and especially with God. Gimpel of the *Gimpel the Fool* one of the legendary characters of Singer acts as the harbinger in taking the relationship between man and God to the next level.

Review of Literature:

This primary tools used in the article are the comments of Paul Kresh and Daniel V. Fraustino. To substantiate this article Irving Howe, Pinsker and Lee's view on Singer is also made use

Singers wrote in Yiddish, a language that was dangling on the verge of extinction. Irving Howe states in his work *I. B. Singer*:

Singer wrote in Yiddish, a language that had no amount of energy or affection, seems likely to save from extinction. He writes about a world that is gone, destroyed with a brutality beyond historical comparison. He writes within a culture, the remnant of Yiddish in the English world With such a flair for his language Singer has always produced characters that were very much deep rooted with the Jewish culture and tradition. Gimpel of the *Gimpel the Fool* is one of the characters of Singer who represent the "child like quality" of man. Daniel V. Fraustine rightly states:

Gimpel, the narrator-protagonist represents the child like quality in all of us which is the source of both our humanity and vulnerability: the need to believe in the people around us and in the credibility of our own experiences. Singer's story is about Gimpel's search of manifestation of truth (228).

Gimpel the Fool Singer's most famous story was written in the year 1945 and later got translated into English in the year 1953 by Saul Bellow. The translated version of *Gimpel the Fool* appeared in *Partisan Review*. Gimpel in *Gimpel the Fool* belongs to the tradition of the Schlemiel school of comedy of Yiddish writers. Ruth Wisse presents an important analysis on Gimpel "a rare example of the Schlemiel figures in the post-war Yiddish fiction" (60). The story is unfolded from the point of view of Gimpel. "I am Gimpel the Fool" (3). Thus begins the story and emphasizes the fact that Gimpel is a fool, who can even be compared to the fool of the *King Lear*. A very much wise fool who knows the bitter reality of the world and accepts the injustice extended upon him a with an air of hope and a ray of smile.

Gimpel leads the life of an ordinary baker in Frampol. The entire Frampol village makes fun of Gimpel. He says "I think to myself, let it pass. So they take advantage of me" (3). He is teased for believing anything he is told. His gullibility grows along with him. From an assistant in the bakery, he turns out to be

baker of the Frampol village, yet he continues to believe the stories of the villagers. S an epitome of mockery, the villagers persuade to marry Elka, the whore. Gimpel acknowledges and later becomes her cuckolded husband. In fact he longs to get her unreciprocated love. Elka gives birth to a baby four months after their marriage, which Gimpel believes is the result of the premature delivery.

In spite of the humiliation rendered by the people of Frampol village, Gimpel loves both Elka and the child as his own. Elka makes him stay away from her, Gimpel accepts this nature of Elka as “shoulders are from God and burdens too” (8). In *Short Story Criticism*, edited by Thomas J.Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudence, compares Gimpel with Adam and Elka with Eve.

Critics have identified the central concerns of *Gimpel the Fool* as the power of faith and love, the virtue of the powerless, innocence, tolerance and conformity. Some commentators have observed *Gimpel the Fool* explicitly establishes a connection between Gimpel and Adam and between Elka and Eve: as Adam forgives Eve for deceiving him, so does Gimpel pardon Elka.

Pinsker has derived the meaning of the Hebrew word Schlemiel as one who is “sent from God”. Hence amidst all the adverse nature of his life, Gimpel’s hope on god continues to increase.

Gimpe is ordered by the rabbi to divorce his wife, when he finds her with another man in the bed. Yet Gimpel denies divorcing his wife and blames himself for being hallucinated. Gimpel attempts to mend his strangled relationship with his wife Elka by all means. He acknowledges his marriage life with Elka and also his six children. But his happiness for his marriage ends with the death bed of Elka. She confesses that none of the six children were fathered by Gimpel. This confession leads to the loss of faith in Gimpel. “Woe Gimpel! It was ugly how I deceived you all these years. I want to go clean to my Maker and so I have to tell you that the children are not yours... I deceived Gimpel. That was the meaning of my brief life” (12).

To avenge for the loss of his life, for the exploitation of his gullibility, Gimpel urinates in the dough that he had prepared to be baked. The evil within him persuades him to revenge the people of the Frampol village. But Elka makes Gimpel to realize his mistake in his dream. Gimpel states “But God gave me his help” (13). He buries the urinated dough and leaves the Frampol village. He loiters from village to village as a man devoid of physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological clutches. He states “No doubt the world is entirely an imaginary world, but is only once removed from the true world” (14).

According to Paul Kresh Gimpel “ is the quintessential Jew taunted and dispossessed but preferring to wait for his reward in the next world rather than seek revenge on his tormentors in this one” (204). For Grace Lee “ Gimpel the fool is a sophisticated dialectic in which, Gimpel moves steadfastly in the path of faith, the reader is pushed along a counter path of skepticism and disbelief until the path cross and both characters and reader must face the central question of faith” (17).

Gimpel always realizes his oneness with God “when the time comes I will go joyfully whatever may be there it will be real without complication, without ridicule, without deception. God be praised, there even Gimpel cannot be deceived” (14). Thus Gimpel ascertains his trust on God. Goonetillke emphasizes thus “Gimpel’s acceptance of the situation and deception imposed on hi, just as much control over his own life as he would have had if he insisted on questioning or rejecting them. Finally, he looks forward to death- because it promises him the happiness of an ultimate, questionable reality, but since he is assured of it only in wish-fulfilling dreams, the validity of his belief is left an open question”. This question is well answered by Gimpel’s steadfastness on God. He finds his solace in God.

The power of Gimpel lies in his reconciliation with God. His belief on love, humanity, hope and humility are his strengths. Gimpel becomes a story teller. His adversities convert him to story teller just like Singer, who has converted all his traumatic experience in presenting characters of immortality. Daniel V. Fraustino narrates the character of Singer thus “At the heart of Gimpel the Fool lie the questions what is truth and how it is to be known. It is Gimpel’s failure to pose these questions that result in his continued deception by the villagers of Frampol. An innocent, Gimpel at first is able to weather their humiliation through his simple faith in God and the Bible... he is sustained by the Biblical injunction that it is “better to be a fool all your days than for one hour to be evil”. Gimpel is the typical Jewish character that Singer has successfully portrayed in his work.

Conclusion:

Holocaust the never ending trauma that the Jews had undergone during the nineteenth century still continues to linger in their soul and heart. Yet their love for God and humanity continues to exist. Gimpel is a version of this Jewish believes. Whatever is the adversity or the bewilderment life continues to move on as in the case of Singer. A momentary estrangement of Singer from God is reverted through his conscience in the form of dream. His relationship with God is redefined at this juncture. Hudson thus exemplifies “A Jew perpetually had accounts to settle with the Almighty: he praised Him or blasphemed Him, loved Him or hated Him, but he was never free of Him. Whatever other complexes the Jew suffered from, the God complex was his ineluctable fate: he could as little escape from Him as from his skin, his blood, his marrow. Whenever a Jew imagined that he was fleeing from God, he was in reality turning blindly in circles like a donkey in a mill or a caravan in a desert”.

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