



SINGH SONG! KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



Context – *Singh Song* was written by Daljit Nagra and published in 2007.

Daljit Nagra – Daljit Nagra (born 1966) is a British poet of Indian descent. He was born in Bradford, West Yorkshire, but now lives and works in London. His poems relate the experience of Indians living in the UK, and he uses language that imitates the language used by Indian immigrants of Punjabi descent (a dialect that has been termed 'Punglish'.) His first collection of poetry, 'Look We Have Coming to Dover', won the Forward Poetry Prize.



Look, We Have Coming to Dover! – Nagra describes his first collection as 'obsessed with Asian-ness' as 'there hasn't been a lot of successful poetry about Indian working classes.' The poetry is vividly concerned with experiences of 'Asian-ness: racism, arranged marriages, corner shops, and faith.' He uses a variety of dramatic monologues.



British Indian – British Indians are citizens of the United Kingdom whose ancestral roots lie in India – this includes both people born in the UK of Indian descent, and those who have migrated from India to the UK. British Indians are comprised of about 1.4 million people, making them the largest ethnic minority group in the country. One of the main reasons for the size of the community is due to historical Indian-British relations, with India once being under British colonial rule. About 45% of British Indians are of Punjabi origin, the largest Indian sub-group in the UK. Whilst prejudice and discrimination against British Indians is not widespread in the UK, there are incidents that have received widespread attention in recent years. A persisting stereotype is that of British Indians being storekeepers and newsagents, a stereotyped played upon in this poem.



Language/Structural Devices

'Punglish' – The poem is written using phonetic spelling representing the Punjabi-English dialect of the speaker (often known as 'Punglish'). Examples of this include 'he vunt me not to have a break' and 'she book dem for di meat at di cheese.' The increase in the 'd' and 'v' sounds in the poem creates an alliterative, rhythmic effect which makes the poem more song-like. It also makes the poem appear more authentic – this is a poem that focuses heavily upon the theme of identity, and evidence of the speaker's speech patterns are a key feature of his identity.

Quote: "and he vunt me not to hav a break but ven nobody in, I do di lock –"

Rhyme – There is a great deal of rhyming in the poem, which one may expect from a poem intended to be in song form. Although the rhyme is not regular, there is a great deal of end rhyme throughout the poem, largely dominated by the 'ee' sound (for example: 'Punjabi, daddy, teddy, chapatti, chutney, Putney). This helps to replicate some of the natural patterns of speech of British Indians of Punjabi descent. It also helps to speed up the rhythm of the poem. When the rhyme stops towards the end of the poem, it slows the rhythm of the poem down, showing their tender intimacy with one another.

Quote: "vee share in chapatti vee share in di chutney"

Repetition/ Refrain – Certain words and phrases are repeated throughout the poem, either to emphasise their meaning or to increase their mnemonic value. For example, the speaker repeatedly opens stanzas with 'my bride', which allows the reader to understand how much of the speaker's mind is preoccupied with his new bride – because of his obsession with her, he has little interest in anything else.

Quote: "my bride tiny eyes ov a gun"

Figurative Language – Figurative language is used sparingly throughout the poem, but to considerable effect. For example, in stanza 4, a 'cat and mouse' metaphor is used to demonstrate how she predated on men on the using the internet. Personification is also used, in stanza 9, in the description of the 'whispering stairs.' It highlights the idea that what they are doing is mischievous and secretive.

Quote: "ven di precinct is concrete-cool vee cum down whispering stairs"

Form – The poem is a dramatic monologue containing numerous stanzas of varied lengths. The rhyme scheme is also irregular. These irregularities reflect the way in which the speaker and his wife deviate from social/ cultural expectations. The poem ends with a series of isolated couplets, which underline the couple's closeness in opposition to the pressures of family and society around them.

Quote: "from di stool each night I say, Is priceless baby –"

Narrative Structure – The opening two stanzas introduce the reader to the speaker's occupation and marital status, before stanza 3 brings in the discouraging voices of others in society. In stanzas 5-7, the speaker gives more details about his bride, before stanza 8 returns to the discontented views of the customers. The final stanzas offer a more intimate view of the interactions between the speaker and his bride.

Quote: "I run just one ov my daddy's shops from 9 o'clock to 9 o'clock"

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Romantic Love – Romantic Love is a predominant theme across the poem. The speaker is a newlywed, and his desire and passion for his wife comes before everything else: he is neglecting his shop, upsetting customers, and together they are exploiting people (through their online venture). The last stanza confirms their love.



Identity – The issue of identity is prominent throughout the entirety of the poem. The speaker alludes to pressures from his parents and from the customers in his shop, each of which pressurise him to adopt a certain identity. However, alongside his bride, the speaker challenges the enforced identity imposed upon him.



Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA	LINE	POEM	ANALYSIS
1	1-4	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 -	The speaker is immediately seen as immature: he is only trusted to run one of the shops, and refers to his father as 'daddy.' His father owns numerous shops – depicting his success in relation to his son. Although the speaker is newly-married, he gets told what to do by his parents – he is told to work 12 hour days with no break.
2	5-8	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 -	Note the phonetic nature of the spelling, representing his Punjabi accent. The speaker neglects the wishes of his parents (and the work ethic of the older generation) to be with his wife. The Indian foods (chapatti and chutney) appear to be a metaphor for sex. They are challenging the more reserved attitudes of Sikh culture.
3	9-16	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 -	The image of the 'pinnie untied' is intended to be humorous – his sloppiness and disorganisation are in direct contrast to his father's more modest generation. 'Cry' is used to show their horror at his punctuality. The direct speech of the customers (including personal pronouns) forces the reader's engagement. It is clear that the shopkeeper has become negligent, but also that he feels as though the customers will complain about anything. The repetition of 'little' shows their condescending and patronising tone towards him.
4	17-20	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 -	The onomatopoeic 'high heel tap' may be literal, but is also a metaphor representing the mental distraction that the wife's presence provides. The wife is unconventional – she is neglecting the housework to run some form of internet dating site to luring men in a money-making scheme – anything but traditional Sikh.
5	21-25	my bride she effing at my mum in all di colours of Punjabi den stumble like a drunk making fun at my daddy	The repetition of 'My bride' reinforces his love for her – she is all that is on his mind. The stanza demonstrates the social/cultural differences between the two generations. His wife swears at his mother and makes fun of his dad's drinking, yet his loyalties appear to now lie with her over them. Traditional expectations of his wife being polite and submissive are completely subverted.
6	26-28	my bride tiny eyes ov a gun and di tummy ov a teddy	In his description of her, the poet juxtaposes analogies of a gun and a teddy, showing her physical beauty/cuteness, but also how dangerous she is. He seems to find this mix particularly alluring.
7	29-33	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 -	The repetition of 'my bride' is now repeated enough times to be considered a refrain – she dominates this love story. Physically, the haircut described is radical and unreserved – however red can also symbolise danger/ warning. Her clothes demonstrate the fusion of two cultures – tartan is a Scottish/British pattern, but she still retains the sari, a feature of Sikh culture. The fact that she is wearing the same footwear as the girls who rob the shop once more demonstrates her tendency towards danger/ risk-taking.
8	34-41	Ven I return from di tinkle 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 -	The opening to this stanza is repetition from stanza 3, indicating that they make love frequently. The opening line is intended to be humorous. The direct speech intensifies the earlier concerns about the upkeep of the shop – thus emphasising that the shop is seriously deteriorating on his watch. The repetition of the personal pronoun 'yoo' shows that the customers clearly know that it is his fault. The spelling stresses the vowel sound in 'yoo' – presenting their anger.
9	42-49	Late in di midnight hour ven yoo shoppers are wrap up quiet 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 -	The poem becomes more lyrical, with the 'midnight hour' hinting at the romance that takes place. The speaker now addresses the reader alongside the customers with the personal pronoun 'yoo', suggesting that at this time – he views everyone except him and his wife as being 'other' – 'us' and 'you.' The long vowels and alliteration of consonants creates an idea of a controlled sexual encounter. The personified stairs implies that what they are doing is secretive. There is a contrast between the romantic and the mundane, with the 'brightey moon' and 'half price window signs.'
10	50	from di stool each night she say,	The poem ends with a series of short stanzas made up only of couplets – showing their togetherness in opposition to the rest of society. Through the question and answer couplets they profess their love for one another. This ending reflects the style of a Bollywood film, and yet they use of the affectionate western term 'baby.' The final line asserts that despite the pressures of both western and Sikh culture, their love for one another is strong.
11	51	How much do yoo charge for dat moon baby?	
12	52	from di stool each night I say,	
13	53	Is half di cost ov yoo baby,	
	54	from di stool each night she say,	
	55	How much does dat come to baby?	
	56	from di stool each night I say,	
	57	Is priceless baby -	

Poems for Comparison

Poems for Comparison	Influences on the Poet
Sonnet 29: 'I think of thee'	<i>Singh Song!</i> can be contrasted with this poem in relation to the theme of <u>Romantic Love</u>
The Farmer's Bride	<i>Singh Song!</i> can be contrasted with this poem in relation to the theme of <u>Identity</u>

His parents arrived in the UK in the late 1950s, drawn by the promise of jobs. "The British advertised in Punjab because Sikhs were seen as hard workers from farming backgrounds," he says. It wasn't a story of escape from hardship – his father was a well-known wrestling champion with a cushy future lined up as a celebrity army officer – but his mother was "completely uneducated". In their new home in Yiewsley, near Heathrow airport, his father took factory jobs while his mother worked in a hospital laundry. Both did as much overtime as they could." Interview from www.theguardian.com

