Singh Song!

SUMMARY

I manage one of my father's many shops, working all day—from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. My dad would prefer me not to take a break at all, but whenever the shop is empty I lock the door.

That's because my new wife is upstairs. We eat chapatti and chutney together, after making love as though we were rowing in a boat race.

When I go back down to the shop with my apron untied, the customers point at me and complain: "Singh, where have you been? Your lemons and limes are all mixed up, and what you've labeled as bananas are actually plantains! Your shop floor is dirty and needs mopping. This is the worst of all the Indian shops on the whole road."

I can hear my wife's high heels clicking on the ground of the apartment above me. She's up there using the internet, playing with the mouse. When she snags matches on her Sikh lover site, she sets them up for a date for a fee.

Ah, my wife: she swears at my mother using lots of colorful Punjabi words. She stumbles around pretending to be drunk, doing an impression of my dad.

Ah, my wife: she has beady black eyes, like the hole of a gun, and her belly is like a teddy bear's.

Ah, my wife: she has short red hair and wears a sari with a Tartan pattern, a workwear jacket, and high heels. She catches the young girls trying to steal sweets from my shop.

When I go back down to the shop after making love to my wife, the shoppers always point at me and complain: "Singh, where have you been? The milk and the bread have gone bad, and your sale items are out of stock. This is the worst of all the Indian shops on the whole road."

When midnight comes around, and you shoppers are wrapped up in bed—when the concrete outside is cool and quiet—my wife and I sneak downstairs and sit on the shop's silver stool. We look past the chocolate bars and the sale signs in the window, staring at the UK's beaches bathed in bright moonlight.

On the stool each night my wife asks me: how much does that moon cost, baby?

From the stool I reply: it costs half as much as you do, baby.

Then she asks me: how much is that, baby?

And I reply: it's priceless, baby.

THEMES

LOVE AND ROMANCE

"Singh Song" celebrates love's ability to bring joy and passion to life. The speaker is a British-Indian man tasked with running his "daddy's" shop, but who refuses to make his work his top priority; he's far too caught up in the giddy joys of young love for that! With sweetness and humor, the poem depicts how the shopkeeper sidesteps his duties in order to be with his new bride. The poem thus shows how love can make people obsessive, silly, and even irresponsible, gently poking fun at its speaker while also presenting the love that he and his wife share as what really matters.

Singh, the poem's speaker, has a lot of pressure on him: he's supposed to run his father's shop from 9:00 in the morning to 9:00 at night without a break. But Singh's head is totally in the clouds—or, more accurately, in the flat upstairs, which he shares with his new bride. That's why, as soon as there is no one in the shop, Singh locks the door and runs upstairs to make "luv." He readily shirks his responsibilities, neglecting the mundane realities of everyday life for the much more exciting prospect of having a "tickle" with his lover.

The speaker's antics have consequences: the shop is a mess—fruit is mislabelled, bread is stale, milk is expired—and customers are constantly berating Singh for running the "worst Indian shop" around. Young love, this all implies, makes the speaker more than a little absent-minded and irresponsible.

And yet, the poem doesn't judge Singh for the way love distracts him from his duties. In fact, it implies that love is what matters—even if, or perhaps *because*, it makes people goofy and a bit irrational. Through love, Singh and his wife take a little piece of their lives back for themselves.

At night, Singh and his wife sit in the shop, "behind di chocolate bars," and look out "past di half-price window signs" at one of England's moonlit beaches. It's a romantic scene that reflects love's power to transform the everyday world of work and responsibility into a place of delight and wonder. This, the poem ultimately suggests, is what makes love "priceless."

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-58

IMMIGRATION, ASSIMILATION, AND GENERATIONAL CLASHES

"Singh Song" is mostly a celebration of young love,

but it also subtly explores immigration and assimilation. The poem implies that both the speaker and his wife have either grown up in or at least some of their youth in the UK, and that they combine elements of Indian and British culture in their language, dress, and behavior. At the same time, they butt heads with Singh's parents and with the local Indian community coming into the shop (who deem it the "worst Indian shop" around). The poem thus illustrates how young immigrants (or the children of immigrants) may form hybrid identities that blend their two cultural influences, and also how their assimilation into Western culture can be a source of tension with older generations.

Singh and his father, for example, clearly have very different expectations when it comes to work. Singh's "daddy" is a demanding figure who owns multiple shops and expects his son to work from nine in the morning till nine at night, without even taking a break. While Singh's father seems to represent the stereotypically hardworking immigrant, Singh himself is trying to do the bare minimum so that he can concentrate on what he really cares about: his wife.

Singh also clashes with the customers who expect him to manage a well-organized and tidy store (perhaps of the kind that his father would run). Visitors to the shop are constantly nagging him, telling him his "lemons are limes" or his "bananas are plantains," or that the floor is "dirty." In short, they think he runs the "worst Indian shop" on the whole "Indian road." The poem thus implies that Singh isn't living up to the expectations of the Indian community.

But Singh and his wife have their own way of doing things. As members of a younger generation, they draw on their cultural heritage *and* on the customs and trends of the country in which they now live (and probably grew up, or at least spent much of their youth). Singh's wife wears both a sari *and* heels, for example, mixing Indian and Western styles. Her job—running a dating site for Sikhs—also feels distinctly modern (especially considering the long history of arranged marriage in many Indian cultures). She pokes fun at Singh's parents (even swearing at his mother), further suggesting the tension between these two generations.

At the same time, both Singh and his bride eat traditional foods like chapatti and chutney, and the entire poem is written to evoke an Indian accent peppered with English slang like “baby.” With a light touch, then, the poem shows how Singh and his wife have a nuanced relationship with their competing cultural influences—how they can draw on two cultures at once to forge their own, unique identities.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-58

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

I run just ...
... di lock -

The poem opens with the speaker (the "Singh" of the title) talking about his responsibilities in his father's shop. Right away, readers will notice how the poem's phonetic spellings (things like "ov" and "vunt") evoke an Indian accent. While readers don't yet know that the poem actually takes place in the UK, some context is helpful for understanding what's happening here:

- In the U.K., shops like the one described in the poem are generally known as corner shops. From the '60s onwards, these were often owned by Indian immigrants and their descendants (Daljit Nagra's parents, who immigrated to Britain in the 1950s, ran a corner shop in the northern town of Sheffield).

The poem implies that Singh's father is a hardworking man, giving that this store is just "one" of many that he owns and that he expects his son to work 12-hour days without a break.

Readers can also tell a lot about the speaker himself from these lines. For one thing, the word "daddy" makes him seem a bit young and immature. And it's clear that he doesn't really care for his job. Line 2 captures the dull drudgery of running the shop through the diacope (the quick repetition) of "9 O'clock":

> from 9 O'clock to 9 O'clock

The repetition of the phrase captures the repetitiveness of Singh's days—getting up early, selling produce, restocking, going to bed, and so on—and sounds that much more boring than something like "for twelve hours." But the speaker also leads a kind of double-life. In line 4, he says:

> but ven nobody in, I do di lock -

In other words, once the shop is empty, he closes and locks the door. The caesura, the first real pause in the poem thus far, indicates that *something* is changing—that there's much more to learn about Singh's life. That is, the locked door signals a transgression between two very different worlds. Readers will see what happens after this door-locking in the next stanza.

LINES 5-9

cos up di ...
... through Putney -

The speaker is deeply, giddily in love with his "newly bride"—the woman he has recently married—and goes up to see her the

very second that there is no one in the store.

Notice how the first stanza focused on work and the shop, while the second ("cos up di stairs [...] through Putney") focuses on the couple's young romance. The poem makes use of this alternating structure throughout, mimicking the alternating rhythm of Singh's life itself—the pull between two worlds.

That pull is reflected even by the two main activities in which the speaker and his wife partake: eating foods like chapatti and chutney, and making love as though "rowing through Putney":

- "Chapatti" and "chutney" refer to traditional Indian dishes, and the playful alliteration here adds to the poem's vibrant, light-hearted tone.
- "Putney," meanwhile, is likely a reference to The Boat Race, an annual event that sees teams from Cambridge and Oxford universities compete against each other to see who can row a stretch of the Thames river in the quickest time. This famous race usually starts in Putney, a suburb of London. The simile suggests that making love, for Singh and his wife, is a kind of mad dash, threatened with being interrupted by a customer at the door at any moment. And rowing, of course, is intensely physical!
- There is a possible pun at play here, too, because "patani" (or "patni") means "wife" in Punjabi.

The rhyme between "chutney" and "Putney" is purposefully funny, the poem both gently mocking and celebrating Singh's enthusiasm. At the same time, it neatly encapsulates the speaker's two different cultural influences: that of India, represented by these traditional foods, and that of the UK, represented by the reference to Putney.

LINES 10-17

ven I return ...
... Indian road -

Shortly after making love to his wife and eating, Singh has to return to his shop duties downstairs. He arrives with his "pinnie [his apron] untied," showing that he is in a rush—and that he doesn't care too deeply about being the best shopkeeper he can be.

The fact that Singh neglects his work—which, it should be stressed, is something the poem portrays with affection and humor—frustrates his customers. They want (and apparently expect, based on previous experiences of Indian-run shops) the place to be well run, with products in stock and accurately labeled. But it seems Singh is too distracted by his bride to care that much.

While the whole poem is very musical in terms of its sound—fitting with the title's suggestion that this is a "song" of Singh's life—this section is *especially* so. It's easy to imagine a musical theater version of the poem, in which the customers appear in a big group like a Greek chorus to sing their complaints at the young shopkeeper. Here there's alliteration and consonance; anaphora and broader parallelism (in the repeated structure of "yor [fruit] is [other fruit]"); the relentless drone of diacope (the repetition of "little" and "Indian"); and even a full rhyme between "mop" and "shop":

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 —

All of these devices combine to make this section feel extra lively. The shared sounds and parallelism of lines 13 and 14 ("Yor [...] plantain,") also cleverly show how, to Singh, lemons and limes, bananas and plantains, are essentially interchangeable That's not to say he doesn't know which is which, but that he doesn't really care—lemons might as well go in the limes section, and vice versa. All that matters is getting back upstairs as soon as possible.

All that said, there is a serious point to be found despite the poem's light and humorous tone. The speaker's customers seem to come to the shop with pre-established cultural expectations. Essentially, they expect Singh to be hardworking and diligent like his father. But Singh is his own man, and part of a new generation that doesn't necessarily have the same values as the one that came before.

LINES 18-21

above my head ...
... her price -

In the fourth stanza, the reader learns more about Singh's wife. While he works in the shop downstairs, she is working for (or possibly running) a dating site for "Sikh" people (or, maybe, catfishing unsuspecting men on such a site—more on that below).

The speaker's language is again full of playfulness, which captures the temptation represented by the upstairs world (the apartment where the young couple makes love) versus the mundanity of shop life. Singh hears his wife's "high heel" shoes tapping the floor above his "head," for example, the alliteration making the phrase intentionally noisy.

The speaker's wife seems quite savvy here. She's on the internet "playing wid di mouse," a description that literally refers to a computer mouse but is also a pun: the wife is also "playing wid di mouse" in the sense that she's baiting "two cat," or site-users. In fact, this entire stanza is filled with puns:

- "Web" (line 19) and "netting" (line 20) relate to the internet and also to the act of entrapment—of

catching someone in a "web" or "net."
- The phrase "Sikh lover site" also sounds like "seek lover site"—as in, a website for people looking for lovers.

The reader never learns exactly what the wife's job entails, but all this punny language about cats and mice and webs and nets suggests that she's doing something at least a little sneaky! Maybe she simply acts as a matchmaker, bringing people together for "di meat" (a possible metaphor for love-making) at "di cheese ov her price." In other words, perhaps she makes a tidy profit out of pairing two Sikh people up.

Or, maybe she's catfishing: pretending to be someone she's not in order to trick people into online relationships (and sending her money, gifts, etc.). Either way, it's clear that her work is nothing like her husband's, nor his father's.

LINES 22-26

my bride ...
... at my daddy

The poem spends the next three stanzas developing Singh's wife's character, and with good reason: Singh is totally head over heels in love with her. This section reads like a kind of lover's list, setting out what it is about her that makes Singh so giddy with romance. Each of these stanzas begins with "my bride," giving the reader a sense of Singh's intense affection for his wife.

But this section avoids clichéd romantic ideas. The speaker's wife isn't some wilting flower; instead, she is rather bold, vulgar, and even disrespectful. She swears at Singh's mother "in all di colours of Punjabi," in fact, and does impressions of his father. The assonance of "stumbling like a drunk / making fun at my daddy" seems to evoke the playful mocking it describes.

On the one hand, all this might simply reflect the generational and cultural gap between Singh's parents and wife. Read charitably, she has an independent, playful spirit that encourages Singh to live according to his own values rather than those of his parents. If Singh's parents represent an old, more serious way of life, he's attracted to the way his wife undermines that seriousness, and there's no real animosity there.

Less charitably, the wife is just plain rude, and the poem thus points to the power of love to blind people to their beloved's faults. In this reading, Singh seems silly here, so wrapped in love that he finds his wife's disrespect toward his own parents endearing rather than off-putting.

LINES 27-29

my bride ...
... ov a teddy

Through two metaphors, the sixth stanza captures the way that Singh's wife is both feisty and sweet. The speaker begins by repeating the phrase"my bride," before going on to say that she has the "tiny eyes ov a gun" (line 28). The smallness of her eyes is like the beady black hole on the end of a gun, suggesting violence and danger (and, perhaps, that when she aims her sights on something, she gets it). Given the previous stanza's suggestion that she's also toying with men online, readers again get the sense that the speaker's wife might is pretty sharp and crafty.

The speaker might be oblivious to this, blinded by his love and lust, or maybe he just genuinely likes that she thrills him, makes him feel alive, and is infinitely more exciting to be around than the customers in the shop.

Emphasizing his affection for her, the speaker then compares her "tummy" (a cutesy word for stomach) to that of a teddy bear (a child's toy). This metaphor shows that the two of them share an affectionate, playful intimacy. Teddy bears, of course, are made to be held! Perhaps Singh feels most happy when he and his wife are in each other's loving arms.

LINES 30-34

my bride ...
... my sweeties -

The seventh stanza—the third and final "my bride" section—describes Singh's wife's fashion sense. Like Singh, she mixes her Indian heritage with British culture. She wears her hair short and red instead of long and black, suggesting a rejection of traditional femininity. She wears a sari, which *is* a traditional Indian item of clothing, but it features a "Tartan" pattern—a Scottish design similar to plaid. Finally, she pairs her sari with a "donkey jacket," a kind of mid-length work coat, and high heels ("pumps"). Singh's wife, then, fuses two cultures in her appearance itself.

This stanza also provides further evidence that Singh's wife is a fierce, independent woman. There are young girls that sometimes try to pinch, or steal, Singh's "sweeties" (the confectionary he sells in his shop). But Singh's wife is on their heels, catching them in the act. The poem describes this as "on di squeak" (as opposed to "on their heels"), evoking the sound of the girls' sneakers as they scamper away. This adds one more reason to Singh's long list of things he loves about her.

LINES 35-42

ven I return ...
... Indian road -

This stanza once again depicts what happens when Singh goes back downstairs to the shop after making love with his wife upstairs. The poem thus continues its alternating structure, shifting the focus from love and romance to the drudgery of work.

He euphemistically describes sex as a "tickle," a word that

portrays the lovers as youthful, excited, and somewhat innocent. But as Singh returns to the shop floor, his customers admonish him for his absence and for his neglect of the store in general.

The chorus of customers begins by repeating a line from earlier in the poem:

> *hey Singh, ver yoo bin?*

This repetition creates a kind of refrain in the poem—and suggests that the speaker skips out on work a lot! Whereas earlier the customers complained about mislabeled fruits, now they point out stocking issues: the milk is expired, the bread is stale, and the shop keeps running out of products that it advertises. Clearly, Singh isn't staying on top of the demands of the store, which leads the customers to declare, once again that this is "*di worst Indian shop / on di whole Indian road*."

LINES 43-47

> *late in di ...*
> *... my silver stool,*

Line 43 marks an important shift in the poem. While all of the previous lines have focused on what the speaker does during the daytime—his of running of the shop, and his mad dashes upstairs to be with his wife—now the reader learns what the young couple gets up to once the shop is closed. The speaker calls this the "midnight hour," a phrase that suggests intimacy, romance, hushed excitement, and moonlit magic.

For the first time in the poem, Singh addresses his audience as "yoo shoppers" (line 44), using the second-person collective pronoun. This heightens the sense that Singh has, or at least feels he has, something truly special going on with his wife. In other words, he creates a kind of us vs. them scenario—Singh and his wife on one side, and the shoppers on the other. In a way, the reader is being let in on a secret here, the poem showing that there is a lot more to Singh than the fairly repetitive exchanges between shopkeeper and customer would suggest.

Midnight falls, the shoppers are "wrap up quiet" (tucked in bed), and the town grows cold and quiet (the "precinct is concrete-cool"). The unusual word choices play up Singh's British-Indian vocabulary, while also making the language feel fresh and vibrant. When the young couple go down to the shop at this illicit hour, the stairs seem to "whisper," a metaphor that captures the intimacy of the moment. The sibilance of the phrase "sit on [Singh's] silver stool" evokes the hushed, quiet atmosphere as well.

LINES 48-50

> *from behind di ...*
> *... brightey moon -*

As Singh and his wife sit on the "silver stool" during the "midnight hour," the shop seems to become infused with the magic of young love. They're still physically in the same old mundane workplace, next to things like "chocolate bars" and "half-price window signs," but they also look "past" all this, their love breaking free from the everyday reality of their lives.

Now, they gaze longingly at:

> [...] di beaches ov di UK in di brightey moon —

It's hard to tell what's real here and what's a kind of poeticized image. It's *possible* that Singh's shop is somewhere on the U.K. coastline (the collection in which the poem appears references Dover, a coastal town, in its title), but it's not logically possible to look at *multiple* beaches at once. Regardless, the world seems transformed into a very romantic setting.

The alliteration between "beaches" and "brightey" here has a sparkling quality to it, popping out of the line to make the moment feel special. It's also worth noting that "brightey" is *close* in sound to "Blighty," which is a nostalgic slang word for Britain that has its origins in the Urdu language (one of the languages spoken in India and Pakistan). Singh and his wife are looking out on the country in which they live, and sensing that it is, in some small way, *theirs*.

LINES 51-58

> *from di stool ...*
> *... priceless baby -*

The poem ends with a playful exchange between Singh and his wife. This is something that Singh says he and his wife do "each night," a ritual that represents the depth (and humor) of their love. All day long, Singh has to listen to customers asking how much this or that product costs. Here, his wife subverts that by asking how much he will charge her for the moon:

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

Of course, Singh can't really sell her the moon! They're being playful and romantic, their love helping them transcend their everyday reality.

Singh tells his wife that the moon costs half as much as she does. And when she asks what that comes to, he delivers the punchline (and last line of the poem): "is priceless baby." This is probably an allusion to the famous Mastercard slogan, which divides life into two sets of experiences: those that money *can* buy, and those that it can't. In the poem's end, then, the speaker asserts that his love is far more important than many—and, it follows, more important than work!

Also note how the poem's structure morphs into couplets (two-line stanzas) throughout this conversation, reflecting the young couple's intimacy. At this time of night, they are together

without distractions, an isolated duo represented by the groupings of lines into twos. Each couplet also uses anaphora ("from di stool each night") and epistrophe ("baby"), again making it feel like readers are getting a glimpse of a sweet nightly routine that the couple shares.

SYMBOLS

THE WIFE'S CLOTHES

In lines 30-33, Singh describes his wife's typical outfit:

> she hav a red crew cut
> and she wear a Tartan sari
> a donkey jacket and some pumps

Her sense of style symbolizes her cultural assimilation—the way she combines her Indian heritage with Western influences. The sari is a traditional Indian garment that uses draped cloth and often has beautiful patterning/coloring. Its usage dates as far back as the fifthth century B.C.E! By wearing it, then, Singh's wife stays in touch with her Indian roots. But this is a sari with a difference—it's made with a *Scottish* pattern called Tartan (intersecting lines/squares of different colors; think of plaid).

She puts her own twist on tradition, then, in a way that represents her independent spirit and her distinct cultural identity. Her short red hair further contrasts with the long, dark hair many Indian women favor, and she also pairs high heels with a "donkey jacket" (a kind of midlength workwear coat).

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 31-33:** " she hav a red crew cut / and she wear a Tartan sari / a donkey jacket and some pumps"

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration fills the poem with music, which makes sense given that the title is "Singh Song"! It also works closely with consonance and assonance to create a poem that's simply fun to read aloud.

Some subtle alliteration here is just the result of the poet's choice to evoke an Indian accent (for example, "I do di lock" in line 4). Other moments are more striking, as with "chapatti" and "chutney" in the second stanza. These strong sounds ring out through the lines and suggest the speaker's excitement upon spending time with his new bride.

More alliteration appears as a chorus of disgruntled shoppers complains to Singh that "yor lemons and limes." Beyond simply sounding musical and a bit funny, the shared sounds of these words reflects the fact that the speaker doesn't really care to distinguish between fruits. To Singh, lemons might as well be limes, and vice versa—he's more interested in his wife than produce!

Later, the alliteration of "head high heel" in line 18 draws attention to Singh's wife tapping her feet upstairs, while the sharp /t/ sounds of "tiny eyes ov a gun / and di tummy ov a teddy" add a bit of bite to this description of her. And as the speaker describes sitting in the store at the end of the day, musical alliteration evokes an atmosphere charged with romance and magic. These lines are loaded with shared sounds, as Singh describes how "de precinct is concrete-cool" as he and his wife:

> [...] 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 —

This intense alliteration signals that the drudgery of the daytime has been dispelled by the power of the young couple's love. The sibilance here also gently evokes the hush of the evening, when the lovers finally get some time all to themselves.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "do di"
- **Line 6:** "chapatti"
- **Line 7:** "chutney"
- **Line 13:** "lemons," "limes"
- **Line 15:** "dis dirty"
- **Line 18:** "head high heel"
- **Line 19:** "web," "wid"
- **Line 20:** "Sikh," "site"
- **Line 23:** "my mum"
- **Line 25:** "den," "drunk"
- **Line 26:** "daddy"
- **Line 28:** "tiny"
- **Line 29:** "tummy," "teddy"
- **Line 31:** "crew cut"
- **Line 38:** "di," "date"
- **Line 45:** "concrete-cool"
- **Line 46:** "cum," "stairs"
- **Line 47:** "sit," "silver stool"
- **Line 48:** "behind," "bars"
- **Line 49:** "past," "price"
- **Line 50:** "beaches," "brightey"

ALLUSION

The poem makes two allusions, mostly for comic effect.

In the second stanza, Singh describes how, whenever no one is in his shop, he dashes upstairs to make love to his wife. They do this, he says in line 9, "like vee rowing through Putney." Putney is a suburb of London on the River Thames and is the starting location of The Boat Race—an annual event that pits rowing crews from Oxford and Cambridge universities against one another. Rowing, of course, is an intense burst of physical activity and endurance; Singh alludes to it in order to demonstrate the passionate physicality of his relationship with his wife. It's also an event that most people not living in the UK wouldn't have heard of; it thus demonstrates Singh's Britishness and pokes fun at it (because it's such an eccentric comparison).

The other example appears at the end of the poem. Late in the "midnight hour," after the shop has closed its doors, Singh and his wife sneak downstairs and sit on a stool, looking out of the window. When Singh's wife asks how much she "costs," he says she's "priceless." This refers to a well-known advertising slogan used by the credit card company Mastercard, which basically divvies life up into experiences things that money can buy and things that it can't—things that are "priceless." Singh and his wife don't seem to have a lot of money but they do have each other.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 9:** "like vee rowing through Putney -"
- **Lines 57-58:** "from di stool each night I say, / / is priceless baby -"

ASSONANCE

Assonance works with other sonic devices like consonance and alliteration to fill the poem with music. The poem is a funny "Song," and assonance plays a big part in creating its lighthearted tone.

Check out the two chorus sections, for example, where assonance makes the customers' angry complaints seem a bit silly and overwrought:

> *dis dirty little floor need a little bit of mop*
> *in di worst Indian shop*
> *on di whole Indian road —*

All the assonance here makes it sound as if Singh is putting on a voice and gently mocking his customers.

Later, the long /i/ sounds of "my bride" evoke Singh's contented sigh as he thinks about his wife, the shared vowel drawing out these words as though Singh is luxuriating in them. Assonance works like this throughout the poem, making certain moments all the more memorable and rhythmic.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "shops"
- **Line 2:** "O'clock," "O'clock"
- **Line 4:** "lock"
- **Line 7:** "chutney"
- **Line 8:** "luv"
- **Line 9:** "Putney"
- **Line 10:** "my," "untied"
- **Line 11:** "cry"
- **Line 12:** "Singh," "bin"
- **Line 15:** "dis ," "little," "little bit," "of mop"
- **Line 16:** "shop"
- **Line 17:** "whole," "road"
- **Line 18:** "ground"
- **Line 19:** "mouse"
- **Line 20:** "site"
- **Line 21:** "meat," "cheese," "price"
- **Line 22:** "my bride"
- **Line 23:** "mum"
- **Line 24:** "Punjabi"
- **Line 25:** "stumble," "drunk"
- **Line 26:** "fun," "daddy"
- **Line 27:** "my bride"
- **Line 28:** "tiny eyes"
- **Line 29:** "tummy," "teddy"
- **Line 30:** "my bride"
- **Line 32:** "Tartan sari"
- **Line 33:** "some pumps"
- **Line 35:** "my bride"
- **Line 36:** "cry"
- **Line 37:** "Singh," "bin"
- **Line 38:** "date"
- **Line 39:** "stale"
- **Line 40:** "offer," "got," "stock"
- **Line 41:** "shop"
- **Line 42:** "whole," "road"
- **Line 45:** "cool"
- **Line 47:** "sit," "silver," "stool"
- **Line 49:** "past," "half-price," "signs"
- **Line 52:** "yoo," "moon"

CONSONANCE

Consonance, like alliteration and assonance, helps make the poem more musical, memorable, and light-hearted.

Note, for example, how Singh's disgruntled shoppers accuse him of mixing up the "lemons" and "limes" as well as the "bananas" and "plantain." In other words, everything is mislabeled, and the poem deliberately selects words that are similar in sound to show how easy it is for Singh to make these mistakes. (Of course, these mistakes don't happen because Singh is ignorant about his produce, but because he is distracted by the giddy, joyous love he feels for his wife.)

Strong consonance also crops up when the speaker describes what happens when the shop is closed for the night. His annoying customers have left until the following morning, and Singh sits with his wife in the shop looking out on a moonlit scene. Sibilance captures the hushed, delicate excitement of these private moments:

> vee cum down whispering stairs
> and sit on my silver stool,
> [...]
> vee stare past di half-price window signs

The gentle, whispered quality of these lines captures how special these moments are, when the young couple are together without distraction—and without Singh having to rush back behind the tills to attend to his customers.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "do di"
- **Line 6:** "chapatti"
- **Line 7:** "chutney"
- **Lines 8-9:** "luv / like"
- **Line 9:** "Putney"
- **Line 10:** "pinnie untied"
- **Line 11:** "point"
- **Line 13:** "lemons," "limes"
- **Line 14:** "bananas," "plantain"
- **Line 15:** "dis dirty little floor," "little bit," "mop"
- **Line 16:** "shop"
- **Line 18:** "head high heel"
- **Line 19:** "web," "wid"
- **Line 20:** "netting two cat," "Sikh," "site"
- **Line 23:** "my mum"
- **Line 25:** "den," "stumble like," "drunk"
- **Line 26:** "making," "my daddy"
- **Line 28:** "tiny"
- **Line 29:** "tummy," "teddy"
- **Line 31:** "red crew cut"
- **Line 32:** "wear," "Tartan sari"
- **Line 33:** "donkey jacket," "some pumps"
- **Line 34:** "squeak," "pinching," "sweeties"
- **Line 35:** "return," "tickle"
- **Line 45:** "precinct," "concrete-cool"
- **Line 46:** "cum," "whispering stairs"
- **Line 47:** "sit," "silver stool"
- **Line 48:** "behind," "bars"
- **Line 49:** "stare past," "price," "signs"
- **Line 50:** "beaches," "brightey"

ENJAMBMENT

The poem's frequent enjambment makes things feel conversational and intimate, as though Singh is talking excitedly to a friend. And as a young man caught in the giddy throes of love, it makes sense that Singh communicates with enthusiasm. Enjambment speeds up the poem, and in doing so might also evoke the hectic pace of Singh's life (seemingly every moment of which is split between running the shop and then literally running upstairs to be with his wife).

The poem eschews traditional punctuation, which adds to the rapid, free-flowing feel throughout (though some lines without any punctuation aren't really enjambed, given that they contain full grammatical clauses). This lack of punctuation makes the poem's final eight lines ("from di stool [...] is priceless baby") stand out, as here the speaker indicates clear pauses at the end of each line through punctuation (all of these lines are end-stopped). This noticeably slows the poem down and, in doing so, suggests that, when midnight comes around, Singh and his wife carve out a little time and space that is wholly their own. They can relax a little and enjoy their own company.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "shops / from"
- **Lines 8-9:** "luv / like"
- **Lines 10-11:** "untied / di"
- **Lines 16-17:** "shop / on"
- **Lines 18-19:** "ground / as"
- **Lines 19-20:** "mouse / ven"
- **Lines 20-21:** "site / she"
- **Lines 23-24:** " mum / in"
- **Lines 25-26:** "drunk / making"
- **Lines 28-29:** "gun / and"
- **Lines 31-32:** "cut / and"
- **Lines 33-34:** "pumps / on"
- **Lines 35-36:** "bride / di"
- **Lines 38-39:** "date / and"
- **Lines 41-42:** "shop / on"
- **Lines 46-47:** "stairs / and"
- **Lines 48-49:** " bars / vee"
- **Lines 49-50:** "signs / at"

METAPHOR

Singh lovingly and comically describes his "bride" as having the "eyes ov a gun / and di tummy ov a teddy" in lines 27 to 29. These are cutesy metaphors that speak to the wife's sharp yet feminine demeanor.

On the one hand, Singh's wife seems to be somewhat intimidating and bold, her gun-like eyes perhaps suggesting that she is threatening or dangerous in some way. But to her husband, she also a teddy bear—soft and cuddly, the person he loves to snuggle and fall asleep with. It's an intimate, silly image that fits in with Singh's somewhat childish vocabulary throughout the poem (as in the use of the word "daddy" to refer to his father).

Towards the end of the poem, Singh turns to metaphorical language again when he describes going down to the shop at midnight with his wife. These are romantic, intimate occasions, which the poem conveys by personifying the stairs as "whispering" as the couple descends, conjuring atmosphere of quiet, charged excitement.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 20-21:** "ven she netting two cat on her Sikh lover site / she book dem for di meat at di cheese ov her price -"
- **Lines 27-29:** "my bride / tiny eyes ov a gun / and di tummy ov a teddy"
- **Line 46:** "whispering stairs"

PUN

"Singh Song!" is a funny poem, and much of that humor comes from its generous use of puns. Even the title is a play on words (with the speaker's name being a homonym for "sing").

In the second stanza, Singh describes how he and his wife make love "like vee rowing through Putney." Putney is the start-point of a famous boat race in England. But it also sounds like the Punjabi word roughly transliterated as "patnī," which means, appropriately enough, wife!

Later on in the poem, Singh talks about his wife's work, which involves some kind of dating site. This section is full of puns: "mouse" refers to a computer mouse but also might refer to the small prey animal. In this reading, the wife is playing a kind of cat and mouse game on her dating site (the "web"), luring, or "netting," "cat[s]," or users. Note how the words "web" and "netting" are puns as well, referring both to the internet and to means of entrapment. Meanwhile, "Sikh lover site" sounds just like "seek lover site," and "meat" sounds like "meet" (and has sexual undertones). Altogether, readers get the sense that Singh's wife is pretty crafty—and is either setting users up on dates, or catfishing unsuspecting men!

Where Pun appears in the poem:

- **Lines 8-9:** "after vee hav made luv / like vee rowing through Putney -"
- **Line 19:** "web," "mouse"
- **Line 20:** "netting," "Sikh lover site"
- **Line 21:** "di meat"

REFRAIN

Refrain works here just like it does in an actual song—as a kind of catchy hook. While Singh is the poem's speaker throughout, in the third and eighth stanzas he gives voice to his disgruntled customers:

hey Singh, ver yoo bin?
[...]
in di worst Indian shop
on di whole Indian road —

The refrain's opening question—"hey Singh, ver yoo bin?—demonstrates Singh's disdain for his work. He's often entirely absent, neglecting his duties. The second repeated section ("in di worst [...] road") speaks to the cultural expectations of those who shop in the store. They expect Singh to be diligent and attentive to their needs, in part because they associate those traits with the shop being "Indian" (Singh's father seems more in line with this stereotype).

The repeated lines here also function like a chorus in a song, coming back around again after some intervening verses. They also give Singh a chance to vent his frustrations; he's tired of being badgered by his shoppers, and it's not hard to hear this in a comically mocking tone.

Where Refrain appears in the poem:

- **Line 12:** "hey Singh, ver yoo bin?"
- **Lines 16-17:** "in di worst Indian shop / on di whole Indian road -"
- **Line 37:** "hey Singh, ver yoo bin?"
- **Lines 41-42:** "in di worst Indian shop / on di whole Indian road -"

REPETITION

"Singh Song" is full of repetition, making it a fun, musical poem to read. Indeed, repetition is a key part of what makes this a *song*, and it comes in various shapes and sizes here: namely diacope, anaphora, epistrophe, and parallelism.

In line 2, for example, Singh uses diacope when he explains that his "daddy" expects him to work "from 9 O'clock to 9 O'clock." The repetition here captures Singh's attitude towards the job: it's basically one long bore. Saying "9 O'clock" twice emphasizes the sheer length of his shift and suggests how repetitive the job *itself* is.

Anaphora, meanwhile, gives the poem a fast, frantic pace, and also shows Singh's state of mind. In lines 6 and 7, for example, the repeated "vee share in" captures the excitement with which Singh rushes upstairs to his wife whenever the store is empty of customers. And later in the poem, Singh starts three stanzas in a row with the phrase "my bride." This repetition of this phrase, which also features drawn-out assonance of the long /i/ sound, implies that Singh is totally smitten; he revels in the fact that this woman is his wife.

The last eight lines ("from di stool [...] is priceless baby") strike a different tone from the rest of the poem. Here, Singh recounts a little skit that he and his wife perform together when they are alone in the shop at midnight. This section uses anaphora,

epistrophe (the repeated "baby"), and parallelism (the question/answer structure). All this repetition makes this feel like a little performance, a lovers' ritual.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "9 O'clock," "9 O'clock"
- **Line 6:** "vee share in"
- **Line 7:** "vee share in"
- **Line 12:** "hey Singh, ver yoo bin?"
- **Line 13:** "yor," "are"
- **Line 14:** "yor," "are"
- **Lines 16-17:** "in di worst Indian shop / on di whole Indian road -"
- **Line 22:** "my bride"
- **Line 27:** "my bride"
- **Line 30:** "my bride"
- **Line 37:** "hey Singh, ver yoo bin?"
- **Lines 41-42:** "in di worst Indian shop / on di whole Indian road -"
- **Line 44:** "ven"
- **Line 45:** "ven"
- **Line 51:** "from di stool each night she say,"
- **Line 52:** "how much," "baby"
- **Line 53:** "from di stool each night I say,"
- **Line 54:** "baby"
- **Line 55:** "from di stool each night she say,"
- **Line 56:** "how much," "baby"
- **Line 57:** "from di stool each night I say,"
- **Line 58:** "baby"

SIMILE

The poem uses one simile, found in lines 8 and 9. Here Singh describes how he and his wife make "luv"—they do it "like vee rowing through Putney."

This is probably an allusion to The Boat Race, an annual rowing competition between Oxford and Cambridge universities. The race takes place on the Thames and usually starts in Putney. The simile here compares the young couple's love-making to the extremely physical activity of rowing a boat (under racing conditions, no less!). It comically suggests passion, power, and pace. Rowing, of course, is a repetitive back and forth motion, and it's quite possible that Singh intends the simile as a kind of brag, showing off—or thinking that he's showing off—his love-making prowess.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 8-9:** "after vee hav made luv / like vee rowing through Putney -"

VOCABULARY

Chapatti (Line 6) - A thin flatbread popular in India.

Chutney (Line 7) - A condiment popular in India.

Putney (Line 9) - A suburb of London on the River Thames and the start point of annual boat race between Oxford and Cambridge universities.

Pinnie (Line 10) - Apron.

Plantain (Line 14) - A starchy variety of banana, often cooked.

Sikh (Line 20) - Sikhism is a monotheistic religion originating in the Punjab region (which covers parts of modern-day Pakistan and India).

Effing (Line 23) - Swearing.

Punjabi (Line 24) - A language native to the Punjab region of India/Pakistan, spoken as a first language by approximately 113 million people.

Teddy (Line 29) - A cuddly stuffed animal.

Crew Cut (Line 31) - A short, sharp haircut.

Tartan (Line 32) - A textile pattern originating in Scotland.

Sari (Line 32) - A traditional Indian garment.

Donkey Jacket (Line 33) - A type of workwear coat.

Pumps (Line 33) - High heels.

Sweeties (Line 34) - Confectionary, candies.

Tickle (Line 35) - A euphemism for love-making.

Precinct (Line 45) - Surrounding area/town.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Singh Song!" is a dramatic monologue told from the perspective of a young Indian-British shopkeeper. Apart from that, it doesn't use any established form; instead, it breaks its 58 lines into 13 stanzas of very different lengths. The form is thus unpredictable and perhaps even seems a bit random or disorganized, which evokes its speaker's mindset; Singh is totally giddy with love, to the point that he mislabels fruit and forgets to restock items.

The poem does become more regular in the end, when Singh and his wife go downstairs and stare romantically at the moonlight coast. The shop closed and customers gone, the poem takes on a steadier, calmer tone that is reflected by the couplets that comprise the final eight lines ("from di stool [...] is priceless baby"). The couplets might visually represent the bond between Singh and his wife.

METER

"Singh Song!" is written in free verse, meaning it doesn't have a regular meter. This makes sense, given the poem's casual tone and its speaker's excitement throughout. Singh seems a bit all over the place, neglecting his work duties because of the giddy love he feels towards his wife. The lack of meter here keeps things conversational and natural, while also preventing the language from feeling stiff or stilted.

RHYME SCHEME

"Singh Song!" doesn't have a regular, steady rhyme scheme, but it does use *lots* of rhyme throughout. Having so many unpredictable rhymes reflects the speaker's excited, giddy state of mind.

The first stanza follows an ABCB pattern, where "O'clock" in line 2 rhymes with "lock" in line 4. The assonance and consonance at the end of every line here, however, makes the whole stanza feel musical; note how the "shops," "O'clock," "break," and "lock" all shared at least one consonant or vowel sound.

The next stanza introduces a different pattern, to comic effect:

> [...] bride
> [...] chapatti
> [...] chutney
> [...] luv
> [...] Putney —

The rhyme between "chutney" and "Putney" rings out clearly, drawing attention to the speaker's silly and happy boast about his lovemaking.

The poem plays with rhyme like this throughout, inserting a new pattern into each stanza. Take lines 18-21, which features two sets of slant rhymes:

> [...] ground
> [...] mouse
> [...] site
> [...] price

All these shifting patterns and sounds make the poem feel lively, energetic, and, above all, like a "song."

SPEAKER

The poem's speaker is the "Singh" of the title: a young British-Indian man who works in his father's shop. Singh is head over heels in love with his wife, to the point that neglects his work-related duties in order to be with her. The poem implies that, in this way, Singh is very different from his father, who owns multiple shops and expects his son to work a 12-hour shift without a break. Both Singh and his wife have also adopted elements of British culture, peppering their speech with slang like "baby" and wearing a mixture of Western and Indian clothing.

SETTING

The poem has two distinct settings. First, there is the shop that Singh runs for his father. This seems to be a corner store or small grocery shop of some sort, located near other establishments owned and/or frequented by Indian immigrants (customers describe the shop as being on the "Indian road"). Singh finds the shop dull and doesn't take the best care of it, often mislabelling items, running out of stock, and failing to clean up properly.

The poem alternates between this setting and that of Singh's apartment above the shop, where he lives with his wife. There, his wife works on the internet, and the two make love and eat traditional foods like "chapatti" and "chutney."

These two settings capture the division in Singh's life between work and love, between the responsibilities and expectations of his father/the Indian community and his own personal desires. And only when customers have gone for the day does the shop itself transform into a more welcoming setting for Singh. Late at night, he and his wife go downstairs and stare out at the moonlit coast of the UK. That they look "past" the shop suggests their desire to be free of the responsibilities it entails.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Daljit Nagra is a British poet born in 1966. "Singh Song!" was first published in his debut collection *Look We Have Coming to Dover!*, which won a 2007 Forward Prize. Nagra is a graduate of Royal Holloway University, where he attended workshops by other prominent contemporary poets, such as Carol Ann Duffy, Jackie Kay, and Pascale Petit.

"Singh Song!" is fairly typical of the book in which it appears. *Look We Have Coming to Dover!* primarily explores the experiences of second-generation British-Indians who, unlike their parents, were brought up in Britain rather than India. Many of the poems in the book are also dramatic monologues, inventing characters in order to explore and question cultural stereotypes. Some of the other poems in the book are also like "Singh Song!" in that they use "Punglish"—a hybrid mix of English and Punjabi words/phonetic pronunciation (e.g., "ov" for *of*).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After World War II saw a significant drop in the population of

local working-age men, the British government invited people from across the Commonwealth to live and work in the UK. The 1949 Royal Commission on Population stated that immigrants of "good stock" would be welcomed to the country "without reserve." A large number of people subsequently emigrated from the Indian subcontinent during the 1950s and 1960s, including Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims.

Nagra's parents, Sikhs from the Punjabi region, arrived in Britain in the 1950s and owned a shop much like that in this poem in Sheffield, a town in the north of England. The poem implies that Singh is either a second-generation British Indian like Nagra or someone who moved to the UK from India as a young person.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Nagra Reads the Poem — Hear the poem in the poet's own voice. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYIDS4Ka7CE)
- An Interview with Nagra — Check out an interview with the poet in the British newspaper The Guardian. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/14/daljit-nagra-poetry-espresso-shot-of-thought-interview)
- Look We Have Coming to Dover! — Watch Nagra read from and discuss his prize-winning debut collection. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8eonfv5elM)
- The Corner Shop — An article about the kind of shop that Singh runs for his dad. (https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markeaston/2009/09/corner_shop_culture.html)

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