



Reflection of multiculturalism in Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*.

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Abstract

The existence of multiple culture and traditions within a country is known as multiculturalism. It is usually considered in terms of the culture associated with foreign groups. It happens when judicial body created or expanded by the union of two or more cultures or through immigration from different parts of the world. The policies and ideologies of multiculturalism varies widely, ranging from the advocacy of equality of different cultures and groups and recognizing their individuality.

In Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) we can see how multiculturalism turns to be both blessing and curse to the small village Mano Majra, located in the border of India and Pakistan. According to New Historicism, some advocates of cultural studies orient their writings and teaching towards the explicit political end of reforming the existing power-relations which, they claim, are dominated by a privileged gender, race, class, or ethnic group. Multiculturalism in *Train to Pakistan* can be analyzed in two phases. One before the arrival of the ghost train and the second is the tension aroused among the multicultural village Mano Majra after the arrival of the ghost train.

Keywords : Multiculturalism, Identity crisis, Suppression.

Introduction

Multiculturalism centers on the thought in political philosophy about the way to respond to cultural and religious differences. It is closely associated with "identity politics", "the politics of difference" and "politics of recognition". It is also a matter of economic interest and political power. Despite the fact that multiculturalism has mainly been used as a term to define disadvantaged groups,

including African Americans, members of LGBT community, and the disabled, many theorists tend to focus their arguments to immigrants who are ethnic and religious minorities, minority nations and indigenous peoples.

Multiculturalism can refer to a demographic fact, a particular set of philosophical ideas or a specific orientation by government or institution towards a diverse population. Most of the debate over multiculturalism centers on whether or not public multiculturalism is the appropriate way to deal with diversity and immigrant integration. Recognition on the context of multicultural education is a demand not just for recognition of aspects of a group's actual culture but also for the history of group subordination and its entire experience. The term multiculturalism is most often used in reference to western nation-states, which had seemingly achieved a de facto single national identity during the 18th or 19th centuries. Multiculturalism had been an official policy in western countries since the 1970's, for reasons that varied from country to country, including the fact that many of the greatest cities of the western world are increasingly made of mosaic of cultures.

Multiculturalism in India

Considering the multicultural society of our country, the Indian constitution has included innumerable acts by which the marginalized sections of the country are given sufficient protection and special privileges. Thus the scheduled tribes and castes and other backward communities get reservation in education as well as employment. Strangely enough only 25% of the Indian population is in the forward communities. In addition to these reservations two major minority religious sections-Muslims and Sikhs enjoy special rights in our country. Even though absence of common civil code creates some problems the government of India ensures that each religion and its customs are protected in the society. When we look onto the recent religious and communal trends in our country we are gently alarmed to find that people give undue importance to their religious belief and rituals. National feelings and patriotism are being devoured by the monster of religion. The present generation seems to forget the fact that they are citizens in the country-the land which gave them birth and sustain and protect till they go back to the very same land. Thus national feelings affiliation shall be uppermost of all other narrow feelings of religion, community, language, region etc. just imagine that when we are comfortably sitting here and sleeping well in our houses without any fear, millions of soldiers are patrolling on our borders fighting with extreme climate and even risking their lives to keep us all safe.

Language plays an important role in multicultural unity. Languages are the special gifts of man which make him distinct from other animals. There is a tendency among our vernacular writers to boast of their language and literature. India being a multicultural, multi-lingual country we should respect other languages and literature. Very often vernacular writers complain that existence and use of English is a hindrance for the growth of regional languages. Such an antagonistic attitude to English is not fair as

English is the only Lingua Franca which knits all Indians together. Of course Hindi is our national language but its function is less in the south. It's only through English we can communicate to the world. The culture of India has been shaped by its long history, unique geography and diverse demography. India's languages, religions, dance, music architecture and customs differ from place to place within the country, but nevertheless possess a commonality. The Indian caste system describes the social stratification and social restrictions in the Indian subcontinent, in which social classes are defined by thousands of endogamous hereditary groups, are often termed jades or castes.

Reflection of Multiculturalism in Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*.

By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms or hiding. The only oasis of peace was a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villages was Mano Majra. Indian ethos reflects the continuity and tolerance-tolerance of faiths, religions, languages, dialects, ideas, lifestyles and cuisines. Variety is the spice of life and it is there in abundance in India. Singh's portrayal of the village Mano Majra before it turns out into a battlefield shows how religious diversity represents a complete and wonderful pattern of unity, integrity and wholeness. The background of the novel is partition. The partition turns out to be a tragedy in both the minds and actions of the villagers. By presenting the village as the protagonist, Singh shows the peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance of various identities.

The central character of the novel Juggut Singh is an excellent symbol of emotionally and physically strong Punjabi. He is the village gangster, but even so he was not ready to soil his hands with the blood of a fellow villager. "For them truth, honour, financial integrity are all placed lower down the scale of values than being true to one's salt to one's friends and fellow villagers. For friends you could lie, in court or cheat and no one could blame you."(44). It was the projection of the rural society where everyone in the village was a relation and loyalty to the village was the supreme test. Singh also present before the readers the love story between Juggut Singh and Nooran, daughter of a Muslim weaver. While bringing forth loyalty, equality and brotherhoodness of the villagers, Singh also highlights an innocent rural society, who is uneducated. Mano Majra is such a remote village in Punjab, even they are unaware of what is happening in the country.

The partition of India do not had much effect on the villagers but when Ramlal the only Hindu in the village is murdered, suspicion falls upon the village gangster Juggut Singh who is actually innocent. When Iqbal arrived there despite of all his calculations the only tension in the village was the unexpected death of Ramlal. As a social reformer, Iqbal gets to know about the village through Meet Singh. From the conversation between them we can understand the contrast of opinion between a typical rural Indian

and an Indian scholar from London who foresees the danger the village is going to face in association with the incidents happening in India. He was well aware that more than a political conflict, it is going to affect the inner mindset of the people. There is a great chance to break the bond of love, trust and brotherhood they maintained for decades.

Even though as we say India is a multicultural society, with diverse culture and people respecting the faith, rituals and even the festivals of other communities, their own individual religion is important to them. Religion becomes a part our identity. An Indian cannot complete his identity without a religion. This is the most sensitive side of India. The security of India lies in its religious understanding. A single spark to this belief will result in a conflict. The mindset of almost all Indians is that religion gives morality. Khushwant Singh, who refuses this point of view being an agnostic, tells his opinion about morality through Iqbal. When the story proceeds we can see that Iqbal and Juggut Singh are arrested by police. There is a difference in the treatments for both Iqbal and Jugga. At the police station Jugga's arrival was the subject of much hilarity. Iqbal is treated with honour. But this did not surprised Iqbal because, In a country which had accepted cast distinctions for many centuries, inequality had become an inborn mental concept. The communal groups try to provoke other groups through their fundamentalist speeches and actions that lead to violence in the society. After the evacuation of Muslims from Mano Majra, the Sikhs and the group headed by the gangster Malli destroys the vacated houses of Muslims. They decide to kill the Muslims in train to Pakistan, as a gift to Pakistan in return for the ghostly train. For each Sikh they killed two Muslims there were riots.

The magistrate is a major character on the dramatic stage of Train to Pakistan. The magistrate believes that Iqbal and Juggut will be able to influence the people and save the Muslims from being killed, because Iqbal Singh is a social worker and Juggut Singh is in love with a Muslim girl called Nooran. But when they come to know of the proposed plan to attack train, Juggut, a passionate man of action, concerns for the safety of Nooran. He prevents the accident by cutting the rope meant for killing the Muslims but he is himself killed in the attempt. Thus, Juggut though criticized by the villagers but he succeeds in safeguarding the lives of Muslims, which the so called police department failed to achieve. He becomes a symbol of love for humanity.

Khushwant Singh observes the two communities Hindu and Muslims towards their involvement in partition riots. He portrays the reality of situation and horrible tragedy of the two communities. Thus though unity prevails in the village, the outlook of communication has descended in the village. Partition had brought about division to the lives of people who dreams of a united India.

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