

Reflection of Multiculturalism in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

Grishma Manikrao Khobragade

Assit.Prof, Dept of English,
Birla College, Kalyan
(Affiliated to University of Mumbai)
(M.S.)

The concept of multiculturalism recognizes socio-cultural diversity within a society. It promotes others to be open-minded by contributing to society from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Multiculturalism has acquired a broad multiplicity and scope in the areas of politics, sociology and humanity. It realizes cultural diversity and respects the view of various identities at individual, cultural, ethnic, religious and national levels. The paper aims at showing how multiculturalism supports in keeping social harmony through love, tolerance, acceptance, recognition and adjustment of different cultures. It attempts a close review of Indian novel in English in the light of both support and violation of the ideology of multiculturalism in the selected novel Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956). Multiculturalism can be defined as the belief that it is important and good to include people or ideas from many different countries, races or religions. 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. (Abrams: 1993:254)

In Democratic country like India, the government shoulders responsibility for the protection of human rights of all communities and marginalized groups and their ethnic identities. The marginalized people struggle for their human identity with the dominating mainstream majority. We believe in unity in diversity, diversity of culture, race, caste, creed and language. As Sujata Patel rightly observes:

The post –independence India experienced varied identity formation as a consequence of the process of industrialization, urbanization, globalization and expansion of the information technology. The identities that are emerged were based on discrete received categories such as religion, Caste (Jati), Class (Varna), gender and sex. (Patel: 1995:235)

Indian writers cannot get the Indian environment out of their system. The place a writers live-in, the community he is in contact with, the concerns that affect his country. All together determine the ethos and personality of the writer. The memories of mother country are memorable. They are persistently struggling to search for an identity. There is combination of these immigrant cultures with the mainstream without state interference which considered as “melting pot.” But in course of time the migrated people create literatures for articulating their expression and identity. Thus India becomes a multiethnic, multilingual, multi cultural and multi religious society and India has maintained its unity in diversity. But where diversity prevails, the idea of divide geo-political national entities has become unavoidable, the minorities being concerned for their prospect under the larger ethnic group. In this regard Gates remarks:

Multiculturalism is concerned with representations, not of differences as such, but of cultural identities.(Gate:1993:6)

The Partition of India in 1947 is the greatest setback in the history of India's integrity and democracy. The country has been witnessing clash between Hindus and Muslims or Christians and Hindus.

In this novel Khushwant Sing presents a picture of the horror of killings, looting and raping that followed the partition of India. The aim of this novel is to liberate people from their narrow loyalties to caste, community and politics and awaken their conscience to live a real human life upholding the values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Mano Majra is a small place on the banks of the Satlj river. There are only three brick buildings-the house of money-lender Lala Ramal, the Sikh temple and mosque. There are only seventy families in the village. Lala Ram Lal is the only Hindu family. The others are Sikhs or Muslims in equal numbers. Sikhs and Muslims had lived in peace for years. The life in Mano Majra is peaceful except for the dogs barking at the trains that pass in the night.

Train to Pakistan pictures a touching description of the tragedy of Partition, in the small Indian village of Mano Majra. The Sikhs are the landowners, the Muslims their tenants and the district magistrate is a Hindu, namely, Hukam Chand. It is a model of peaceful life and inter-racial harmony. Into this peaceful location, arrives a gang of dacoits who kill the local money lender - Lala Ram Lal The police arrest the usual suspect - a local budmash - Juggat Singh. At the time of the incident, Juggat Singh was out of the village with his Muslim beloved. He is considered to be the strong suspect because his relations with the dacoits. The day after the murder, Iqbal Sing arrived at Manao Majra for party work. He had spent many years aboard. He wanted to become a leader. The day after his arrival, both Iqbal and Jugga were arrested by the police without any warrant. They were taken to the police station at Chandunagar. The simple lives of the people of Mano Majra are regulated by the trains. Partition and Independence do not really mean much to any of them until an incident happens. One day when a train from Lahore comes over the bridge an unexpected time and is found to be full of dead Sikhs. But the people swear it will not happen to them, they will not see harm come to their friends and neighbours. Soon, the people of Mano Majra are influenced by outsiders and corrupted to turn on their old friends.

A few days after the corpses have been burnt in Mano Majra, another such train follows. It is then Mano Majra changes. Manjo Manra becomes a battleground of conflicting faithfulness and with new refugees and mobs in the village. Refugee camps had come up for the Muslims. Pak, Baluchi and Pathan soldiers were evacuating them to Pakistan. About three score Sikhs had arrived at Mano Majra from Pakistan. Mano Majra is suddenly frightened into the harsh reality of mass flight. Mano Majra was an oasis of peace and harmony when looting, rape and murder were the order of the day on the both side of the border. The magistrate wanted to remove Muslim from the village. What had been a rumor is now suddenly a reality. Plots are hatched; rumors are spread of the death and destruction in other towns and villages. The train to Pakistan is involved. Friends become foes and ethnicity of brotherhood and peaceful coexistence disappear.

In *Train to Pakistan* the social milieu reveals that Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims made the traditional structures of the Punjabi society in the pre-partition India. Culture, language and customs contributed to the larger Punjabi identity though at a certain level religion divided them into communal identities. Another identity is a tense emotional belongingness to the village

which gave separate religious identities. Mano Manjra, the focal point of Train to Pakistan is typical of the rural Punjabi life. Sikhs and the Muslims of the village live happily till the day of partition. They represent a communal harmony; Identity, sense of belongingness, sense of locality and sense of history are some of the aspects of Multiculturalism. The novelist while depicting the tragedy of partition also seems to portray Punjabi ethos and identity. The Sikh people's trustworthiness towards their fellow beings come before anything else.

“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 would blame you.”(38)

The central character of the novel is Juggut Singh, a Sikh martyr and his sacrifice is motivated to all community. The Sikh Gurus and Muslim Mullahs are respected by both communities. Both communities are ready to secure their lives for each other. Imam Baksh is Mullah as well as *Chacha* of the village. Meet Singh is a religious head of the Sikhs. There is a mutual understanding among the villagers which maintains the feeling of friendliness, peace and non-violence. Meet Singh did not have any objection on the basis of religion. Meet Singh represented the tension free life of the village when he said to the social worker, Iqbal:

Everyone is welcome to his religion. Here next door is a Muslim mosque. When I pray to my Guru, uncle Imam Baksh calls to Allah. (35)

Muslim felt that Pakistan would be a haven of refugee where there were no Sikhs and Hindus. The Sikhs in turn were mad and angry and they seemed to agree with people who said Muslims had no loyalties. Mano Majra was now no more a peaceful place but this silence is suddenly disturbed:

The arrival of the ghost train, filled with corpses at Mano Majro from Pkistan, created a commotion. Sikhs and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries, are engulfed in Fratricidal conflicts. (Shahane: 1972:336).

The arrival of *ghost train* brought a distinct change in the life of Mano Majra. Entire village is divided. Muslims started talking about the atrocities committed by the Sikhs and Hindus in Patiala, Ambala etc. They thought that under the circumstances, it was better for Muslims to go to the refugees camps for their safety and Sikh would look after their properties till the normalcy returned. It came as a big surprise to the Sikhs when they came to know that trucks had come to take the Muslims of Mano Majro to Pakistan, never to return. A sense of fear by the Muslims, engrossed the Sikhs' minds. They say:

We have looked upon the Muslims as our brothers and sisters. Why should they send some body to spy on us. (105)

The news and rumors of Muslim atrocities on the side of border created deep unrest in both the communities. Muslims are insecure about their future. The Muslims determine to join the refugee camp. Some young Sikh s arrives in the village from Pakistan. They had a relatively safe journey and the Muslims of Mano Majra were giving them good and shelter. Sikhs of Village felt that the local Muslims had nothing to do with what Muslims of Pakistan did to Hindus and Sikhs there. Sikhs in Khaki dress challenge the villagers:

Never trust a Mussulman ... The last Guru had warned them that the Muslims had no loyalties. He was right. All through the Muslim period of Indian History, sons had imprisoned or killed their own fathers and brothers. (106)

The conflict between religious groups is not limited to India society alone; almost every country at one time or other has to face it and others are still struggling with the problem known as Communalism. It is a belief of a social or religious group that their religion is supreme. Sikhs try to assure the Muslims of their safety. When the news of evacuation comes, it creates a sorrowful atmosphere. Their sense of belongingness and the suffering of being uprooted from their motherland are reflected through their words and tears. The young men promised Muslim:

It is like this Uncle Imam Bakhs. As long as we are here nobody will dare touch you. We die first and then you look after yourselves (110)

Imam Baksh is also could not control his emotions .He says:

What we have to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers. Imam Baksh broke down. Meet Singh clasped him in his arms and began to sob. Several of the people started crying quietly and blowing their noses. (110-111)

A communal group promotes the interests of its own members and in doing so may even be hostile to the interests of other groups. The communal groups try to provoke other groups through their fundamentalist speeches and actions that lead to violence and lawlessness in the society. The fear complex could be fully aroused by propagating that their religious interests and their religion itself were in danger. He recalled:

What had they done to Sikhs? Executed two of their Gurus, assassinated another and butchered his infant children; hundreds of thousands had been put to the sword for no other offence than refusing to accept Islam. (106)

Hukum Chand is the magistrate and deputy commissioner of the district. He is a major character on the dramatic stage of train to Pakistan. Hukum Chand discusses the complex situations and the challenges before him. Police department are completely unable to control the communal violence. They decide to assign the job to Juggut Singh and Iqbal Singh whom they have arrested on the charge of dacoity and murder of Lala Ram Lal. The magistrate believes that these two persons will be able to influence the people and save the Muslim from being killed. Because Iqbal 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. When he knows the conspiracy that the train is carrying his beloved 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 criticize by the villagers but he succeeds in safeguarding the lives of Muslims, which so called police department fails to achieve. He becomes a symbol of love for humanity. In this regard Chirantan Kulshrestha reiterates:

Juggat's act of love and sacrifice silhouetted against the backdrop of hatred and violence towers above the communal differences and lends a meaning to the general aimlessness of life in the partition days. (Mukharjee: 1977:152).

Khushwant Singh observes towards the two communities, Hindu and Muslims towards their involvement in the partition riots. He portrays the reality of the situation and horrible tragedy of the two communities Thus though unity prevails in the village Mano Majra, the outlook of communalism has descended on the village. Partition had brought about division to the lives of

people who dreams of a united India. In spite of the assurance given by the Sikhs, the Muslims decide to leave the Village to Pakistan .Sikh becomes aggressive when their self-respect is challenged. They say:

For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussulmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot two. For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across. For each road convoy that is attacked, attack two. That will stop the killings on the other side. It will teach them that we can also play this game of killing and looting. (129)

The train plays a central role in regulating the lives of Mano Majrans. The train, time and tryst are dominant motifs in the novel. Train keeps coming in and going out throughout the novel. Train regulates the time and life of the village. The whole Mano Majra wakes up when the mail train runs through the bridge. The train has other contextual relations .It signifies groups of people who are heading for diverse objective. In this regard V.A. Shahane remarks:

Religious diversities are thus overcome by the center of supernatural and divine power and forces of division alternate with Life in Mano Majra is regulated by the passing of train across the bridge. (Shahane: 1972:78)

This novel is more than a powerful story of crimes and horrors that followed partition. The train is very suggestive symbol emphasizing the importance of love, peace, unity, discipline and liberty. Thus in spite of the ethnic diversity, peace and unity exist in their lives until communal conflict and violence generated by partition surround the minds of the villagers. Ethnic consciousness enables people and harmony. Ethnic identity gives importance to justice and equality. A person who is ethnic conscious does not believe in social discrimination on the basis of caste, race, religion, language and so on. Ethnic consciousness expects people of various faiths and religion to co-exist and live in peace and harmony. Iqbal is a social worker found religion hollow and lack of ethnic values. He reflects:

Take religion. For the Hindu, it means little besides caste and cow protection. For the Muslim, circumcision and Kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and hatred of the Muslim. For the Christian, Hinduism with a sola topee. For the Parsee, fire-worship and feeding vultures. (149)

The religious leaders of all faiths can play a leading role to develop communal harmony. The religious leaders should meet regularly to discuss ways and means to ensure communal harmony. The religious leaders also need to preach regularly the merits of communal harmony. All the characters are rooted in Punjabi culture. Religion forms an integral part of their life. Religion may exercise social control over its members. The members must behave according to the norms or standards of the religion. Meet Singh expresses the Punjabi rules of religious ethics. He says to Juggut Singh:

It is just the Guru's word. If you are going to do something good, the Guru will help you: if you are going to do something bad, the Guru will stand in your way. If you persist in doing it, he will punish you till you repent, and then forgive you. (151)

The end of the novel has become very poignant and dramatic. Novelist has not highlighted any of his characters; he has narrated an episodes and incidents that is plot. At the time of the departure of Muslims, they went from house to house talking, crying, swearing love and

friendship, assuring each other that this would soon be over. Another aspect of partition is revealed as the Muslims were evacuated from the village. The leader talks of the atrocities caused on Sikhs by Muslims. Thus Novelist portrays the ethnic identity and harmony in Indian society being interrupted by communal conflict.

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