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Theme of Multiculturalism in Khushvant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

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Abstract:

The novel presents the tragic tale of the partition period in Indian history. The partition was a political pronouncement, which had caused miseries and sufferings to the people from diverse communities and cultures, particularly the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. It had devalued humanistic values and principles and created a sense of hatred, antagonism and hostility among different communities and cultures. This is an analysis of *Train to Pakistan* from the socio-political perspective of multiculturalism. First we should study the history of partition, a necessary background to the analysis of the novel and later multiculturalism. The most recent MLA 8th edition has been used for citation and documentation.

Keywords: multiculturalism, Communities, Cultures, ideology, politics, minority, etc.

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, 235)

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 Khushvant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* 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:

‘Train to Pakistan’ presents ‘Mano Majra,’ a border village of Punjab, with its religious, cultural, and ethnic characteristics. Although of diverse backgrounds, the people of the village had been residing together with much respect and love for one another. Their peaceful coexistence nurtured human values like love, trust and respect in the public domain. In the pre-partition period, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims in Mano Majra made a positive contribution to solidify a cultural mosaic in Punjab. Different cultural and religious groups were free to define their own ways of life. They could enjoy their religious, cultural and linguistic practices and customary ways. They respected each other's religion and culture and encouraged the differences in terms of food habits, life styles, beliefs and different cultural and religious practices.

The ‘three brick’ buildings enclose a triangular common with a large people tree in the middle. The rest of the village is a cluster of flat-roofed mud huts and low-walled courtyards, which front on narrow lanes that radiate from the center.... At the western end of the village there is a pond ringed round by keeker trees. There are only about seventy families in Mano Majra, and Lala Ram Lal's is the only Hindu family. The others are Sikhs or Muslims, about equal in number. The Sikhs own all the land around the village; the Muslims are tenants and share the tilling with the owners. There are few families of sweepers whose religion is uncertain. (P.10)

Multiculturalism does not differentiate between the majority and the minority on the basis of numerical strength. It advocates and celebrates differences in terms of religion, culture, ideology and different ways of life. In *Mano Majra*, muslims are in minority but they feel comfortable and secure in the village. The religious security and preference they enjoy are revealed in these words: The mullah at the mosque knows that it is time for Morning Prayer. He has a quick wash, stands facing west towards Mecca and with his fingers in his ears cries in long sonorous notes, ‘Allah-ho-Akbar.’

The priest at the Sikh temple lies in bed till the mullah has called. Then he gets up, draws a bucket of water from the well in the temple courtyard, pours it over himself, and intones his prayer in monotonous singsong to the sound of splashing water. (Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, 12-13)

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.

(Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, 38)

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.
(Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, 149)

The end of the novel has become very poignant and dramatic. Novelist has not highlighted any of his characters; he has narrated an episode 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.

Conclusion:

The multiculturalism reflected in the opening part of the novel is a positive step towards fostering the value of social integrity and peace. In brief, Meet Singh's way of greeting, polite language, etiquette, respect to the Sikh scriptures and above all his hospitality reveal the multidimensionality of the Sikh culture, which essentially promotes humanism, egalitarianism, socio-religious liberalism and multicultural harmony.

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