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Identity Crisis in Sukha Bargad by Manzoor Ehtesham

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Abstract:

The Partition of India and Pakistan was perhaps one of the most heartbreaking events of Indian history. Many people were uprooted and many lost. Its ripples are still felt every day in our culture, in our movies, in our books and for many of us, in our personal lives as well. The Partition also caused the largest mass migration in human history. Many Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan and many Hindus from Pakistan to India. After Partition the problem of identity for Indian Muslims is one of the burning issues of today's postcolonial world. Because of the migration people all over India since Partition became the victims through power transplantation. Therefore, one big question always haunts the migrant: "Who am I?"

Key words: Struggle, Identity Crisis, Muslim Society



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Manzoor Ehtesham (born in 1948) is one of the Indian authors who have remained relevant to historical as well as to the present generation of readership. He has been writing for Hindi Literature but has been received and acclaimed in all parts of India for the period of more than three decades. He was born just a year after the independence of India in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. He belonged to a conservative Muslim family of modest background. He studied well and got educated up to higher education at Aligarh Muslim University and Maulana Azad College of Technology, Bhopal. He currently lives in Bhopal, where he runs an interior decoration business and works as an independent writer. Manzoor Ehtesham represents the important Muslim voice of modern India in Hindi fiction. He is known for his minute observations of psyche of Indian Muslims in his novels. He is one of the most productive authors of modern Hindi fiction. He renewed five Hindi novels - *Kuch din aur* published in the year 1976, *Sukha Bargad* that appeared in 1986, *Dastan-e Lapata* that came in the year 1995, *Basharat Manzil* which came out in 2004, and his latest novel is *Pahar dhalte* that was published in the year 2007. He also wrote many short stories during his literary career. These collections came out regularly, starting from *Ramzan mem ek maut* (A Death During Ramadan, published in the year 1982), *Tasbih* (The Rosary, published in the year 1998), and *Tamasha tatha anya kahaniyam* (The Spectacle and Other Stories, published in the year 2001). He is also associated with composing several plays, such as *Ek tha badshah* (*There Once was a King*, which got published in the year 1980), which was co-authored by Satyen Kumar. Manzoor Ehtesham's work has been translated into many European languages English, German, and several Indian languages.

Apart from his other novels, the author is peculiarly known for his most acclaimed novel *Sukha Bargad*. This novel was translated into English by Kuldip Singh as *A Dying Banyan* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2005). His yet another novel *Dastan-e Lapata* also has been translated into English by Jason Grunebaum and Ulrike Stark. For his literary contribution and master pieces that he crated, Manzoor Ehtesham has revived many prestigious literary prizes that include India's highest civilian award, the Padma Shri (2003), the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Puruskar, the Shrikant Verma Smriti Samman, the Virsingh Deo Award (for *Dastan-e Lapata*), the Vageshwari Award (for *Tasbih*), the Shikhar Samman, and the Pahal Samman for his contribution to Hindi literature.



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In the novel, *Sukha Bargad*, the author traces out the flow of the course of life of Suhail, the son of a conservative Muslim family born in India. Though born in a conservative family background, Suhail has a secular mindset. He is a lawyer by profession and married to a traditional Muslim woman. Unlike, most of the novels written by the Indian authors, *Sukha Bargad* is a narrative of a Muslim character of Suhail who chooses to stay back to India. Through his experiences, the novel *Sukha Bargad* explores the identity crisis of the Muslims in India in general and those who stayed back in particular after the partition. *Sukha Bargad* deals with the life story of Suhail and wife and rest of the family who stayed back in Bhopal. It is interesting to note that Bhopal has been one of the Muslim dominated cities of India which was once ruled by the Nawabs before independence.

However, after independence in 1947, the character of Bhopal gradually started changing. Gradually the traditional mindset of the Muslims and their staunch identities started diluting and as a result many Muslims migrated to Pakistan. Those people who did not go to Pakistan before or after partition. *Sukha Bargad* deliberates on the issues of wars that Pakistan waged against Indian in the year 1965 and later on in the year 1971. Both the wars showed the true color of the Muslims League and the supporters of that fundamental belief. All Indians irrespective of their religion used to listen to All Indian Radio as well as Radio Pakistan. However, the general perception was that if a Hindu is following news on Pakistani Radio station he's just listening for curiosity to know what's the counter part of their country's doing. Whereas if a Muslim is seen listening to Radio Pakistan he is looked with suspicion by everyone. He might be accused of being a traitor who's sharing national secrets to the 'enemy' of the state. And yet with so many blood relatives in Pakistan, the Indian Muslims had valid reasons to listen to Radio Pakistan, not because they were traitors but because they had legitimate concerns about the welfare of their families. *Sukha Bargad* also deals with these peculiar traits of the dormant state of mass suspensions of the faith and loyalties with the state. In the novel, *Sukha Bargad*, the author traces out the flow of the course of life of Suhail, the son of a conservative Muslim family born in India. Though born in a conservative family background, Suhail has a secular mindset. He is a lawyer by profession and married to a traditional Muslim woman. Unlike, most of the novels written by the Indian authors, *Sukha Bargad* is a narrative of a Muslim character of Suhail who chose to stay back to India.

Thus, novel is an attempt to narrate the follow of a Muslim character and through his character the state of mind of the Muslims who stayed back in India after partition. The novel depicts the life of a Muslim



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charted, Suhail. He is the only son of a middle class family unlike many other secularism oriented mindset. His father was a lawyer and his mother was a fundamentalist tradition minded wife as observed by Rashida, Suhail's sister. Along the way, through Suhail's experiences, the book tries to trace the search for identity of a Muslims, post partition.

The horrific events followed by the partition of India and Pakistan later on of Bangladesh were the events of such a massive scale that they affected the human sentiments and moral values to a great extent. No sensitive human being can remain unaffected or indifferent. All creative art forms and artists involved with those arts forms came under its influence profoundly. Many of these artists documented their feelings as a first person narrative technique so as to appeal the reader. In it interesting to note that at times, the art affected the facts and history and sometimes the facts and historical affects. Thus, the effect of these two elements is mutually corresponding and affecting each other.

The present novel *Sukha Bargad* (1984), one of the best novels of Manzoor Ehtesham is one such creative out cry of an artist for documenting the dreadful events of partition and upheavals, mass migration and massacre that was followed. Thus, the reception of these dreadful events can be seen well reported in the present novel along with the descriptive narration and documentation of the dreadful events of partition the author has also documented the saner voices of the communities, those individuals who stood by the humanity and moral values even at the worst conditions and during the movements of crisis that were being unfolded at the wake of partition of India and Pakistan.

Sukha Bargad deals with the lives of the Muslims who stayed back to India, by choice. Unlike the novels by other India authors, the novel does not have backdrop of Civil Disobedience Movement during the first half of the decade of 1930s and winds up by the describing the dreadful events of partition that took place in Punjab. The novel also deals the historical events such as Gandhi led Swadeshi Movement, the activities of the freedom volunteers, the commencement of the World War - II, the retreat of British Army from Rangoon, the Bombay dock explosion and the gory partition of India and Pakistan. These can be seen a great amalgamation of all these historical events that aimed at providing a grandeur of themes and an attempt to provide it the scale of an epic. It is in this context that scholar and critic, Mukherjee had to remark that *A Bend in the Ganges* is a political novel with panoramic in scope and epic in aspiration. (Mukherjee 59) Khushwant Singh praises the novel *A Bend in the Ganges*; a successful novel owing to the



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fact that novel encompasses the great many of national events. Khushwant Singh considers *A Bend in the Ganges* as a remarkable and rare novels written by an India author that can be called "...samples of good writing by Indian English writers of today". (Singh, 284)

In the novel, *Sukha Bargad*, the author traces out the flow of the course of life of Suhail, the son of a conservative Muslim family born in India. Though born in a conservative family background, Suhail has a secular mindset. He is a lawyer by profession and married to a traditional Muslim woman. Unlike, most of the novels written by the Indian authors, *Sukha Bargad* is a narrative of a Muslim character of Suhail who shoes to stay back to India. Through his experiences, the novel *Sukha Bargad* explores the identity crisis of the Muslims in India in general and those who stayed back in particular after the partition. *Sukha Bargad* deals with the life story of Suhail and wife and rest of the family who stayed back in Bhopal. It is interesting to note that Bhopal has been one of the Muslim dominated cities of India which was once ruled by the Nawabs before independence.

Moreover, after independence in 1947, the character of Bhopal gradually started changing. Gradually the traditional mindset of the Muslims and their staunch identities started diluting and as a result many Muslims migrated to Pakistan. Those people who did not go to Pakistan before or after partition. *Sukha Bargad* deliberates on the issues of wars that Pakistan waged against Indian in the year 1965 and later on in the year 1971. Both the wars showed the true color of the Muslims League and the supporters of that fundamental belief.

Nevertheless, the British knew the ways in which they had been ruling the country for several decades i.e. divide and rule. It is interesting to note that the Congress and the Muslim League, playing the pupates in the hands of the British in the name of freedom and independence decided to part the nation based on Hindus and Muslims separate camps. Both Congress of the time and the Muslim League the hatred between Hindus and Muslims is age-old and both these communities cannot go along as complementary to each other without the bitterness. Hafiz, once the foremost revolutionary and a leader of the movement, was now converted into fundamentalism and started speaking the language of fanatic Muslim considerations. Hafiz represents the voice of hard liner of Muslim fundamentalists who have a particular line understanding that is that of separatists'. Their opposition turned against the Hindus rather than the British which can be seen reported in the daily newspaper of the time. For instance, the *Dawn*, the *Awaz*.



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The *Sulah* and the *Subah* spread such opposition against Hindu dominant state in Duriabad. Hafiz started advocating separatist Muslim point of view. He could not realize that he had become a puppet in the hands of the British and had started speaking for their language of divide and rule. He shares his fundamental beliefs with Shafi in one of those undercover meetings. Hafiz blatantly put forward the logic advocating the popular fear that once the British rule would come to an end, the Muslim would have to succumb as the second and inferior citizens of India and the Hindus will dominate the lives, property and religion of Muslim. The Muslim minority would be in danger as against the overpowering majority of the Hindus. Jinnah's conversion into a fundamental and fanatic Muslim was a bench mark for the sort of Muslim that divided India. They started demanding a separate and safe land exclusively for the Muslims. Jinnah's spiting venom and distrust against the Hindus was started being taken as a role model by the fanatic Muslims of the time.

Thought the novel, *Sukha Bargad*, the author documented the flow of the course of life of Suhail, the son of a conservative Muslim family born in India. Though born in a conservative family background, Suhail has a secular mindset. He is a lawyer by profession and married to a traditional Muslim woman. Unlike, most of the novels written by the Indian authors, *Sukha Bargad* is a narrative of a Muslim character of Suhail who shoes to stay back to India. Through his experiences, the novel *Sukha Bargad* explores the identity crisis of the Muslims in India in general and those who stayed back in particular after the partition. *Sukha Bargad* deals with the life story of Suhail and wife and rest of the family who stayed back in Bhopal. It is interesting to note that Bhopal has been one of the Muslim dominated cities of India which was once ruled by the Nawabs before independence. However, after independence in 1947, the character of Bhopal gradually started changing. Gradually the traditional mindset of the Muslims and their staunch identities started diluting and as a result many Muslims migrated to Pakistan. Those people who did not go to Pakistan before or after partition.

Sukha Bargad also deliberates on the issues of wars that Pakistan waged against Indian in the year 1965 and later on in the year 1971. Both the wars showed the true color of the Muslims League and the supporters of that fundamental belief. All Indians irrespective of their religion used to listen to All Indian Radio as well as Radio Pakistan. However, the general perception was that if a Hindu is following news on Pakistani Radio station he's just listening for curiosity to know what's the counter part of their country's doing. Whereas if a Muslim is seen listening to Radio Pakistan he is looked with suspicion by everyone. He



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might be accused of being a traitor who's sharing national secrets to the 'enemy' of the state. And yet with so many blood relatives in Pakistan, the Indian Muslims had valid reasons to listen to Radio Pakistan, not because they were traitors but because they had legitimate concerns about the welfare of their families. *Sukha Bargad* also deals with these peculiar traits of the dormant start of mass suspensions of the faith and loyalties with the state

Conclusion:

The novelist's concern in *Sukha Bargad* is mainly related to two issues. On the one hand, the full attention of the novelist has been towards the statement of the mentality of Indian Muslim society in post-independence India; on the other hand, identifying the causes of identity crisis for Indian Muslim is also a purpose. The three special sides of the mindset of Indian Muslim society are related to the middle of the *Sukha Bargad*. Intermediate Attitudes - past passion, discrimination in vain and distinction in words and deeds etc. have also been underlined in the minority society as Stereotypes. Honestly, the purity of blood has been given to the extent of conceit in the Muslims. But 'poverty' is a curse. Relationships of others from the poor relative gradually fall apart. It is evidence of this tendency to gradually reach margins in the family of Abbu's family in *Sukha Bargad*. The educated middle class youth are definitely trying to violate this attitude. Manzoor Ehtesham has tried to express the tendency of political, social, cultural change since independence to the eighth decade in *Sukha Bargad* and in this broad context. He has been successful in portraying the realities of Muslim life and their struggle to find their identity in the post-independence India



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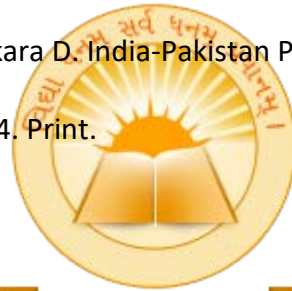
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