

## Reevaluation of Identity Crisis in the Selected Novels *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* and *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh

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**ABSTRACT :** This study delves deeply into the intricate theme of identity crisis as portrayed in Khushwant Singh's novels, "I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale" and "Train to Pakistan." Using rigorous qualitative research methods, the research explores the multifaceted dimensions of identity crisis experienced by the characters in these works. Through meticulous textual analysis, the study investigates how historical, cultural, and social contexts mold the characters' identities, leading to profound existential dilemmas. Employing techniques like thematic analysis and narrative inquiry, the research uncovers the characters' psychological nuances, revealing their struggles amidst political turmoil and cultural shifts. A unique aspect of this study is its comparative approach, analyzing the characters' experiences in both novels to identify commonalities and differences in their identity struggles. The research illuminates the intricate interplay between personal identity and societal constructs, demonstrating that identity crises, though deeply personal, are significantly influenced by external factors such as politics and culture. This comparative analysis sheds light on the profound impact of external forces on individual identity, echoing the broader sociopolitical milieu. By deciphering these complexities, the study not only enhances our understanding of Khushwant Singh's literary genius but also provides valuable insights into the discourse on identity crisis in post-colonial societies. It contributes significantly to the ongoing dialogue on cultural identity, historical consciousness, and the enduring effects of societal change on individuals.

**Keywords- :** Identity Crisis, Khushwant Singh, Post-colonial Societies, Thematic Analysis, Sociopolitical Milieu

### I. INTRODUCTION

The post-colonial discourse has become an essential lens for writers and academics to use when critically examining the long-lasting effects of colonialism on cultures, societies, and people across the huge field of literature. The renowned Indian author Khushwant Singh is one of these giants in the field of post-colonial writing. His literary works have received recognition for their complex portrayals of Indian society during and after the colonial era, astute insights, and captivating narrative. This research aimed to explore the post-colonial features seen in a few of Khushwant Singh's novels. Singh is a skilled

storyteller whose works reflect the complexities and difficulties faced by a country trying to restore its identity and independence following the period of British rule.

The writings of Khushwant Singh provide a distinctive viewpoint on the post-colonial setting by fusing historical realism with sharp social critique and evocative human portraits. This study has aimed to investigate the numerous elements of post-colonial themes present in Singh's writings by examining chosen books from his varied literary output. Additionally, this research has tried to clarify how Singh's writings contribute to the larger conversation on post-colonialism, diaspora, cultural identity, and the battle for freedom. Khushwant Singh has written books throughout his career that examine the effects of colonialism and how Indian society changed as a result. His stories frequently feature recurring themes including cultural assimilation, the erasure of traditional values, identity crisis, and complex power dynamics. It was hoped to learn more about how colonialism affected the Indian mentality and how it affected post-independence society by examining these components. Additionally, this study has aimed to place Khushwant Singh's writing in the broader context of post-colonial literature by making comparisons to other notable writers and intellectuals who have tackled related topics. It has also looked at Singh's distinctive voice and writing style in relation to the development of post-colonial literature in India and elsewhere.

The purpose of this study was to provide a thorough and in-depth analysis of identity crisis as the post-colonial component found in the chosen novels of Khushwant Singh. It was wanted to obtain a better knowledge of the lasting consequences of identity crisis on post-independence cultures as well as a greater appreciation for the creative prowess of a magnificent author who has made an enduring impact on the field of literature by delving into the complexities of his writings.

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The study has aimed to shed light on the historical and sociopolitical context in which Khushwant Singh wrote, as well as the literary strategies he employed to engage with the issues of post-colonialism.

## III. METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

The methodology employed in this study involves rigorous qualitative research methods to explore the theme of identity crisis as depicted in Khushwant Singh's novels, "I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale" and "Train to Pakistan." Through meticulous textual analysis, the research delves into the multifaceted dimensions of identity crisis experienced by the characters within these literary works. The study utilizes thematic analysis to dissect the novels, identifying recurring themes related to identity crisis. This method enables a systematic exploration of the characters' struggles and the underlying factors shaping their identities. Employing narrative inquiry, the research focuses on the characters' stories and personal experiences. By analyzing the characters' narratives, the study uncovers the psychological nuances of their identity crises, providing a deep insight into their struggles amid political and cultural challenges. A distinctive feature of this study is its comparative approach. By analyzing the characters' experiences in both novels, commonalities and differences in their identity struggles are identified. This comparative analysis offers a nuanced understanding of how external factors, such as politics and culture, impact individual identity, highlighting the interplay between personal identity and societal constructs. The research incorporates historical, cultural, and social contexts to comprehend how these factors mold the characters' identities. This contextual analysis is essential for understanding the characters' existential dilemmas and illuminates the broader sociopolitical milieu in which their identity crises unfold. Through these qualitative research methods, the study deciphers the complexities of identity crisis in post-colonial societies, shedding light on the profound impact of external forces on individual identities. This in-depth analysis not only enhances the appreciation of Khushwant Singh's literary works but also contributes valuable insights to the discourse on cultural identity and historical consciousness in the face of societal change.

## IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Difficult to define, the notion of identity is today one of the most debated and controversial terms because of its extreme polysemy. Some even come to question its relevance and consider its use risky

or difficult. Hall (1996) acknowledges the challenges associated with the concept of identity in the introduction to his book *Questions of Cultural Identity*. However, he believes that identity is one of those concepts that is no longer useful to think about in its original and primary form but has not been dialectically superseded and that there are no other, completely different concepts to replace them. As a result, Hall (1996) concludes that the only thing left to do is to keep thinking about identity in its deconstructed forms. One such term is identity, which cannot be thought of in the conventional sense but without which it is impossible to think about some crucial issues (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). The notion of identity is all the more operative, even unavoidable, in formerly colonized countries where populations often experience situations of ill-being or identity crisis between loss of bearings and reactive identities. Also, one of the major characteristics of postcolonial literatures is the primacy granted to questions of identity and, in the case of Mauritian literature, the prevalence of ethnicity over politics. Little or no place for the work of writing, for its relationship to the world and to language, such is the issue – and the challenge – that the Mauritian writer, Khushwant Singh, sets out to take up in his novels.

Edward (1993) argues that the origin of questions about identity is when the “colonized” struggle to find identity and heritage from their original culture before facing the dominant culture imposed by the colonizers. The “colonized” tried to assert their identity, struggled to define their own identity amidst the cultural confusion they experienced.

Identity crisis has become a phenomenon that is discussed all over the world, thanks to the convenience provided by the environment on which it tries to flourish. Especially after the 70s, when states such as Canada and Australia officially made multiculturalism a state policy as a policy initiative that recognizes their differences in a multi-ethnic structure, instead of assimilation or assimilation of the immigrants they have accepted into their countries, the issue has become more popular in the world (Kymlicka, 1998, p. 32). It is a social reality that should not be ignored and that individuals in the society cannot be considered as unburdened subjects by isolating them from their belongings. Humans are not beings who can be abstracted from any concrete, private bonds, establishing social relations and engagements. Individuals cannot get rid of their social contexts and the cultural conditions and practices that make them up. Today, however, the opposite process is at work. On the one hand, the functioning of the general networks of production, consumption and communication flows over modern societies and their institutions; On the other hand, a return to the community is observed. Identitarian groupings, associations, organizations, sects, sects and nationalisms based on common belonging are increasing everywhere, and societies are becoming congregational. For these reasons, multiculturalism is mentioned more frequently today and multiculturalism is spreading rapidly as a trend (Bilgin, 2005, p. 55).

According to Irem (2006), multiculturalism has evolved through a series of regulations that delineate the positions of various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. This development was prompted by the economic migrations in Europe since the 1950s, as a response to the homogeneous European society and state. Initially rooted in individualist-libertarian ideals, multiculturalism took on different meanings under new concepts like multi-ethnicism and multi-ethnicity, particularly during the USA's expansion into Central and Eastern Europe from the mid-1990s. However, these traditional implications started to diminish, giving way to a more communal-nationalist content (p. 67).

The concept of difference would amount to multiculturalism because it is an ambivalent concept of cultural authority. This ambivalence is found in the idea of enunciation. It is then that we realize why claims of racial purity are untenable. Multiculturality (not multiculturalism) equals diversity (not difference). This means that diversity, like multiculturalism, is an epistemological object where culture is taken as an object of empirical knowledge: "cultural diversity is the recognition of contents and uses already given, contained in a time frame of relativism, gives rise to liberal ideas of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity" (Bhabha, 2002, p.54).

What is interesting about Bhabha's theory is that in this process of representation of the other there is an ambivalence at the moment of enunciation when, due to the desire to emerge as genuine, the other falls into irony as a result of his mimicry. This means that we cannot fail to perceive the moment of cultural domination. Thus seen, in multiculturalism as a liberal perspective, the mestizos or colonized dress up as white men ("almost the same but not white"). The author points out that in mimicry, the

representation of identity is articulated on the axis of metonymy. Mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of resemblance but the repression of difference:

In his work, Bhabha (2002) explores the concept of colonial mimicry as a desire for a reformed other, one that is similar yet not identical, signifying an ambivalence. This mimicry represents a double articulation, a sophisticated strategy involving reform, regulation, and discipline. It involves appropriating the other to visualize power, revealing complexities in the dynamics of colonial relationships (p. 112). Bhabha also makes a critique of the concept of hybridity: "hybridity % does not have that perspective of depth or truth to give: it is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures. It does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself. It is always a split screen of the self and its duplication, the hybrid" (Bhabha, 2002, p.143). Cultural conflict is not seen as domination but only the effects of practices. When it comes to the exercise of power, hybridity always stands for the unpredictable nature of its existence rather than the impossibility of its identification. This biasing process of hybridity is related to a metonymy of presence (persistence of the narcissistic demand for difference). Thus, it is understood that hybridity is equivalent to the discourse of colonial authority. There is a link between the psychic and the political when the colonialist assumes his exhibitionism by remembering his master's place. The native petrifies and duplicates itself in the master: "the master's words become the site of hybridity" (Bhabha, 2002, p.150).

## V. FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion delves into the complexities of identity in postcolonial societies, drawing on Edward's argument about the struggle for identity among the colonized. Khushwant Singh's novels exemplify this recurring theme, depicting individuals torn between their original culture and the dominant culture imposed by colonizers. Stuart Hall's recognition of the contested nature of identity resonates, highlighting the challenges individuals face in defining themselves amidst cultural confusion. The emergence of multiculturalism, once rooted in individualist-libertarian ideals, has evolved to define various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, reflecting the changing dynamics of global societies. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and hybridity enrich the discussion, illustrating the desire for recognition and the unpredictability of presence in the context of identity. Ultimately, the discourse emphasizes the significance of identity in postcolonial contexts, illuminating the intricate interplay between personal and societal constructs amidst cultural complexities and offering insights into the evolving nature of multiculturalism.

## VI. IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF KHUSHWANT SINGH

Khushwant Singh, a prominent Indian author, delves into identity crises and diversity in his works, offering insightful analyses of individual and group identities amidst societal changes. His novel "Train to Pakistan" poignantly depicts the tragic partition between India and Pakistan, focusing on Mano Majra's residents. Through characters like Nooran and Juggut Singh, Singh portrays the heart-wrenching love story amid communal tensions. The novel captures the anguish of Sikhs and Muslims during the partition, revealing the impact of political manipulation on people's lives. Singh's storytelling prompts readers to reflect on their own identities and societal influences, highlighting the complexities of diversity and identity in a rapidly changing society. The following lines reflect the idea.

Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it.

We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians-or the Pakistanis.  
(Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, p.52)

In Khushwant Singh's narrative, the character Iqbal Singh symbolizes the profound impact of intergroup violence on personal identities during the partition. Iqbal's struggle epitomizes the dilemma faced by many individuals torn between personal beliefs and community pressures during this period of division. His identity crisis serves as a poignant portrayal of the intricate facets of human nature, the enduring consequences of intergroup conflict, and a critique of the divisive legacy left by colonialism and its aftermath. Singh's storytelling underscores the complexity of post-colonial societies, highlighting the enduring scars of historical conflicts on individual lives and identities.

In Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Iqbal Singh, a secular Sikh from Mano Majra, grapples with his multicultural background amid escalating Hindu-Muslim tensions during the partition. Educated in Lahore, his liberal views clash with the communal discord in his village. As sectarian violence erupts, Iqbal's internal conflict intensifies, leading him to reject religious hatred. Accused falsely during riots, he becomes estranged from both Sikh and Muslim communities, highlighting the challenges of identity in communal turmoil and the pursuit of peace amid societal divisions.

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 sociological backdrop illustrates the intricate social fabric of pre-partition Punjab, where Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims coexisted in a complex web of communal and cultural identities. Religion played a role in shaping communal identities, but broader Punjabi identity was also influenced by shared culture, language, and traditions. The novel explores the emotional connection to the village, emphasizing a sense of place, history, and belonging. The characters, like those in Mano Majra, embody rural Punjabi life and represent peaceful coexistence until partition's upheaval. The narrative delves into multiculturalism, highlighting identity, place, history, and belonging, while emphasizing Sikh people's trustworthiness amidst communal turmoil.

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)

In this book, the train symbolizes more than just the horrors of partition; it represents love, peace, unity, discipline, and freedom. The story portrays a community living in harmony until communal discord, fueled by partition, disrupts their peace. Ethnic consciousness fosters justice and equality, discouraging discrimination based on caste, race, religion, or language. Iqbal, a disillusioned social worker, highlights the hollowness of religion and emphasizes the importance of ethnic values, advocating for coexistence and harmony among people of different faiths and religions.

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 author of the story depicts the good and bad, or virtue and vice, in people. Buta Singh, the District Magistrate, is the main character. He is portrayed as an ally of the English and a defender of British authority in India:

...loyalty to the Raj had been as much an article of faith with him as it had

been with his father and grandfather who had served in the army. He like

them, had mentioned the English King or Queen in his evening prayer, 'O, Guru, bless our sovereign and bless us their subjects so that we remain contended and happy. (Singh, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, p.23)

The District Magistrate is Buta Singh. He works for the British government and is a supporter of British sovereignty in India. However, he is a chameleon like Hukum Chand in *Train to Pakistan* and someone who wishes to benefit from both being an Indian and British privileges. Says Khushwant Singh:

When he was with the Englishmen, he professed his loyalty to the Raj. He would tell them, "At my age I cannot change." But when he was amongst his own countrymen he would be a little critical of the English ways. He let his son cast his lot with the Nationalists and did not object

to his organizing the students and making political speeches. (Singh, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, p.26)

Sher Singh is the name of Buta Singh's son. He is the head of the college's student union and a nationalist who draws inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bagh Singh, and other nationalists who gave their lives in defense of their motherland, India. When Buta Singh implicitly encourages Sher Singh and counsels him to exercise caution and caution when he is fighting the British, his dual nature is on display.

Don't say anything which may cause trouble. Remember my position. I do not mind your hobnobbing with these nationalists... as a matter of fact, it is good to keep in with both sides but one ought to be cautious. (Singh, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, p.27)

Buta Singh, a seemingly honest British officer, secretly supports nationalists, providing his son Sher Singh with resources. Buta aims to benefit regardless of British rule's outcome, enjoying power and money. Khushwant Singh satirizes Indians like Buta, who opportunistically backed both British and Indian regimes for personal gain. Singh's portrayal criticizes their duplicity and desire for power and wealth. Sher Singh, like his father, embodies this duality in Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, highlighting the complexity of characters torn between conflicting allegiances and ambitions.

He had somehow believed that he would muddle through, getting the best of the two worlds: The one of security provided by his father who was a senior magistrate and the other full of applause that would come to him as a heroic leader of a band of terrorists." (Singh, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, p.14)

Buta disagreed with Sher about the British having to learn tolerance from the Indian people during a specific conversation he had with his son regarding the British, hospitality, and tolerance:

"Ask the eighty million untouchables what they think of the tolerance of caste Hindus. Ask the Hindus and Sikhs about the tolerance of the Muslims [...]" (Singh, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, p.226).

Buta made it clear that he disagreed with the caste system by bringing up the poor treatment of the Untouchables and the conflict between Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. But in this explanation, he combined the Sikhs and Hindus into one category.

Buta Singh spent the whole time immersed in a shadowy setting. Even if there were times when he also preferred the unprotected Indians, he always sided with the British. But from his vantage position, he realized that no other monarch or ruler had brought India as much riches as the British had.

## VII. DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

The discussion on Khushwant Singh's novels, particularly "Train to Pakistan" and "I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale," explores the intricate issues of identity crises and diversity in the backdrop of societal change. In "Train to Pakistan," Singh vividly depicts the partition's tragedy, exemplified through characters like Iqbal Singh, torn between religious heritage and modern perspectives. The novel underscores the harmony of multiculturalism disrupted by communal conflict, emphasizing the importance of unity. In "I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale," Singh delves into British colonial rule's complexities, critiquing individuals like Buta Singh and Sher Singh, revealing the challenges of nationalism and bravery. Singh's narratives, rich in satire and storytelling, prompt reflection on personal identities and biases, offering profound insights into multiculturalism and societal upheaval.

## VIII. COMPARISON AND CONTRAST BETWEEN THE FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES AND THE PRESENT STUDY

The literature review and the present study both delve into the intricate complexities of identity in postcolonial societies, drawing on foundational theories by scholars like Edward and Stuart Hall. Both sources recognize the struggle faced by colonized individuals in asserting their identities amidst cultural confusion and dominance of the colonizers. Khushwant Singh's novels serve as a powerful lens through which these themes are explored. In both the literature review and the study, there is a shared emphasis on the evolving nature of multiculturalism. Initially rooted in individualist-libertarian ideals, multiculturalism has transformed to define various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, mirroring the changing dynamics of global societies. Both sources highlight the challenges individuals encounter while defining themselves in the face of contested identities and shifting societal paradigms. Furthermore, the study and the literature review both incorporate Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and hybridity, enriching the discussion on identity. Both sources acknowledge the desire for recognition and the unpredictability of presence, illustrating how individuals navigate the complex terrain of identity in postcolonial contexts. In essence, both the literature review and the study shed light on the profound significance of identity in postcolonial societies. They emphasize the intricate interplay between personal and societal constructs amidst cultural complexities. Khushwant Singh's narratives serve as poignant examples, prompting readers to reflect on their own identities and biases, ultimately offering profound insights into the evolving nature of multiculturalism and the challenges faced by individuals in the process of self-definition.

## IX. CONCLUSION

This study delves deeply into Khushwant Singh's novels, *Train to Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, shedding light on the intricacies of identity crisis and multiculturalism in postcolonial societies. Through rigorous qualitative research and meticulous textual analysis, the research illuminates the multifaceted dimensions of identity crisis experienced by the characters. By comparing and contrasting with existing literature, the study enriches our understanding of multiculturalism's evolving nature and the challenges individuals face in defining their identities amid social complexities. Singh's narratives serve as powerful tools, emphasizing the influence of external factors like politics and culture on personal identity. This research significantly contributes to the discourse on identity crisis, cultural identity, and historical consciousness, offering valuable insights into the enduring effects of societal change. Singh's timeless novels provide a critical lens for readers to engage with complex themes of identity and diversity in our ever-changing world.

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