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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

MULTICULTURALISM IN HARI KUNZRU'S TRANSMISSION.

Mrs.v.poornima m.a¹, ms.m.kokila².

1. B.ed., m.phil, assistant professor, department of english, nadar saraswathi college of arts and science, theni.
2. M.a.,m.phil, assistant professor, department of english, nadar saraswathi college of arts and science,theni.

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History:

Received: 17 January 2016
Final Accepted: 20 February 2016
Published Online: March 2016

Key words:

*Corresponding Author

Mrs.v.poornima m.a.

Abstract

Literature is the art of life. It is fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language. Literature reflects an interest in the world of reality as well as imagination. Hari Mohan Nath Kunzru is an Indian author and one of the best known Diastolic writers in Indian English Literature. His novels mostly deal with multiculturalism, globalization, technology, political and social problems, terrorism, diaspora and cultural identity. His second novel "Transmission" is one of the first and most timely novels about multiculturalism and globalization in all its diverse manifestations. Multicultural politics have undoubtedly proved useful in reconfiguring the public discourse of former colonial powers such as Britain as they adapt to mass immigration, particularly in opening up institutions and providing a framework by which those who have no direct social experience of immigrants and their second generation kids can interact with them. However in recent years many of the more challenging aspects of multiculturalists discourse, particularly in its celebration of hybridity and the formation of new identities have been sidelined in favors of those aspects which are easy to deliver as policy 'community relations' conducted as a dialogue between the Centre and National representatives of supposedly stable and fixed 'minorities' or which suit prevailing political fashions. Transmission is a political novel, centers on the story of Arjun Mehta, a geeky day dreaming Indian Software Engineer who believes in the corny promises of the corny Bollywood film industry. Parallel to Arjun's story is to that of Guy Swift, the seemingly well to do English CEO of an advertising company, and his struggle to keep his business going as the virus spreads in the company.

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Introduction:-

Hari Kunzru's second novel "Transmission" is one of the first and most timely novels about multiculturalism and globalization in all its diverse manifestations. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives Canadians a feeling of security and self-confidence making them more open to, and accepting of diverse cultures. The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding and discourages hatred, discrimination and violence.

Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity. This novel is not quiet satire implies a clear object an author wishes to mock or demystify. And there are some satirical objects in some of Transmission's subplots especially relating to multinational corporations and Hindi cinema; the same cannot be said for the novel's protagonist, an alienated software programmer named

Arjun Mehta. He finds his way from a second rate technical university in India to an exploitative 'body shop' working arrangement in the Bay Area and then later in Washington state.

Kunzru is not quite sure what to do with Mehta. On the one hand he is questioning what the dream of working in Silicon Valley is in many ways a false promise to which a great many Indian engineers remain susceptible. The pay isn't all that great after to pay the rent, car payments, cell phone bills, as well as periodic plane fare to and from India. Also, dealing with the department of homeland security to try and keep one's visa straight is a dehumanizing and expensive process.

Throughout the novel, the characters that are most rootless are not those who are members of an invisible and insidious global labor force, but those who are most readily expose the ethos of global business. Indeed rootlessness can cut across class distinction. Throughout "Transmission" it is most explicitly linked to economic privilege. Guy, the exemplary subject of Richard Florida's creative class, is the most rootless of all the characters; he lacks even a clear backstory, suggesting a complete personal histories and all kinship connections.

There is in circulation a right-wing critique of multiculturalism which is exploiting the wots to attempt to regain ground lost in the culture wars of the '80s. If terrorism is a bad meme and terrorism is the product of Islamic culture, then we can say with confidence that Islam is worse than whatever we're proposing as 'our' culture. In saying this, we accept the validity of making value judgements about culture in general, something which the right has always claimed the Stalinist commissars of multiculturalism specifically disallow. Leaving aside the truth, or otherwise, of such a characterization, the secret desire what Salvo Size might call the obscene supplement of this school of thought is that once we've loosened up on this issue, we'll start embracing other value judgements and developing a taste for the juicy treats beloved of a certain strand of social conservatism, dishes which have been off the menu for some years: black people's tendency to crime, homosexuality's destructive impact on the family which is the bedrock of society and such like.

Certainly from a wots perspective, if ignore social, political and economic reasons for terrorism and concentrate purely on values, it's easy to make the initial Islam terror case to the average British voter. Because of the fear of terrorism the field is open in a way it hasn't been for ten years of terrorism for a reassertion of monoculture dominance. The new name for it is 'shared values' and its present around the edges of such cultural sharp objects as the newly-introduced 'Life in the UK Test' for immigrants, which asks coyly about Christian festivals and saints days and the queen's ceremonial duties and trial by jury. The test introduces the concept of a minimal standard of shared values as the price of admission to Britain.

The political conversation now appears to be all about ownership of those values. This notion, which has obvious appeal to conservatives, is also attractive to the mainstream social democratic left, a tradition which in Britain now consists of three layers, rather like a Victoria sponge cake - a bottom spongy layer of Methodist piety, a thin red jammy spread of second international socialism and most recently 1980's onwards an over baked top layer of communitarianism. All three layers lead social democrats to believe that the area of values is their natural terrain, good ground to pick a fight with the Centre right and its founding model, the atomized individual of classical liberalism, so very silent about what happens when that individual comes into relationship with others.

In Britain multiculturalism the make-shift post-imperial doctrine of diversity as the route to equality of unity through managed disagreement is under attack, not only from its traditional monoculture opponents, or from the classical liberals who've always disliked its whiff of groupthink, but from those who previously supported it most staunchly, the mainstream social democrats now scrambling to abandon it and sit on the high hillock marked shared values.

Multiculturalism was, for many on the Centre left always a second-best opinion. Along with feminism and associated positions it grew in strength just at the time when the economic argument was being won hands down in Britain by the Chicago School monetarism of Keith Joseph, Margaret Thatcher and the Institute of Economic Affairs. In the '70s, traditional Keynesianism had ceased to produce good outcomes and by the mid '80s the right was holding all the economic policy cards, so the left retreated to the terrain of language, visibility and culture, ground appropriate to its stronghold in the universities, the arts and the media. It was from this 'red base' that those of an egalitarian bent made for into areas like social policy, multiculturalism, diversity and anti-discrimination legislation was the result. In doing this they ceded the economic ground entirely. Not much has changed.

Management of inflation is still the primary goal. Redistribution remains a dirty word. However, New Labor now feels it 'owns' economics again and diversity can safely be dropped for a more muscular approach to community.

Lacking belief in the power of their politics to produce fairness the market being the mechanism of choice, for that, our politicians are offering up the pageantry of respect as a consolation prize. Islam will be valued in law, on government websites and in glossy brochures as part of the tapestry of Britain diversity but individual Muslims will remain poor and marginalized. A hyper-sensitivity to issues of language and representation exploited by cultural conservatives of all stripes and encouraged by religious offence legislation is the pessimistic remnant of the multiculturalists dream. Instead of a new hybrid culture, we're offered what Amara Sen has called 'plural monoculturalism', with power in the hands of self-identified community leaders who are defensive, patriarchal, hide-bound and antagonistic to change women, homosexuals and the young all suffer.

Perhaps the picture isn't all gloomy. Once upon a time the terrain of argument about difference was biology. Little by little, biological racism was demolished and culture became the main battle-ground. Even now it uses multiculturalist language to make its case. Its monthly magazine is called Identity and its defence of 'native British culture' is presented as a protectionist bulwark against a coffee-colored global capitalism which wishes to erase difference to assist the transnational flow of labor, goods and services. Cultural essentialism is now in play everywhere from Nick Griffin's pamphlets to the pages of Prospect. The notion of shared values as opposed to the crude group identity of 'culture' in its current political incarnation as the basis for community is far from stupid. However, within the context of the war on terror and that's the only context we're going to have for the next generation or so the pressure will all flow in one direction. Immigrants were to prove their right to belong, not just by hard work, but by displaying the approved set of values. Gordon Brown is already getting misty-eyed about flags on lawns and the pledge of allegiance. British Muslims are undergoing a near-constant media interrogation. If we're to avoid shared values becoming assimilation by the back-door, we need to ensure that the smug guardians of the mainstream put their own ideas recues under the spotlight, primarily the notion that bad values are an adequate explanation for the alienation many not just young Muslims feel from the current dispensation of things.

Kunzru achieve this shift through repeated scenes of Arjun walking through Los Angeles, the city to which he emigrates from India on a contemporary work permit. Arjun's lack of real agency in the United States is highlighted in these scenes, as the spaces available for him to walk suggest the constraints placed on this movement. The text does not identify him as Arjun the primary character in the preceding pages until quite a bit later in this walk, implying a loss of existential status. Arjun is without economic and cultural capital and status required for full participation in the global metropolis. Further, this status is repeatedly shown to be beyond his grasp. His walks become increasingly desperate as the promise of the neoliberal dream of constant upward social mobility withdraws more and from Arjun. He returns, after a three-month job, to the Los Angeles house where data bodies the corporation which had initially hired him board its international computer engineers, only to continue his walks. He has been given credit, and had it withdrawn. He knows what lies above him, the sublime mobility of those who travel without ever touching the ground. He has glimpsed what lies below, the other mobility, the forced motion of the shopping carts pushers, the collectors of cardboard boxes. Kunzru seems to be satirizing the representation of immigrant labor as contaminant, suggesting that the virus with its negative connotation more accurately work as a metaphor for failed global citizens such as Guy.

Arjun, however, whose actions are more obviously disruptive, retains an emphasis on connection and responsibility. Arjun's release of the virus is an act undertaken out of a need for responsibility. He creates and release of "Leela" virus in order to make the company that has treated him as disposable recognize him as indispensable. While Kunzru near fully endorses his action, Arjun remains a much more sympathetic figure than Guy in part because of his desire for greater responsibility, rather than having it taken away from him. Arjun's actions produce a chaotic global scenario; this is neither predicted nor controlled by him. Guy, however, actively participants in the creation of an authoritarianism that places significant limits, under the guise of freedom and the direct control of cultural subjects like himself, on the economically and geographically marginalized.

Within twenty-fours of Leela being identified and countered, variants were reported. Some were obviously the work of copycats, crude alterations to the subject line of the delivery e-mail, superficial weak to the code. Other were more profound, and analysts were reluctantly forced to classify them as entirely new organisms, where other people out there dreaming of Leela Zahir.

Kunzru suggests a mode of multiculturalism that foreground the labor and the concomitant treatment of global laborers that it requires. Global action, thus, becomes about ethical and political commitments to others rather than individualized pleasures. Kunzru's text suggests the inescapability of global subject positions, arguing that we are always already enmeshed in global capitalist systems and that resisting these positions is therefore futile. We are, therefore, engaged in an "actually existing multiculturalist". However, these global subject positions need not only reproduce global inequalities or mimic the pathways of global capital. Instead, Kunzru imagines a virus like multiculturalists that changes as it moves around the world resisting conceptualization of multiculturalism as necessarily individualized.

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