

Multiculturalism in Adib Khan's *Seasonal Adjustment*

Jaywant Ambadas Mhetre
The Head, Department of English,
Dr. Bapuji Salunkhe Mahavidyalaya, Karad.

Abstract: The present paper explores the multicultural aspects such as cultural conflict, diversity, assimilation, ethnic diversity in the novel *Seasonal Adjustments* of Bangladeshi origin Muslim writer, Adib Khan. It is significant that Khan's first foray into writing was about the experiences of conflict and adjusting a new culture. His first novel, '*Seasonal Adjustments*' (1994) is a thoroughly absorbing account of culture, family and faith told by a man who has a tenuous relationship with all three. '*Seasonal Adjustments*' went on to win the Commonwealth Writers Prize first book award, after winning several other awards. Adib's characters struggle to identify with a nation, culture and family they are no longer familiar with. Adib Khan's body works gives the impression on meditation on a theme, with its focus on loss, regret, secrets and family history, all played out against a backdrop of cultural fragmentation. In all his work, his preoccupation has been with identity, particularly identity of the migrant and search for self. Khan uses his own experience of cultural fragmentation to tease out the betrayals and inconsistencies, the idealism and the bigotry that infest nationalism, as well as illustrate the lack of secure identity for these who are alienated from their country of birth.

Key Words: Cultural conflict, Adib Khan, Identity, Ethnic diversity etc.

The term Multiculturalism is used for the coexistence of different ethical, racial and cultural group in the society. The term celebrates the cultural diversity in the society and it expects peaceful coexistence of different groups in the society. This term is against the so called policy of America i.e. 'Melting Pot' and supports the Canadian policy of 'Salad Bowl'. The present study is an attempt to explore the multiculturalism in the novel *Seasonal Adjustments* by Adib Khan. *Seasonal Adjustments* traces a man's return to his village in Bangladesh after an 18-year absence. Adib Khan's novel, however, is not in the tradition of expats who return with a willingness to embrace their native land after years of romanticizing it. The central character, 43-year-old Iqbal Ahmed Chaudhary from Shopnoganj, simply isn't in the mood. He has recently endured the pain of matrimonial breakdown, so he arrives in Bangladesh with his young daughter and a shattered ego. However, Iqbal is not too preoccupied to discover that spending nearly two decades in Australia has profoundly altered him, and he is shocked to realize that fitting in might not work out.

"...there is an unfamiliarity about everything I hear and see. It is like looking at life with borrowed eyes".

Seasonal Adjustment
(Khan, 1994, p.7)

The novel *Seasonal Adjustment* is foregrounding 'perceived irreconcilable polarities' between two vastly different cultural contexts – namely Catholic/Muslim, insider/outsider, Australian/migrant – the text gives way to a multiplicity of

affiliations and a 'profound preoccupation with liminality and shifting boundaries'. In present novel, protagonist Iqbal and his daughter spend two decades in Australia and they were so mingled with the Australian culture that they could not adjust with their own culture in Bangladesh. Iqbal's daughter, who enjoyed freedom in Australia, has to follow the restrictions lead by Muslim community for women in Bangladesh.

Iqbal, the protagonist of *Seasonal Adjustment* has quest for identity is restlessly forged through the difficulties of being outside dominator models across different social spaces. This without conforming to the expectations and ideals of dominator nationalist cultures and traditions, surmounting racism, xenophobia and other forms of cultural stereotyping common to all cultures. Back in Bangladesh, Iqbal faces the same conservative parochialism expressed by his family on several occasions, such as the racial intolerance for having the burden of a foreign wife, the demand of instilling Islamic values in his daughter, and the enforced family tradition of the Chaudhary lineage dominated by patriarchal male figures.

"Khan's imaginative return to Bangladesh is partly autobiographical as he migrated to Australia in 1973, and kept returning to his native country until his most recent visit in 1999, when he no longer felt anchored as 'the familiar landmarks have disappeared'" (De Neefe par. 6).

Protagonists of the novel, *Seasonal Adjustment* return to their country Bangladesh and try to adjust themselves as people adjust themselves with

different season. Though they have cultural conflict in their mind they try to negotiate with new cultural experiences. Iqbal Chaudhary seems to oscillate between repudiating the Bangali culture and yearning for the Australian way of life, between an instant recognition of the traditions of his home with its rules governing etiquette and a fierce rejection of all attempts to homogenise and change his identity into an integrated migrant jettisoning all traces of his past. This is particularly obvious in his reaction to the food served to him at his cousin's household where, faced with 'an inviting array of curries. His choice of language in describing the Bangala food – 'I eye them with some apprehension' – and his 'revulsion at the slaughter of animals following the *halal* requirements – 'I felt like an accomplice to a heinous crime' – are symbolic of a rejection that spills over into other aspects of his birth culture. Multiculturalism seeks to integrate social, cultural, economic, religious, differences in the society.

Postcolonialism decentralizes the Eurocentric norms in same way, according to Raj Kumar Mishra:

Multiculturalism seeks to disintegrate first world centres by incorporating all native differences into the lifeline which I prefer to call 'neo-Postcolonialism'.

(Raj Kumar Mishra:1)

Multiculturalism is need of time, to live peaceful life in the society; every country should follow the path multiculturalism because it doesn't support the monopoly of single culture in the society. That's why Raj Kumar Mishra used substitute term 'neo-postcolonialism' for multiculturalism. To maintain harmony, the groups need to interact. Mahatma Gandhi said, "No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive". At the initial stage the protagonist in the both novels come across the problem of cultural diversity but at the end they try to negotiate with the new culture.

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