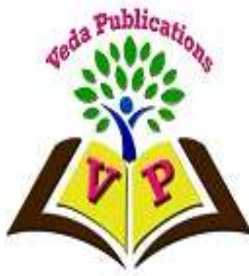


**THE CULTURAL STUDY OF RIVER OF FIRE BY QURAT UL AIN HAIDER**

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*(Research Scholars, University of Lahore, Sargodha, Pakistan.)***ABSTRACT**

The research is intended at the study of culture in the novel “River of Fire” by Qurratulain Hyder. The main objective of the research is to contribute to the cultural significance of the novel .It is also aimed at the exploration of a composite culture of subcontinent Indo-pak through various epochs of history and factors that shattered it. The novel timelines spanned over two thousand years starting from the time of Chandargapt to the partition of India. It encompasses the fates of four recurring characters over two and a half millennia: Gautam, Champa, Kamal, and Cyril—Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian. The researcher has tried to find out the way Qurratulain Hyder has described the culture through history.The relevance of religion is also tried in a common culture and in its collapse.The research also shows the cultural value of the novel as the transcreation urdu novel “Aag ka Darya”. Qualitative approach has been followed .

**Keywords:** *Culture, Religion, Indo-Pak Subcontinent.***Citation:**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The cultural study of "River of Fire" illustrates the cultural stream of Indo-Pak Subcontinent. It is the English version of her Urdu novel "Aag ka Darya". She herself transcreated it in English. The novel is a broad spectrum reflecting the various cultural identities through two thousand years history spanning from the time of Chandragupta Maurya to the Partition of India. Qurratulain Hyder pinpoints the dominating aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity through the namesake characters like Champa, Gautam, Kamal Cyril, Nirmila, Hari Shanker etc. through different epochs of time. Writer shows the relevance of religion in defining cultural identities. India has been a multicultural land.....The land of charm and delight, mystery and unexplored secrets.... Qurratulain Hyder tries to highlight the cultural features and dexterously weaves the historical patterns into fiction to present a fine cultural fabric.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Is the novel "River of Fire" is a cultural chronological of the Sub Continent ?
2. Why did the the unified culture of India collapsed in the end?
3. How far the author is successful in maintaining the cultural appeal from " Aag ka Darya"to "River of Fire"?

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this research is

1. To contribute to the cultural significance of the novel "River of Fire".
2. To discover cultural ties that held together the Hindus and the Muslim for centuries.
3. To point out the aspects that led to cultural breach and what cultural changes took place before and after partition. The research will view the cultural aspect of novel from a different perspective.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH**

The research is interesting and unique as it views the cultural aspect of novel from both political and religious perspectives. It highlights Qurratulain Hyder's technique of mixing historical facts with fiction for the cultural portrayal. The research is very useful in comprehending the complexity of labyrinthine plot and repeated characters. The research is of great

help in developing familiarity with the root cultural values for both the citizens of Pakistan and India.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Some researchers have tried their hand on the cultural study of "River of Fire" and have provided useful speculations in this regard. **Masood Ashraf Raja** in "Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire*: Novel and Politics of Writing Beyond the Nation-State" is of the opinion

"I suggest that the elusive nature of the novel, its capacity to elude categorization, its power to exist beyond the critical expectations and the cultural stereotypes should be seen as its great promise."

He further elaborates the multicultural aspect of India in the following words.

"Overall, through a long, complicated narrative, the subcontinent is represented as a repository of varying cultures that enrich the soil and are tamed by India."

**Masood Ashraf Raja** also detects Hyder's viewpoint about the common culture shared by both the Hindus and the Muslims.

"In Hyder's world we find an India where Muslims and Hindus lived together and formed a great high culture. It is a part of Indo-Pakistan history that must be remembered and taught, for only then, maybe, one day both Indians and Pakistanis will be able to see beyond the politics of religion and nation-state and connect with each other as human beings who once shared a common history."

**Anna C. Oldfield** can also be cited here as she also talks about the cultural picture of "The River of Fire" in her work: "Confusion in the Universe: Conflict and Narrative in "Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire*". Here she comments:

"The book explores through the Indian culture across the ages. She has explored the past upto present---Starts from Vedic age to explore the vast sweep of time and history."

**Sangari** writes: "River of Fire "seeks to express a cultural space larger than a nation."(2005,35).

According to **Durrani**, the Hindus and Muslims had maintained non-antagonistic relationships, a practice that became contaminated by the nationalistic thought introduced due to divisive



influence of colonialism. For Durrani, the creation of Pakistan is the only solution to Hindu-Muslim problem. Both the Hindus and Muslims shared a past in which their separate religious identities did not make them two belligerent nations.

#### METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach is followed in textual analysis of the novel "River of Fire".

#### MAIN BODY

India, the center of ancient civilization serves as a background for Qurratulain Hyder's novel "River of Fire". She captures 2000 years history in a masterly manner. The long narrative is composed of intertexts, namesake characters belonging to distant eras and irregular lapses of time. The novel starts from the regime of Chandragupta Maurya when India was a single unit and concludes at its division into two states. The novel shows the customs and traditions of mysterious land of India. It also narrates the political, cultural and social transition that took place within long historical epochs. Qurratulain Hyder has amalgamated historical transitions with fiction in different ways.

Firstly, the characters participate in the action when Magadhs attacked:

"Gautam fought in front of Aklesh's house and killed a few Maghadan foot soldiers till he was struck down by a spear and fainted"

Then there is Abul Mansoor Kamaluddin who underwent the fall of Jaunpur and also felt the agony of Baghdad Fall. He also reflects the Indian culture in these words.

"Having spent some time in India I realised that bloodties, caste and regional affinities, and "salt" were what counted most in personal and collective relationships. But bloodties became meaningless in the quest for power."

The expatriate character of *River of Fire*—all of them the part of "Gulfishan" they also experienced the pangs of partition. Masood Ashraf Raja, comments on them in the following words: "The world created by a high composite culture Lucknow is replaced by the realities of partition"

Secondly, the characters are engaged in discussing their political and social issues, Abul Mansoor Kamaluddin comes across a punjabi

Mussalman during his journey and he tells him about India's eminent rulers: "He also told me about Razia, this remarkable woman monarch who styled herself sultan, instead of Sultana." There is also Nawab Kamman who recounts the incident of British attack on the state of Oudh and the exile of Vajid Ali Shah.

Thirdly, there is description of historical incidents. There are court intrigues and treasons, assassination of brothers for thorns is a common practice.-----kings spend lavishly ---They share a common culture with the Hindus.----- Muslim rulers connoisseurs of Music and Raag---one of the characters remarks thus:

"The labyrinths of Indian history can drive one up the wall." (p.384)

India was an ancient land. It has been invaded and inhabited by diverse races. Great invaders honoured its throne as Qurratulain Hyder narrates their arrival and sojourn in the subcontinent. There has been Aryans, Iranians, Greeks, Afghans, Mongols, Arabs etc. some attacked, ransacked and departed. While the others made it a part of their empire and ruled over the subcontinent with full majesty.----as there has been slave dynasty, Khiljis, Tughlaqs and Mughals. As a result, it became the vast populated continent speaking varied languages, cherishing diverse cultural and social norms, followers of different religions and schools of thought. Besides, it was a land full of mysteries, superstitions and opportunities. The soil of subcontinent has been the abode of sadhus, bhikshus, jogis, muslim saints, christian missionaries. It has been the land of poets like Kali Das, Bhagat Kabir, Rabindranath Tagore etc. Music and dance were considered fine arts. Even the Muslim kings patronized them. Qurratulain gives us a glimpse of it in "River of Fire".

There is description of Vajid Ali Shah, alias Jan-i-Alam, "He composed thumris and dadras, perfected the dance style of Kathak and created the ballad Ras Lila in which he danced as Krishna."

Hussain Shah, ruler of Jaunpur, composed a new raag which got name and fame as "Hussaini Kanra".

Qurratulain Hyder creates a smooth and balanced cultural world where so many religious and social systems were flourishing. Hindus worshipped in



their temples, Muslims, Sikhs, Budhs, Parsis followed their own religious rituals. But inspite of it, they were breathing in the common air of culture. There have been female Muslim and non- Muslim rulers as Hari Shankar says:

“Rani Karnavati, Durgavati, Razia Sultana, Chand Sultana---They wore armours and led their armies into battle”

Hari Shankar also tells;

“My patni is a purdah observing housewife”

(Though “purdah” is related to Muslims.)

“No Hindu –Muslim rift in princely states---the problem is characteristic of post-1857 British India. Jaipur and Gwalior , both Hindu states, having most spectacular Moharram celebrations, patronized by the Maharajas.”

“Mr. Jinnah had been a congressman, once called the ambassador of Hindu Muslim Unity--“

“Nirmila is not well at all---in Lucknow, her mother must have gone to Hanuman temple in Aligunj and then proceeded to some Imambara

And prayed to imam Hussain for speedy recovery”. Masood Ashraf Raja describes Qurratulain Hyder's setting of novel for the unified culture in these lines.

“There were two major cultural centers of the pre-British India under Muslims: Delhi and Oudh. The British actually treated both these political and cultural centers as two major political entities. In choosing Lucknow as a model of Indian possibilities, Hyder privileges the possibilities of convergence over difference, for it was in Lucknow , the most culturally diverse city in the kingdom of Oudh, that the Muslims and Hindus were able to develop a culture that transcended their religio-Linguistic differences.”

“ Nawab Vazir's of Oudh bannad the killing of monkeys in deference to the Hindu monkey-god, Hanuman. Dussehra and Holi were officially celebrated by many Mughal kings in the Red fort at Delhi, Holi and Basant were official festivals in Lucknow”

The final group of characters belonging to different religious and social background are connected with “Gulfishan”. They carry their ancestral values alongwith their contemporary relations. Kamal and Hari Shankar, Nirmila and Talat

are closely attached with each other. Champa, Gautam, Cyril and Roshan are also friends.

According to Qurratulain Hyder, the arrival of British was such a nightmare as made both the Hindus and Muslims conscious of their differences. She tells about “Firangis” who captured India.

“And they had tried to subvert their faith by greasing the sepoy's cartridges with cow's fat and pig's lard. The Sepoy;s were ordered to cut these with their teeth.”

Excepting the upper class of both the Hindu and the Muslims, all suffered Famine. Economic exploitation reduced especially the Muslims to a lower grade servant class.

The second shot was the partion which widened this cultural breach. As the novel describes.

“Now this new business of culture is redefined as “pure Hindu “ or “pure Muslim” by the Mahasabha and the Muslim League” And right after partition everything got shattered. Kamal an ardent nationalist is now a “homeless, unemployed refugee”.

India promises no future for the Muslims now.

His mother urges him to go to Pakistan.

“But you belong to the wrong community. But Pakistan does not claim to be a secular state”.

“Indian Muslims must pay the price in various ways for the division of India”.

Ernest Gellner considers the creation of a unified high culture an important aspect of modern nationhood.

Thus the united Indian culture collapsed that has been the composition of centuries.

Masood Ashraf Raja describes the disillusionment of same culture in the following words.

“Muslims, they have no future in India. Kamal eventually immigrates to Pakistan, But through his story, Hyder enacts the failure of a composite culture that had been created over centuries.”

“River of Fire” is the English version of the Urdu novel “Aag ka Darya”. Urdu novel was written in 1959 while “River of Fire” was published in 1998. There is almost a period of 40 years between the both. It cannot be regarded as the plain translation of Urdu work. Rather it is a complete and independent work in itself by the author herself.



Qurratulain Hyder describes this act of translation as "transcreation". While transcreating, she has fully maintained the cultural appeal as in the original work. She uses relevant vocabulary and terminology to represent the culture of subcontinent. She often uses local words and expression with their translation.

As Champa, the famous dancer of Lucknow, bids farewell to Gautam.

"And may God give you no other sorrow except the sorrow of Hussain." There are also religious and social references related to the life of Hindus and Muslims. There are also expressions as "huzoor" "Bajhan" "sanyas" "Nirwan" "dasi" "dakshina" Sultan-i-Alam also beat the eastern note.

There is also Urdu wording along with English translation as there is:

"kaha main nay, gul ka hai kitna sabat?

Kali ne yeh sun k tabassam kiya."

"I asked how long the rose would last.

The rose- bud heard me and smiled." (p.188)

Masood Ashraf Raja talks about this aspect of novel in this way.

"Translation, I usually meditated through the conscious and lived experiences of the translator, but in his particular case Hyder's own lived experiences bear upon the novel as she translates it after about forty years of its publication in Urdu. This act of transcreation could easily be an important subject for critique not just in the field of Post colonial literary study but also in the translation studies. She tries to preserve cultural Heritage".

It is a significant point that she breathed in India for quite a larger time period, She also migrated to Pakistan. She has also stayed in England while working for British Broadcasting. Thus, the diversity and richness of interaction proves to be highly influential while transcreating the "River of Fire".

## CONCLUSION

"River of Fire" is a famous work of Qurratulain Hyder. It describes the cultural and political history of subcontinent India. Being a multicultural land, it enjoyed centuries of political and social life. Qurratulain Hyder's 1959 novel

"River of Fire" reflects this as well. This account of peace and war time alliance between Muslim rulers and Hindu community boasts of a past of collective sharing and achievements. It is this shared heritage privileged by Hyder and this heritage was discarded to determine the future of Hindu Muslim Politics. This cultural rift is very articulately represented by Qurratulain Hyder. This transition period with the background of Partition has been a regular canvas in her writings. She does not openly show that religion is the cause of cultural gap. But the way Muslims were treated by British and their prejudices and traumas during partition prove the fact. She is also successful in representing Indian culture in English language.

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