



RESEARCH PAPER

Representation of Sanjha (United) Punjab in Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations*: A Syncretic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

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*The study aims at providing a representation of 'Sanjha Punjab' in *The Weary Generations* (Udas Naslain) by Abdullah Hussein under the perspective of syncretism. It examines the lives of various groups of people such as Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in one community at different stages socio-political, cultural, economic and religious perspectives regardless of their religions. However, for the textual analysis, Bhabha's notion of hybridity/syncretism has been taken as a theoretical framework. Moreover, this study can be helpful to preserve Punjabi culture through the insight of past lives of these groups of people. This study is an invitation of love and peace for the people in the current scenario that they may come and live in multicultural societies. As the multicultural society addresses all issues regarding the animosity and hostility related to the lives of the people whether they belong to Muslim, Sikh, Hindu or other community*

Background of the Study

I summon Waris Shah today, speak from thy grave,
And find the next page in the Book of Love.
Once a daughter of Punjab cried and you wrote long and long,

Today millions of Punjabi women are crying out to you, Waris Shah!

Rise! O sympathizer of the victims, rise and look at your own Punjab.

Fields are covered with corpses today, and the river Chenab is blood-stained. (Pritum, 2009)

The Weary Generations demonstrates three generations of pre and post-partition era. It investigates the various aspects of different groups of people such as Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. Specifically, this study focuses on syncretism at different levels i.e. socio-political, cultural, economic and religious aspects. However, the phrase 'United Punjab' conveys a shared harmony and strong relationship among divergent groups of people like the Sikhs, the Hindus, and the Muslims (Awan, 2017). This study also portrays their shared customs and traditions of different groups of people in Abdullah Hussein are *The Weary Generations* in one community.

Abdullah Hussein was the pen name of Muhammad Khan; he was born in 1931 in Rawalpindi, (now a part of Pakistan). He was an Urdu novelist, a short story writer and he wrote Urdu novel, *Udas Naslain* in 1963 and awarded for prestigious *Adamji Award* in Pakistan. With the popularity, he translated it in an English version in 1999. Abdullah Hussein was a non-conventional and habitually wandering person. He did a number of jobs and visited several countries. After the publication of *Udas Naslain*, he went to the UK for a decade, where he ran a pub (Ghoshal, 2016, p. 1).

Abdullah Hussein wrote *The Weary Generations (Udas Naslain)* in the background of post-colonialism. This current study exhibits the representation of 'Sanjha Punjab' in Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations* in the context of syncretism. In this regard, the phrase 'Sanjha Punjab' comes from the Punjabi society and mostly deals with the shared customs and traditions of various groups of people i.e. Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus. Due to its cultural background, Bhabha's hybridity/syncretism has been taken as a theoretical framework in this study. Furthermore, Bhabha's concept of hybridity is the integration of cultural practices and signs from the colonizer and the colonized culture (1985). Therefore, this project chooses the syncretism as a theoretical framework.

Research Questions

- Why Abdullah Hussein portrays the picture of 'Sanjha Punjab' in *The Weary Generations*?
- How syncretic traditions and practices are used in the maintenance of a cultural hierarchy of Sanjha Punjab in *The Weary Generations*?

Review of the Literature

Sanjha (United): The Origin

'*Sanjha*' is purely a common Punjabi term. Its origin starts from the second half of the 16th century. 'Sanjha Punjab' means a combined and common place where people of several categories live together. Actually, the study perceives the idea of 'Sanjha' from a Punjabi trend, 'Sanjha Chulha'. This practice had commemorated by Grue Nanak Dev Ji in Punjab in the 16th Century and the people of Punjab celebrated it. It explored the customs and traditions of Punjab that made it sanjha. Generally, men worked at farms while women worked at homes. As there was a tradition of baking rotis in a tandoor, they gathered on the specific place, baked rotis and shared their stories of grief and happiness. In this way, they became familiar with one another's problems. This mutual understanding helped them to solve their problems of the entire life. This fact made an ideal community for them to exchange their hardships and problems (Sanjha, 2006).

Research Gap

Palakeel (2018) has discussed *The Weary Generations* from multiple perspectives i.e. feudalism, psychological, imperialism, post-colonialism and Marxism in *Reluctant Hero and the Question of Class (A Review Article)*. Hussein's daughter Fatima (2016) asserts that in *The Life and Times of Abdullah Hussein* "The actual writing of *The Weary Generations* come about 'out of sheer boredom' when Abdullah Hussein was posted at Daudkhel as part of a team up a cement factory".

In addition, Keshavmurthy (2018) has dealt with two topics i.e. politics and cunning forces in *The Weary Generations*. Along with, the story reveals the disturbances between political history and colonial societies. In this way, Naeem produces some resistances against colonialism. In a review, Ghoshal (2016) portrays a picture of Muslim

migration and harsh realities of the partition of Indo-Pak 1947 in *The Partition through the Eyes of One of Pakistan's Greatest Writers*.

The previous studies lack in exploring the specific lens syncretic analysis of Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations*. This current study fills the gap by examining the lives of various groups of people such as Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus at numerous shades of life i.e. socio-political, cultural, economic and religious aspects. In the background of the literature review, this current research fills the gap by providing a representation of 'Sanjha Punjab' in Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations*.

Methodology

This portion of the study deals with research design, and an appropriate theoretical framework regarding the research project. The design of the study is qualitative, content based analysis and explorative in nature. The researcher has analyzed the sample of text via an in-depth study of the selected text. The researcher becomes able to limelight the hidden meanings of the text.

Theoretical Framework

To seek these inter-related objectives, which have been designed in the first section, this research project utilizes Bhabha's notion of hybridity/syncretism as a theoretical framework to analyse the text minutely. In this way, Bhabha (1994) defines 'Hybridity' as a construct of post-colonial theory, it refers "to integrate or mingling of cultural signs and practices from colonizing and the colonized cultures" (p. 184).

Furthermore, this study foregrounds the various shades of life i.e. socio-political, cultural, economic and religious perspectives, instead of studying the integration of cultural signs and practices from colonizer and colonized culture. Due to this reason, the researcher skips off hybridity and intentionally choses syncretism, a co-word of hybridity as a tool. In this regard, the study conducts the textual analysis by taking syncretism as a theoretical framework.

Syncretism

Nel (2017) defines the concept of syncretism as “the fusion of beliefs, as well as to determine the most original and purest expressions in contradistinction to variant or analogous forms of religious and cultural expression”(p. 4). To strengthen the idea of syncretism, Melville Herskovits, an anthropologist argues that syncretism is a valuable concept for locating a status in which diverse cultures have been unified. To further explain it is not a specific platform for a religious integration rather a way leading to an idea of cultural integration and assimilation (Apter, 1991). In the same way, Brazilians Gilberto Freyre, an oncologist, strengthens the idea of Herskovits, claims that “Brazilian society to be fundamentally a synthesis of different ‘races’ and cultures” (Skidmore, 1990, p. 7).

Likewise, a Boasian, anthropologist has an opinion about syncretism that draws a line between culture and race (Damatta, 1987). Moreover, Nutini(1988) asserts that there is no suspicion in it; rather publish numerous articles/studies on different modes and forms of syncretism. Notably, syncretism exists within the community of the village, Roshan Pur, which seems prominent in the lives of the villagers. Due to this reason, there is no conflict regarding socio-political, economic, cultural and religious perspectives. Ashcroft (2013)has pointed out that syncretism is related to religious studies but it also explores the field of culture and theological texts. Furthermore, it has a positive impact on the process of transculturation.

It is further explained as “the combination and alliance of opposing religious or philosophical doctrines, often with political undertones, that result in private and public rituals and commonly accepted local practices” (Claus, 2003, p. 44). Da Silva claims that the syncretism is a process in which a relation is established in different nations i.e. Africans and Portuguese, so, it involves inter-linguistic and inter-cultural process (2005).

Textual Analysis

The study endeavours to conduct a syncretic analysis of Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations*. In this respect, this study scrutinises the various facet of rural life i.e. socio-political, cultural, economic, and religious gamutin the village, Roshan Pur. Again, the current research project also finds out the elements of harmony and

unity. In addition, the novel depicts numerous shades of syncretism. In this regard, the population of the village is the amalgam of a couple of nations in the selected text. To define the syncretic tendencies at the national level aims to explore it, Hussein (2003) says:

Roshan Pur was divided into two communities in equal size, roughly in the form of two groups, the Muslims and the Sikhs. Harnam Singh, head of the Sikhs, has claimed that the village, in fact, lay within the bounds of the province of Punjab, while Ahmed Din, the older resident and chief of the Muslims has maintained that it is indeed the part of Utter Pradesh. (p. 13)

The above resume concept shows that syncretic elements have found in a community of Roshan Pur. In this context, it can be explained that the population of the village, Roshan Pur classifies into two communities i.e. Muslim, and Sikh. Though these different nations have their own background, beliefs, cultures, and social setup, yet they live in the same village, Roshan Pur, without any conflict and issue.

Further, a textual analysis has been classified into four sub-groups, i.e. socio-political, cultural, economic, and religious. In this way, the researcher investigates the syncretic elements minutely in different ways, which have mentioned earlier. First, the study observes the socio-political aspects of the text in the light of syncretism.

Socio-Political Scenario of Sanjha Punjab

As Roshan Pur, a village is an amalgam of different communities i.e. the Sikh and the Muslim. In the same manner, this portion of the study is going to examine the social relations among these nations. To illustrate the social aspects in the selected text under the shade of syncretism, Hussein shows in the following lines, "Roshan Ali was returning from the street next to his neighbours after a visit of condolence to the family of a friend who had been killed in an accident" (2003, p.14). These lines unfold the custom of the village. Roshan Ali, the protagonist who has a social interaction with the community consoles with the bereaved family. However, this social

trend has been enjoyed in the lives of people in the village. Whenever a person dies, people visit their family to console them. Then it becomes the custom.

The Second ingredient of social life is the role of negotiator, which is performed by different groups of the village in the selected text. People of the village seem to be more cooperative and show more kindness with one another. In this way, they do not hesitate to give their own services to other people without knowing cast and creed. In the following lines, Hussein (2003) displays the role of negotiator:

At that moment, two Muslims two Hindus and one Sikh appeared out of their houses and cautiously, fearfully approached the mob; coming within walking distance just as rifle butts begins to fall on Roshan Ali's door . . . the elders fearing that the whole street would go up in flames, took their heavy turbans off their heads and, placing them at the angry soldiers' feet, begged them to stay their hands while they tried to get the culprit out of the house. (pp. 15-16)

The above text gives a short account regarding the mutiny, which takes place in Roshan Pur when a mob gathers in front of a house. They want to get back a farangi officer who runs away from a mutiny, now gets shelter in Roshan Ali's house. The whole village behaves like one nation and raises their voice as one voice. It shows their harmony and mutual understanding.

Especially, Hussein (2003) expresses in this way, "When I was taken away, you know, I gave a bullock to your father for safekeeping. Don't know what happened to it, I was away a long time. Maybe it died like, like your father. There is no accounting for such things. But he was my friend, your father was. Right, right don't worry chaudri" (p.80). This text shows the impact of social interaction in society. In these lines, an incident of social interaction takes place between two persons of two different communities; one is Niaz Beg, a peasant, and other a Sikh.

In addition to the social aspect, the study tries to highlight the political gamut in rural lives. When people of the village start struggling in order to get a separate state for themselves then they

need a strong political setup. Hussein recounts the incident of Jallianwala Bagh in these lines:

Nobody had so far looked around them along the walls. Suddenly the heads of soldiers appeared above the walls on all sides as if from nowhere. They started shooting. For a moment, we did not know what was happening. . . in the silence, the rat-tat-tat of bullets was coming from all three sides. Within moments we became aware of people being hit and bleeding and falling, and then we were running . . . they asked me whom I knew in the city, who were the leaders, who the speechmakers, whether I was a Muslim or a Hindu or a Sikh or Christian. I said I don't know I am only a fisherman. (2003, pp.196-97)

The above text gives also a short description of the Jallianwala massacre and reveals the brutality and cruelty in the result of a decision that made by the British Government. To define the syncretism in these lines, this portion of the socio-political gives an instance of Jallianwala Bagh in which Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu are gathered on Gandhi's call 'hartal'. They make a plan to protest against the British Government against Row let Act. This situation reveals how much politicized the people of Punjab.

Second, to illustrate the effects of politics on the lives of the people, this part of the study explains the impact of the order of crawling. Further, it can be defined that it has a political influence on the page of the socio-political environment. The author of the story mentions the incident the order of crawling in detail. Hussein presents a picture of the crawling orders, which is passed by General Dyer on the incident of the humiliation of British woman. All the community accepted the rebellious attitude of one person. They have an option to defend themselves individually but they refuse the opportunity and embrace the punishment. It shows their harmony and sense of mutual understanding, which does not allow them to feel free from this incident. They consider it is not punishment of one individual but for the whole community.

Cultural Environment of Sanjha Punjab

This portion proffers the cultural aspects of the selected text. On the contrary, it gives a detailed account of Punjabi culture as well. The culture of the village can be explained through these customs and norms. Different people celebrate numerous traditions and this is one of them. This can be seen in the following lines:

The words of the deceased, setting down the tradition, call upon me, as the closest friend and ally of the late lamented, to fulfil my duty and announce the passing of the name . . . of the exalted title "Roshan Agha" . . . all the Indians, Muslim as well as Hindu, and one or two of the foreigners joined, raising their hands in the air in front of them in a gesture of supplication to their God. (Hussein, 2003, p. 32)

The above lines summarize a cultural depiction of the community, Roshan Pur. It shows the element of syncretism among them, as it can be seen on the eve of Dastarbandi. Dastarbandi ceremony is celebrated in the honour of new Roshan Agha, Ghulam Mohyeddin. This is another event of their enjoyment in the village. All the inhabitants (Muslim, Sikh and Hindu) appear in the ceremony and enjoy themselves. Some foreigners have also been invited to this ceremony. Dastarbandi ceremony is shown in these lines as a cultural activity.

To define the canvas of cultural norms and traditions, the text has mentioned another cultural practice. Notably, sowing and harvesting is a source of the income of people in the village. Hussein (2003) describes sowing of crops is a way of connecting people as below:

Niaz Beg had already unloading the two-mound heavy bag of seeds. After standing it against the tree-trunk...slinging it across his shoulders, he entered the field, driving the bullocks before him.

'Come on,' he said to Naim. 'This is your first sowing, Watch.' From one end of the field, he started sowing...seed,

look at the seed, its dropping on the side, going astray, waste, pay attention, look, and look. (p. 64)

This episode of cultural traditions has exposed the element of syncretism. This cultural norm is advertised some of the traits i.e. patient, bravery and hardworking. It shows their sense of doing mutual work. Through this exercise, Naim not only learns the art of sowing but patience, courage, and the lesson of hardworking, also.

Similarly, harvesting is another interesting practice under the shade of cultural activity in the village. Almost, all people of the village participate in this exercise. Men, women, and animals are busy harvesting the crops. This gathering unites them actually. Hussein (2003) represents the picture in this way:

Harvesting had begun. Every man, women, and animal in Roshan Pur was busy. Even the birds, seeing an abundance of grain on the ground, hovered in swarms, uttering shrill cries of hungry delight. Under the May sun, the bare bodies of men had been burnt black...they were leaving heap after heap of the felled crop behind them as they moved, squatting like two-legged tortoises, along with the ground, and clearing swathes of a field in their wake.(p. 79)

A pack of people is there, they all show the element of harmony, unity, and courage. Syncretism can be observed in the harvesting season where Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus engage themselves in harvesting.

Economic Aspect of Sanjha Punjab

Along with the socio-political and cultural aspects of life of the villagers, the study exhibits the glimpses of syncretism in the economic corridor. This session deals with the economic perspective of the lives of the village, Roshan Pur. This tenant outlines the economic perspective of the village, Roshan Pur. People are more cooperative and fulfill their needs with one another regardless of their religions. This exercise shows that syncretic elements exist in the lives of people of the village. Hussein (2003) expresses the economic conditions of the village, Roshan Pur. As follows:

Niaz Beg said. 'I came with a purpose.' . . .

'And you are complaining?' laughed Mahinder Singh...
He is my friend all right. Yes, yes, I will talk to Juginder.'
'We will eat from it first, finish it in a month.'
All right.(p. 80)

The above lines foreground that people depend upon one another, so, they borrow valuable things from the neighbors without any discrimination. This action of the villagers presents the syncretism in the society. Through this action, the element of harmony and unity has been promoted. It can be seen that Niaz Beg goes to Mahinder Singh's father and requests that he may provides a storeroom for grains and seeds. In response to this request, Mahinder Sing's father agrees and provides a place or storeroom. Thus, syncretism covers the whole of the community. Everyone spends one's life under the influence of syncretism.

In addition, borrow of bullocks is also observed in the field of economic perspective. This hierarchy of these aspects explores the worse economic conditions of people in the village. This practice of borrowing thing proposes the barter system. In general, there is a common practice in the rural areas that when they need some valuable things they borrow it from others. Hussein (2003) asserts that:

Now, however, the sowing season was on. Niaz Beg and Naim had worked hard the past few days to prepare the soil. They only had one pair of bullocks. Mahinder Singh had offered to get them another pair, but suspecting that it would be stolen property, they had declined. Father and son had tilled four acres with their one pair, leaving two acres for the second sowing of the rainy season later in the year.(p. 61)

This picture indicates that the sowing season starts in the village and Niaz Beg has only one bullock. In order to meet the desired urgency, Niaz Beg needs one more bullock for tilling the land in time. Actually, Niaz Beg has four acres and one bullock. Mahinder Singh, a friend of his son Naim offers him a bullock for the cultivation. But Niaz Beg does not accept this offer and demands four acres with only

one pair. In addition, this aspect performs two functions i.e. social interaction and courage of the peasant.

Religious Conditions of Sanjha Punjab

The study observes different aspects of life i.e. socio-political, cultural, economic corridors in this part of textual analysis. Similarly, in this section, the researcher unveils a couple of constructs regarding the religious scenario through syncretism. Like the previous sections, this section can be divided into sub-groups. As the theoretical framework purports that syncretism is directly connected with religion. Most of the religious obligations are done under the title of syncretism. They take part in each other's religious activities.

This text also discusses the syncretic element from a religious perspective. There is a complete paradigm about the law of marriage in the village. In addition, detailed guidance regarding the marriage ceremony has been advertised and implemented willingly. Hussein (2003) surveys the guideline of marriage in this community in these lines:

Still, it's a matter of my turn on the canal, Niaz Beg; do you think I keep lying down with my woman? I only have one.' The Sikh laughed.

'Our guru did not allow us more than one, not like your guru did'

'Damn the guru,' Niaz Beg muttered after the Sikh had left.

'Only excuses for lazy limbs.(p. 63)

The above lines outline the syncretic elements exist in the village, Roshan Pur. Above discussion, shows that both the individuals engage in a discussion belong to one community. Though they have different values regarding the marriage ceremony in one community, yet they celebrate it with complete harmony and mutual understanding. In Sikhism, only one marriage is allowed but the Muslim community has more than one.

Moreover, begging for mercy depicts the element of syncretism when people of the village seek mercy from every pyramid of every

religious order for the sake of their people. Hussein (2003) examines these religious aspects of their life:

Hindus and Sikhs sacrificed virgin goats to the hungry gods and goddesses while the Muslims kneeled down to pray to their one omnipotent God that water, the scourge, they never let go of the hope, the last refuge of this patient breed, that this difficult time too, like so many that had come before, would pass, for such had been the fate of the Indian peasant from the beginning of time.(p. 131)

To illustrate the recent fact of begging mercy, when the flood comes due to the dynamic rainy season in the village, Roshan Pur, the people beg mercy from different gods. Everywhere is water nobody is saved there. For this reason, people of the village become afraid of sudden changes in the season. Everyone feels fear and wish for a sudden miracle.

Likewise, Sikhs and Hindus sacrifice their virgin goats for the sake of mercy; on the contrary, the Muslims are gone in the mosques in order to offer prayers. They think that, by doing so, the risk of the flood may be suspended and they can be able to settle their lives. Conversely, Muslims offer prayers in the mosque and pay tributes to the blessings of God. Religion has worth in their lives but as not as they give worth to their community. This is the main fact of syncretism that they respect every religion without creating discrimination.

Conclusion

As the analysis suggests, in the early of the 20th century, the province of Punjab has been divided into different groups of people i.e. Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. Abdullah Hussein has portrayed the picture of the village, Roshan Pur where several groups of people live together as one community. They all have different religions but this fact has not disturbed their internal social environment. These people have their own cultural, social composition, political scenario, economic activities, lifestyle and religious domains.

It is pertinent to mention that every community either they Muslim, Sikh or Hindu have its own customs, rites, and traditions and the inhabitants of each community have celebrated them with wholeheartedly. Thus, it can be said that the people of diverse communities live like one nation. Briefly, they have shared all the activities regarding the colloquial activities especially in the field of culture.

In addition, syncretic elements also exist in the diverse community of the village before partition. This community has almost various groups of people like Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Sikh. Notably, syncretism has existed within the community of the village, Roshan Pur that seems prominent in the lives of the villagers. Due to this reason, there is no conflict regarding socio-political, economic, cultural and religious among them. Notably, at every stage of life, these people have spent their lives in the domain of syncretism.

Moreover, people of Roshan Pur have harmony, unity and mutual understanding among them. In every moment of life whether there is happiness or woes in Roshan Pur, they display the sign of unity and harmony. In this regard, they become the symbol of universal brotherhood. In this way, people of the village thrive well and the economy reaches to its peak. Through Sanjha Punjab, people can be able to preserve the heritage of Punjabi culture. At some extent, this study has proved helpful to resolve the matters of domestic life because it has explored the ways of salvation. Briefly, the study has suggested a multicultural society where people have solved their issues of present life because this study has portrayed a picture of a balanced society with having several religions even. The study has represented a picture of 'Sanjah Punjab' regarding every aspect of their life. Briefly, syncretism has been observed in every activity of life whether the issue is related to socio-political, cultural, economic or religious obligations.

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