

CULTURAL PLURALISM AND TRANS-RELIGIOUS AFFINITY IN PUNJAB: UNSUNG MUSLIM AND SIKH HEROES

(Hug Vs Pug Diplomacy)

Dr. Shaheen Khan, Dr. Rasib Mahmood and Kainat Zafar

*“In Punjab, promise, friendship, and revenge never die;
natives have strong ties,
but why? Muslims and Sikhs have a long series of
Death.
Loyalty of Punjab proves that life is not a lie.
Sikhs and Muslims think beyond me and my”*

(Rasib Mahmood).

ABSTRACT

An oral account of the real stories of Punjab shows that the humanitarian love and affection have an upper hand over the religious and cultural divisions. The land of five rivers is fertile due to five native religions, where shades of love and affection have dimmed the religious and cultural extremism, sectarianism, and terrorism. Various Sikh and Muslim characters have established the examples of friendship and loyalty but with the passage of time, religious extremism has emerged across the region with the emergence of globalization/westernization. Especially, religious extremism has increased with the emergence of the Imperialism. This research paper is the documentation and analysis of the oral stories based upon the friendship between Muslim and Sikh real characters. Their friendship was beyond cultural and religious boundaries. They were so close to each other that they sacrificed themselves for upholding their friendship. This cultural pluralism and trans-religion affinity generated new examples of friendship, love, and affection. Sikhs and Muslims have established such examples of friendship which are very rare in history, even among the followers of the same religions and sects it cannot be traced. These relationships were stronger than blood relations. Their

existence proved the loyalty of the regions along with the loyalty of five religions and rivers. Nevertheless, this research paper presents the implication of the past stories in the present scenario in the form of Navjot Singh Sidhu and his friendship with Imran Khan and Punjab. A Muslim leader set a new example of friendship by opening the Gurdaspur corridor for Sikhs. Moreover, there is also analysis in the global perspective, such as the universality, identity of the Punjab, trans-religious love & affection, causes of the emergence of extremism, terrorism, intolerance, and feminism. It is also the study of the distinct colors of Punjab.

Keywords: Folktales; Regionalism; Revenge; Friendship; Trans-Religious Affinity.

INTRODUCTION

People used to express their feelings, preserve their history and culture, through folktales before the writing tradition (Delargy, 1947), as the parents used to tell stories of the past to children (Wright, 1997). This tradition was not only helpful to preserve the culture but also the identities. Nevertheless, later, some writers documented folktales in various books while others are untouched even in the postmodern age. Folktales and archaeological evidence give the glimpse of the previous generations, especially about their culture, religions, social norms, and traditions (Bascom, 1953). This research paper is based upon the documentation of a historical oral story and its thematic analysis in modern perspective. The researcher(s) of this study has documented the story. The story reflects the culture, religions, social norms, and traditions of the natives. It also conveys the concept of postcolonial theory which existed in the minds of the natives but not in any documented form. The natives used to live peacefully but they were very much aware of the destruction caused by colonization (Wa Thiong'o, 1992). The elements of resistance, friendship, and colonization are very prominent in the *Unsung Heroes*. In the borderless world they have their own cultural and religious boundaries but besides these differences, they were living peacefully. This research paper deals with the thematic analysis of historical tale "Unsung Heroes" documented by Rasib Mahmood. This story gives a complete glimpse of the Punjabi culture, religions, and trans-religious affinity of the natives. The documented story also signifies the present

Hug diplomacy of Navjot Singh Sidhu and trans-cultural and trans-religious affinity of Muslims and Sikhs.

Punjab was a province of British-India during the colonial period (Singh,1981), where Muslims and Sikhs were in the majority (Grewal, 1998), and their brevity and friendship was at a peak at that time. The natives were very prosperous because of the agricultural land. The fertility of the land had a profound effect on the minds of the natives. They were living very close to nature, with the seeds of loyalty and prosperity. The land was divided into East and West Punjab in the end of the British Raj (Copland,1982, p.185). The eastern Hindu-Sikh majority area went under the control of India and western Muslim majority area came under the control of Pakistan. Here all the natives have a reflection of the Indus Valley Civilization (Singh,1977).

In ancient times, the province was known as Sapt-Sindhava which means the land of seven rivers. The Muslim invaders had given the name Punjab to the land. It was the fact that seven rivers used to irrigate the native land (Deol, 2003). This civilization is also known as the Harappan civilization, as the images of the ruined cities and villages can be found (Agrawal & Sood,1982). Many colonizers governed the region, but Mughal and Sikh governance are considered more remarkable (Grewal,1998). It can thus be concluded that many personalities have contributed to the development of socio-cultural traditions of the native land.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultures and religions are considered as the resistant tools of any society, community, and country against colonizers (Abu-Nimer, 2001). They also play a vital role in the representation of native culture and religion. The same thing was done by the postcolonial writers who have saved their identity by preserving these tools and using them in their writings (Said, 1995, p.115). Stephen Greenblatt is of the view that such type of writings are “invisible bullets” in the arsenal of empires (Greenblatt & Greenblatt, 1988). He is of the opinion that texts and textuality have played a significant role in colonization and conquests (Shakespeare, 1994). Most of the European histories, anthropologies, and fictional texts have captured the picture of the non- European subjects in the European framework which read her alterity as terror or lacking (Conrad, 2010). Through the explanation and elaboration of the native

cultures, postcolonial writers have rejected the colonizers' presentation of the colonial culture and their social norms and traditions (King, 2012). They have also declared that the occupiers adopted authoritative behavior through suppressing the native voices in the representation of the native people. In short, the native writers are of the opinion that all the Europeans presentations about the "others" are based upon their own assumptions and desires (Said, 1995).

The present study is the textual analysis of the text documented by the researcher himself. It is a textual analysis of an oral historical tale in the modern context. This ancient story signifies many characters, themes, and relationships of the present time. It signifies that blood, traditions and culture never change with the circumstances. It is the story of friendship between a Sikh and a Muslim who loved each other like brothers.

SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research paper signifies the trans-culture and trans-religious affinity between the Muslims and Sikhs in past and implication of ancient oral stories of Punjab in the present scenario, in the form of opening of Gurdaspur Corridor. It also presents a long series of friendships between Muslims and Sikhs. The research also reflects that Pug Diplomacy of ancient Punjab still exists in the blood of native Jutts. It has transformed from Pug to Hug diplomacy which can be seen during the first meeting of Qamar Javed Bajwa and Navjot Singh Sidhu.

The research paper has something to consider for all the disciplines of the social sciences and humanities. It not only covers the religious, cultural, trans-culture, and trans-religious aspects of the region, besides, it is useful for students of Political Science and International Relations to understand the cultural ties between the citizens of Pakistan and India.

DOCUMENTATION OF "UNSUNG HEROES"

(Short Story: Section-1)

In history, Punjab was considered as the heart of purity where friendship was always treated as a religion. The friendship story of two Muslims and Sikhs was very prominent in the region. They lived like family members and used to share the stories of regional invaders. Exchanging the Pugs¹ to strengthen the friendships was a customary practice in ancient Punjab. These ceremonies can be traced through two

¹ *Pugs means caps artificially created from long cloth*

historical events. One incident took place when Mutali and Inspector Lal Singh exchanged their Pugs, while the second incident took place when Ranjeet Singh and Badhri exchanged their Pugs in a big crowd. They announced that they will befriend till death. This was not only the foundation of the friendship of the four people but of the four families from two different religions. Their relationship was announced publicly through the exchange of Pugs.

The beginning of new relationships and the peak of friendship was announced publicly. They loved each other more than their relatives. Even the mother of Lal Singh used to say that Mutali is also her son. Both of them grew up together under shady trees. After some time, Lal became a police inspector under British administration, but the friendship continued. Mutali was the continuous visitor of Lal where ever he got transferred. The roots of their friendship could be traced back to the relations and friendship of their ancestors. They shared the stories of their ancestors and invasions of the region.

The region of Punjab has survived many invasions. The thirst, greed, and hunger of the invaders snatched the jewels of this land and separated people in the name of religion. In return, a hybrid culture and language were developed. The long persistent family codes also vanished with the passage of time. Invaders came like Makri² and destroyed everything and moved to second place. Makri comes like clouds in summer and eats everything in the fields and moves to attack another place. The natives used to beat the drum to destabilize their stay because they destroyed the farmers' possessions. Makri consists of billions of insects who move in one group, stay at one place, and then move to the second one. These pests destroyed villages after villages, and the poor farmers mostly could not endure the pain of this loss.

Relating to the story, it is narrated that there was a Vair³ between Mutali and Badhri before the British colonization. They wanted to kill each other like their fathers. Mutali was a farmer while his enemy Badhri and his friend Ranjeet Singh were thieves. Both the groups were in search of each other when Inspector Lal Singh sent a Munshi⁴ to call Mutali in the police station. Mutali, on the other hand, was happy to know that his friend has

² Treacherous

³ Enmity

⁴ Constable

been transferred to Kot-Momin Police Station as an inspector and distributed sweets in the whole village on this occasion.

With morning light, Mutali was riding in the air, with no fear, because he was equipped with a pistol and a gun's pair. In the clouds of terror and thunder, a tall man with big moustaches, long majaliy⁵ and lambachola⁶ entered Kot-Momin police station, to meet his friend inspector Lal Singh. After the greeting and long discussion, Lal Singh requested his friend to submit his weapons as keeping weapons was banned by the government. However, it was a shocking news for Mutali, and he felt distressed, as he had two enemies, Ranjeet Singh and Badhri, from whom he had to protect himself and his family, and keeping the weapon always gave him with a sense of security.

On this account, Mutali accused the Lal Singh of being a servant of Firangies (English masters) and expressed his fear that without the weapon, he will not be able to protect himself from his enemies. Lal Singh assured him of providing security and guaranteed him that in any such incident he will take revenge from his enemies. In the meanwhile, a spy rode from the police station and informed Ranjeet Singh and Badhri that Mutali was going back with an open hand. Upon which both the friend rode on horses to kill Mutali.

Mutali was on the way of his home with deep thinking of his past, present and future. He was thinking about the resistance shown by his ancestors against colonizers. When he reached at Chanonshah (Darbar). He saw two riders were coming towards him. Mutali found shelter in a house where the household women protected him from the attack. Here the authors of the story portray the strong culture of Punjab, where respect for women is of utmost importance. The enemies were helpless to reach and kill Mutali as they could not sidestep the cultural values. However, as they thought that the survival of Mutali would now be a summon to their death, they somehow managed to negotiate with the house owners to abandon Mutali's protection and let them kill him. Both the enemies, thus, killed Mutali.

Subsequently, the situation in the village became very tense, as the villagers were not only worried about the Mutali murder but were more

⁵ *A long cloth to cover the lower part of the body (Punjabi word)*

⁶ *A long shirt which part of Punjabi culture*

concerned and wept on the disintegration of their regional culture, that why the house owners did not give protection to the person who had taken shelter. In Punjab, even the enemies at homes are treated as guests. As a protest, the villagers boycotted the house owners and this family bhanda⁷ was thrown out that day.

*Sonay Putar Punjab day Tay Sath Daryawan da ay Ang
Mathy Dharti Punjab di ahy keran nahi daindy wand
Sikh bulandat tay Ronda:
Ki ina lantian nay piti hoi si bhang
Sonay shahir Punjab day tay sonahy oday rang.*

Short Story: Section-2

The whole family of Lal Singh was distressed over the death of Mutali. Lal's mother used to say that she has lost her son and she could not sleep due to the distraught and grief. After one year she died and told her son that he had to take revenge of Mutali at any cost, otherwise she would not forgive him on the day of judgement. He decided to leave the job and take revenge, but his wife stopped him from doing so and advised that he can take better revenge while living the police job.

Lal Singh used to say:

"Mutali was a lion, his friendship and my promise are like sunshine, in my mind, until I will not kill Ranjeet Singh and Badhri, nothing is divine."

– Unsung Heroes, Dr. Rasib Mahmood

Time was passing by and Lal Singh was going down day by day. People were asking, "what happened to Lal?" His hair turned grey, he went on medical leave. During his rest, he felt pain in his chest as her mother felt. He used to see Mutali in his dreams. Mutali always advised him to cut his long hair. Later, malaria spread in the locality, and his wife died due to the disease. Lal promised that he will never marry again and will soon quench his pain which saddened him through centuries and made his soul cry.

Soon after, a spy told Lal Singh that Badhri and Ranjeet Singh used to come to Said Sail and were his good friends. As Said Sail possess vast land, both stayed in his house every month for some time. Lal Singh

⁷ *Social Boycott*

planned to meet Said Sail and to use him as a source to take the revenge from Mutali's enemies. The meeting was planned and one night Said Sail came to meet him. Said Sail wanted to know the reason for the invitation. Upon knowing, that Lal Singh wanted to kill his guests, the thought angered him furiously as it was against the traditions and customs of the region to harm the guests. However, Lal Singh threatened him that if he did not help, he may file a non-bailable case against him, on his illegal activities and crimes. One night, Said Sail called Lal Singh and reported that the guests were sleeping in the house with barren hands. Lal Singh thus fired on Ranjeet Singh and Badhri and killed them.

ANALYSIS OF "UNSUNG HEROES"

Pug and Hug of Punjab

The story encompasses various themes such as colonization, resistance, trans-cultural affinity of the natives, regionalism, globalization, separation, and materialism. Above all, the role of Pug and custom of exchanging Pugs in Punjab is much symbolic and signifies the loyalty of the natives. The tradition conveys the moral values of the region, modes of friendship which have become ancient in the present age. The story conveys the ancient picture of the region which is almost unacceptable in the postmodern age. But the arrival of Navjot Singh Sidhu in Prime Minister Imran Khan's oath-taking ceremony gives new colors to the ancient oral story. Three guests were invited from the neighboring land on the oath-taking ceremony but only Navjot Singh Sidhu reached with a Punjabi Pug. Pug is a symbol of loyalty and friendship of Punjabi people. It is a fact that British colonizers played a vital role in dividing the region and the seeds of hatred were sown in that period, but people of both Punjabs have not forgotten their traditions.

The story also signifies how the friendships are loyal, and friends do not hesitate to slaughter and sacrifice for friends just because of the exchanged Pugs. This Pug Diplomacy has great significance for Hug Diplomacy between two Jutts in the postmodern age which has not only opened the Gurdaspur Corridor, but it has also re-established the purity, loyalty, and sincerity of the natives. The natives of Punjab are royal by birth.

Like African theorists, Indian theorists and critics have worked a lot on postcolonial theory, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak are prominent figures among them (Spivak, 2012). Spivak has talked about the

suppressed voices of the subalterns, but African writers have stern response towards colonization as compared to the writers of the Subcontinent. It seems to be very interesting when the convention of the same hatred is found in the folktales of Punjab (Anand, 1974). African Postcolonial theorists are of the view that colonization is evil in the name of good. Same is the case in folktale documented by Rasib Mahmood.

“The region has passed through many invasions. The thirst, greed and hunger of invaders had snatched the Jewels of our land and separated us on the name of religion. In return, they provided us with a hybrid culture and language. Mirrors are helpless to show us a clear picture. The family codes will also vanish with the passage of time. Invaders came like Makri and destroyed everything and moved to a second place. Makri consists of billions of sects move in one group and stay at one place and then moves to the other place. Makri comes like clouds in summer and eats everything in the fields. The natives used to beat the drum to destabilize the stay of these sects because their stay destroyed all the possessions of the native farmers. These living beings destroyed villages after villages and any farmers could not bear the pain of this loss.”

– Unsung Heroes, Dr. Rasib Mahmood

The natives of Punjab disliked the culture and traditions of the colonizers and other communities which were based upon the superficiality of westernization. They thought that it was identity crises for the natives. Through adopting the culture and language of the colonizers they would lose their identity with the passage of time.

The natives were living peacefully before British colonization (Visram, 2015). There was no religious extremism and natives of various sects and religions were living like families. The stories of their friendship are very prominent across the world. The documented story shows that Muslims and Sikhs had so close relationships that they take revenge of each other. But at the same time, the story portrays the revenge and heartedness of the natives against the invaders/colonizers. Moreover, it also shows that inculcation of the colonizers led to the division of the region, especially Punjab into parts, one became Indian Punjab, and another became Pakistan Punjab.

Before separation, there were long friendly relationships among the Muslims and Sikhs in Punjab. Their friendship and enmity were pure from materialism and economic determinism. The societies in past were quite different from the present societies because of their strong beliefs in social values and humanitarianism. Along with religious and cultural differences, there was peace and harmony in the region. There was no concept of materialism and capitalism. Neighbors felt the pain of each other. Nonetheless, imperialism led the world towards globalization and industrialization. This revolution has its own pros and cons. It generated the hate among the nations, tribes, and sects. The people living peacefully with each other became enemy within no time just because of societal changes and globalization which generated competition among the people and nations, exclusively infusing the economic competition.

Globalization has played a vital role in transforming the societies and the mindsets, especially on the people of colonial regions and developing countries (Spechler, 2000). Nevertheless, it has its positive and negative effects as well. The emergence of industrialization has affected the social and cultural values of the civilizations across the world. Material interests determine the friendship and enmity of the countries as well as individuals, that is why there is no concept of lasting friendship and enmity in the postmodern world (Kellner, 2003). The friendship of the nations, as well as individuals, totally based upon their mutual interests.

The documented story in this paper illustrates the picture of regionalism which has now turned into globalization and underlines the materialism which has directly affected the pure feelings of the natives. The natural habits and instincts have changed to superficial ones. Indigenization, hybridization, and inculcations of cultures have affected both sides. Existing civilizations have reshaped across the world because of the emergence of the global phenomenon. Trans-cultural affinity has reached to its end because of the interference of the imperial powers.

Along with the analysis, the above story also shows a deep friendship and the enmity of the Sikhs and Muslims, beyond their religious and cultural boundaries. There were close love and respect bonds between the two distinct religious communities. The friendship between Badhri and Ranjeet Singh was unshakeable until their death. But on the other hand, their trust on Sail proved a mental misconception. Their host and partner proved disloyal and hypocrite when he informed their enemy to kill them.

Regionalism

The story shows regionality, where the culture, social norms and traditions of the society are very prominent. The natives never forget their promise with each other and always keep their words at any cost. They think beyond materialism. There seems to be a natural connection between the natives of the region. Muslims and Sikhs had a long series of friendship with each other because of the commonalities of social norms and traditions. Breaking promise is not in ghuti⁸ of Punjab. The fertility of the land has a profound effect on the minds of the natives. The individual has the purity of souls which can be seen in the friendship between the people from two religions. Badhri and Ranjeet Singh also represent the purity of land in the story.

Friendship

Friendship beyond the cultural and religious boundaries is another emerging theme of the story. The Sikh and Muslim friends are loyal with each other more than their religious fellows. Singh and Badhri's friendship is the best example of the story. Through their friendship, their family relationship established and remained constant until their death. It is not wrong to presume that the friendship bonds are taken seriously as a religious practice in Punjab and in the Punjabi culture. The examples of the oral story are also applicable to Sidhu and Imran Khan.

Revenge

The aim of the Lal Singh's life was to take revenge from Ranjeet Singh and Badhri because of his promise to his friend Mutali. He left all the luxuries of his life just for the sake of this revenge. He forgot his cultural and religious affinity. His revenge was more pious for him as compared to his cultural and religious affinity.

CONCLUSION

This research paper substantiates that the trans-religious affinity and strong friendship ties predominately exist in Punjab and the natives treat them like religious beliefs. The Sikh and Muslim characters have proved this notion in the story who remained friends until their death. Moreover, the Pug signifies the loyal friendship in Punjab. The Punjabi literature presents it as a sign of diplomacy of mediaeval Punjab. We can see its reflection in the friendship of Navjot Singh Sidhu and Imran Khan. This

⁸ *small quantity of sugar given to the newly born child.*

friendship has not only opened the Gurdaspur corridor for the Sikh pilgrims but also established a new history. Navjot Singh Sidhu hug with the Pakistan officials in the oath ceremony is also a great significance of the love and respect between the people of Punjab across borders. It can be seen as the renewal of the Jutts' Pug diplomacy of the past into Hug diplomacy of Post-modern Punjab. It is thus considered that the Muslims and Sikhs have always condemned the foreign invasions and sustained to promote their own culture.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Nimer, M. (2001). Conflict resolution, culture, and religion: Toward a training model of interreligious peacebuilding. *Journal of Peace Research*, 38(6), 685-704.
- Agrawal, D.P., & Sood, R. K. (1982). Ecological factors and the Harappan Civilization. Harappan civilization. In Possehl, G. L. (ed.), *Harappan Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*, (pp.222-229). Delhi: Oxford & IBH and the American Institute of Indian Studies.
- Anand, M. R. (1974). *Folktales of Punjab* (Vol. 18). New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
- Bascom, W. R. (1953). Folklore and anthropology. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 66(262), 283-290.
- Conrad, J. (2010). *Youth, the heart of darkness, the end of the tether*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Copland, I. (1982). *The British Raj and the Indian princes: paramountcy in western India, 1857-1930*. Bombay: Orient Longman.
- Delargy, J. H. (1947). *The Gaelic story-teller: with some notes on Gaelic folk-tales*. London: Cumberlege.
- Deol, H. (2003). *Religion and Nationalism in India: The case of Punjab*. London: Routledge.
- Greenblatt, S., & Greenblatt, S. J. (Eds.). (1988). *Representing the English Renaissance* (Vol. 2). California: Univ of California Press.
- Grewal, J. S. (1998). *The Sikhs of Punjab* (Vol. 2). London: Cambridge University Press.
- Kellner, D. (2003). *Media culture: Cultural studies, identity, and politics between the modern and the post-modern*. London: Routledge.
- King, A. D. (2012). *Colonial urban development: Culture, social power, and environment*. London: Routledge.
- Said, E. W. (1995). *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient* 1978. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin.

- Shakespeare, W. (1994). *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Singh, D. (1981). *Dynamics of Punjab politics*. New Delhi, India: Macmillan.
- Singh, F. (Ed.). (1977). *History of Punjab* (Vol. 1). Department of Punjab Historical Studies, Patiala: Punjabi University.
- Spechler, M. C. (2000). David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 28(3), 629-631.
- Spivak, G. C. (2012). *In other worlds: Essays in cultural politics*. London: Routledge.
- Visram, R. (2015). *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: the story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*. London: Routledge.
- Wa Thiong'o, N. (1992). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Nairobi: East African Publishers.
- Wright, A. (1997). *Creating stories with children*. London: Oxford University Press.