



## **Ethnical And Cultural Discrimination As A Disability In Sanchit Gupta's**

### ***A Tree With A Thousand Apples***

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#### **Abstract**

This article entitled “Ethnical and Cultural Discrimination as a Disability in Sanchit Gupta's A Tree with a Thousand Apples” focuses on disability that prevails in the society based on cultural differences. Disability is a term which is associated with a person who is physically or mentally disabled. The article portrays people's disability in raising their voice against social injustice and cultural discrimination. The writing further focuses on psychological and physical disabilities that are caused due to social, political and cultural imbalance in the society. The paper witnesses that cultural discrimination restricts a person from exposing his own cultural identity. This article proves that even though there are sufferings and riots due to cultural differences, human values like love, affection and friendship can break all social, political and cultural disabilities beyond all the differences and discrimination.

#### **Keywords:**

Disability, Cultural Differences, Social Injustice, Identity Crisis, Violence.

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Disability Studies is a subdivision of knowledge that brings out the ideas on disability. This study further deals with the effects of disability in the case of social, political, cultural and ethical factors in the society. Basically disability is a term which is associated mainly with a person who suffers physical and mental impairment. But the word disability cannot be constrained or confined to such physical and mental illnesses, instead it can also be



associated with the social, cultural and political disabilities undergone by a person in his/her society.

The existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups within a society has increased and this cultural diversity has induced diverse cultural heritages. This diversity also created discrimination in the minds of the people leading to disability in following ones own cultural practices and beliefs. This forces a person to conceal his cultural identity in the society. In such circumstances people are disabled to express their reality. A community performance artist and disability culture activist Petra Kuppers says, “Disability Culture is the difference between being alone, isolated and individuated with a physical, cognitive, emotional or sensory difference that in our society invites discrimination and reinforces that isolation- the difference between all that and being in community” (109). Discriminating the people on the footing of cultural differences and isolating them can also cause disability in the society.

The novel chosen for presentation, *The Tree with a Thousand Apples* by the author Sanchit Gupta, focuses on the ethnic and cultural discrimination that prevails in India. The novel also brings out the sufferings of Kashmiris who experience violence and isolation in their own country. The author points out the problems of Kashmiri Pandits and the Kashmiri Muslims that paves way for inter-communal clashes and violence resulting in the insurgency in Kashmir. He also brings out the differences between Kashmiri and Non- Kashmiri Indians. The novel revolves around the lives of Safeena Malik, Deewan Bhat and Bilal Ahanagar who shares an awesome childhood friendship in the God’s paradise, Kashmir. The lives of these three innocent children collapse due to the rise of social and political unrest in the previously serene land of Kashmir.

This article brings out the inability of the people who could not save their loved ones during time of riots. Deewan’s father, Praveen Bhat with his family takes refuge in the house of Malik. Malik loses his wife, Saira in his attempt to save the Bhat’s family from the mob of rioters. This happens due to the dominance of a particular group of people who have suppressed other people in the label of nationalism. India is a country which had experienced



the suppression of colonizers but the real crisis begins after independence due to ethnical and cultural differences — “Many once-colonised nations have struggled with the internal differences that threaten the production of national unity” (Macleod, 103). The loss of unity among the people is the reason for the cause of such riots and violence.

Disability is caused not only through physical and mental impairment, but disability can also be caused due to the incapability of implementing the social justice, peace and unity among the people. Communal violence and unrest disturbs communal harmony and integrity. This in turn will question any development in the social, economic and political condition of the country. Beyond all these struggle, fights and violence development of a nation is more important.

In the novel, the author uses images like ‘apple tree’ (64) which remains a silent spectator watching the injustice that happens in the land of Kashmir. The tree refers to the innocent people of Kashmir— “The apple tree in the backyard looks down at them, stoic and expressionless, like A mute spectator who has A million words to say, yet would prefer to remain silent, always” (64). This is the pathetic plight the people. They urge to bring out the true situation in their hometown where General Choudhary kills the innocent porters accusing them as terrorists. But the political and social dominance makes them dumb and they remain silent unable to express their emotions in the society. The fear of death has long rooted in the minds of the people which makes them silent and expressionless.

During the time of insurgency and violence caused due to the disharmony and riots many people lose their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. The fear of losing their friends and family will lead to post-traumatic disorder which causes a lifelong fear in the minds of victimised people. This fear leads to stress and depression throughout their life. The value of humanity is being destroyed due to the cultural and ethnical differences between the Pandits and the Muslims. The togetherness and love which they had before the riots are shattered. The only reason for the insurgency is the religious discrimination which destroys human values.



In a nation, the army men and other government regiments which are meant to serve the people without any partiality. But in the land of Kashmir the religious and cultural discrimination dominates the ethical values. Many officials kill innocent men only because they are Muslims. In the novel, General Choudhary accuses all the Muslims as terrorists and says, ““You know what these *Musallas* are?’.... ‘They are a *badboo!*’” (53). Accusing a person as dangerous or evil based on their religious background is an inhumane behaviour. This kind of inhumane discrimination is also explained in the novel *Fugitive Histories* by Gita Hariharan, “When they called the police, all the man on the telephone asked was, ‘Which house is burnt? A Hindu house or a Muslim house?’”(138).

This paper also witnesses that powerful men use riots and violence for their own purpose. The most important reasons for riots and violence is the improper response and selfishness of few corrupted officers and politicians. They do not have any concern for the people who are brutally murdered and raped by the barbaric rioters. Many houses are burnt along with the people. The character of General Choudhary in the novel represents the corrupt officials who dominates the society with their powers. He kills innocent people like Tariq, Saira and Kamal. But in spite of being accused by the people, he is considered a hero. Many murders take place under the captaincy of General Choudhary where innocent people are accused as terrorists. Army men like Kamal who tries to protect those innocent people remains dumb due to the suppression of higher officials like Choudhary. Many innocent people were killed and accused as terrorists. In the name of nationalism many officials like Choudhary dominates and suppress the innocent people. As Etienne Balibar puts it in his essay “*Racism and Nationalism*”, many decolonised nations have undergone the painful experience of “seeing nationalism of liberation turned into nationalism of domination” (MacLeod, 103)

The cultural and ethnical differences in a nation develop a disability in exposing one's own cultural identity. This disability leads to the loss of the ethnic identity of a person in their own land. The people will suffer alienation in their own native land. In this novel,



Safeena while staying at Deewan's house hides her religious identity. Being a Kashmiri Muslim she projects herself as a Hindu Pandit and changes her name into Alka Bhat. When the people around them find that she is a Kashmiri Muslim, they suspect her as a terrorist. Even Babhi, grandmother of Deewan develops an insecure feeling. She requests Deewan to send Safeena from Deewan's house:

‘It has taken 20 years,’ grieves Bhabi, ‘it can all be lost in a few minutes. Today, someone from the society asks, tomorrow someone from across the road, and day after the whole city. What will we tell them? They whisper in hushed voice tone, but I hear when they believe, and call her a *Kharku*.’  
(Gupta, 224)

This paper portrays the vivid description of people who suffer the political unrest due to cultural differences leading them to experience unexpected tragedies of their life. It also focuses on the natives who are treated like refugees in their own country and the emotional breakdown that the people undergo during the time of insurgency. In the novel when Deewan Bhat reaches Mumbai to escape the insurgency, he faces lots of troubles. There is no proper place for their family to live, a place which they can claim as their own. After leaving Kashmir, the isolation of being considered as a refugee is the most disappointing factor that Deewan has faced in Mumbai. In the same way many people have lost their identity, family and home due to the riots and violence. Gita Hariharan expresses the same situation in her novel, *Fugitive Histories* through Yasmin as she says, “We are orphans. We have no one, no police, no government, no country” (164). This situation is an expression of a disabled government and an incapable society which failed to provide a peaceful environment for the people.

The article also portrays the differences between the Kashmiri and the Non Kashmiri through Deewan and Safeena. Deewan being a Kashmiri is unable to connect himself with the culture and lifestyle of Mumbai. Whereas after spending nearly twenty years in Mumbai as a journalist, he is unable to relate himself with the present Kashmir where the places and



people are collapsed and confused by the riots, violence and insurgency. In the same way, Safeena is also ineffectual in finding peace in Mumbai. When she urges to work as a nurse, she understands that she does not have a proper identity as Alka Bhat. Even though there is no violence in Mumbai, she feels restless due to the murder incident telecasted in the TV news—“‘More than 300 dead,’ the news anchor says. Safeena nearly cries, for the first time since she came to Mumbai.” Safeena feels that she should have been in Kashmir. While watching the news, she urges to help the injured people of Kashmir. Whenever she receives the news about the cold blood murders in the hills of Machil, she worries about the life of the people. These incidents bring out the fact that even though Kashmir is an integral part of India, the Kashmiris feel discriminated and isolated in their own land.

This paper highlights that amidst all the religious and cultural differences in the society, love and affection in the heart of people like Deewan, Bilal and Safeena break the social norms. In the novel, Deewan surrenders himself to the police to save Safeena from the murder case of General Choudhary. Being her childhood friend he wants her to lead a peaceful life. Meanwhile, Bilal kills himself to save Safeena and Deewan saying that “‘For us, Deewan bhai, whatever it takes’” (279). The article explores the love for the native land, and the relationships that exist beyond all differences and discriminations. It also brings out the disability of the people during the time of struggles.

Finally, this paper proves that cultural, ethnical and religious discrimination can also lead to psychological disorders and disabilities. Any disease that are caused due to illness can be cured. But discrimination is a disease of the society and it cannot be cured. It completely destroys the peace in the society. Thus, for a healthy and peaceful nation, people must avoid discrimination against one another. Every person should respect other person's religious and cultural values. Only by understanding one's religious and cultural values can bring about harmony in the nation.

## **References**



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