



## MULTICULTURALISM IN HARI KUNZRU'S *TRANSMISSION*

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### ABSTRACT

*Hari Mohan Nath Kunzru is an Indian novelist who is well-known for his Diastolic works in Indian English literature. Multiculturalism, globalisation, technology, political and social issues, terrorism, diaspora, and cultural identity are all themes in his works. Transmission, his second novel, is one of the first and most timely novels addressing multiculturalism and globalisation in all of its forms. Multicultural politics have undoubtedly been useful in reshaping the public discourse of former colonial powers like the United Kingdom as they adjust to mass immigration, particularly in opening up institutions and providing a framework through which those who have no direct social experience with immigrants and their second generation children can interact with them. However, many of the most difficult issues of multiculturalist discourse have been addressed in recent years.*

**Keywords:** *multiculturalism, community relations, culture, immigrants, prejudice, and violence, etc.*

### INTRODUCTION

*Transmission*, Hari Kunzru's second novel, is one of the first and most timely novels addressing multiculturalism and globalisation in all of its forms. Multiculturalism ensures that all residents can maintain their identities, be proud of their ancestors, and feel at home. Acceptance instils a sense of security and self-assurance in Canadians, allowing them to be



more open to and accepting of different cultures. Multiculturalism, as demonstrated by the Canadian experience, promotes racial and ethnic harmony as well as cross-cultural understanding while discouraging hatred, prejudice, and violence.

Arjun Mehta, the protagonist of *Transmission*, is an Indian IT student whose life revolves on the fancies and whims of the filthy popular culture exemplified by Bollywood films. He is also attracted to the glamour of the United States. He desires to visit the United States and live a rich life there. It has been observed that Arjun's mother, as a typical Indian mother provides only a half hearted nod of approval and sends him there :

*Her unmarried 23 year old baby to this remote country locate several thousand miles away ... known to be populated by females who would never dream of starching a collar, and whose well-documented predilection for exposing flesh, drinking alcohol, and feeding ground beef to unwitting Hindu boys was nothing short of an international scandal. Hardly the place for her beta. (Transmission: 15-16)1*

Arjun Mehta is a lover of Bollywood films, and his life is governed by the ridiculous realities that Bollywood films portray, which do not always correspond to fiction.

Multiculturalism is a school of thought in political philosophy about how to respond to cultural and religious diversity. The novel is not a silent satire, which indicates that the author has a specific target in mind to mock or demystify. And while some of *Transmission's* subplots, particularly those involving international corporations and Hindi cinema, include satirical elements, the novel's protagonist, an alienated software programmer named Arjun Mehta, does not. He progresses from a second-rate technical university in India to an exploitative 'body shop' job in the Bay Area and then to Washington state. Promod Kumar Nayar in *An Introduction to Cultural Studies* states that:

*Films are often referred to as mass media or mass communication. Mass media like films affect and influence a large number of people, and are therefore integral to culture. Mass media constitute a public space. They generate debates, influence opinion and create markets.2*

Kunzru is undecided about how to deal with Mehta. On the one hand, he is raising concerns about how the ideal of working in Silicon Valley is, in many respects, a false promise to which a large number of Indian engineers are still vulnerable. After paying rent, car payments, mobile phone bills, and periodic plane fares to and from India, the pay isn't all that fantastic. Dealing with the Department of Homeland Security to maintain one's visa is also a demeaning and costly experience.

The characters who are most rootless throughout the narrative are those who are most readily exposed to the ethos of global commerce, rather than those who are part of an invisible and



sinister global work force. Rootlessness can, in fact, cut across social classes. It is most directly tied to economic privilege throughout *Transmission*. Guy, the exemplary topic of Richard Florida's creative class, is the most rootless of all the characters; he doesn't even have a clear biography, implying a complete personal history and all kinship links.

A right-wing critique of multiculturalism is circulating, attempting to reclaim ground lost in the culture wars of the 1980s by exploiting the wars. If terrorism is a bad meme and terrorism is a result of Islamic culture, we may confidently assert that Islam is worse than whatever 'culture' we propose. By doing so, we acknowledge the validity of making value judgments about culture in general; something the right has long maintained the Stalinist multicultural commissars particularly reject. Leaving aside the truth, or lack thereof, of such a characterization, the secret desire of what Salvo Size might call this school of thought's obscene supplement is that once we've loosed up on this issue, we'll start embracing other value judgments and developing a taste for the juicy treats beloved of a certain strand of social conservatism, dishes that have been off the menu for some years: Black people's proclivity for crime, homosexuality's destructive impact on the environment.

The political debate today appears to be centred on who owns those ideals. This idea, which appeals to conservatives, also appeals to the mainstream social democratic left, a tradition in Britain that now consists of three layers, similar to a Victoria sponge cake: a bottom spongy layer of Methodist piety, a thin red jammy spread of second international socialism, and, more recently, an over baked top layer of communitarianism from the 1980s onwards. All three layers lead social democrats to believe that the area of values is their natural terrain, fertile ground for a fight with the Centre-Right and its founding model, classical liberalism's atomized individual, who is oblivious to what happens when that individual enters into relationships with others.

In the United Kingdom, multiculturalism, the haphazard post-imperial doctrine of diversity as a path to equality and unity through managed disagreement, is under fire, not only from traditional monoculture opponents or classical liberals who have long despised its whiff of groupthink, but also from those who once staunchly supported it, the mainstream social democrats, who are now scrambling to abandon it and sit on the high hillock marked shared values. Arjun has gained experience of a different nature of American which has been described in the novel as:

*Even the bad things in America are always the worst. Their cities are the biggest, the most polluted, the most dangerous. He realizes that he "gained nothing at all since coming to America except a new and harder picture of the world. 3*



For many on the Left, multiculturalism was always a second-best option. It developed in strength, along with feminism and related ideas, just as the Chicago School monetarism of Keith Joseph, Margaret Thatcher, and the Institute of Economic Affairs was winning the economic argument in Britain handily. Traditional Keynesianism had failed to produce positive results in the 1970s, and by the mid-1980s, the right had all of the economic policy cards. As a result, the left retreated to the terrain of language, visibility, and culture, which suited its stronghold in universities, the arts, and the media. Those with an egalitarian inclination made their way into areas like social policy, multiculturalism, diversity, and anti-discrimination legislation as a result of this 'red base.' They effectively ceded all economic ground in the process. There hasn't been much change. The major priority is still to keep inflation under control. The term 'redistribution' is still frowned upon. New Labour, on the other hand, now believes it 'owns' economics again, and diversity can be safely abandoned in favour of a more forceful commitment to community.

Our politicians are putting up the pageantry of respect as a consolation prize because they don't believe in the capacity of their politics to generate fairness, and the market is the mechanism of choice. Individual Muslims will remain poor and excluded, despite the fact that Islam will be valued in law, on government websites, and in glossy brochures as part of Britain's tapestry of diversity. The dismal remains of the multiculturalists' dream is a hypersensitivity to matters of language and representation exploited by cultural conservatives of all stripes and aided by religious offence legislation. Instead of a new hybrid culture, we are offered 'plural mono-culturalism,' with power in the hands of self-identified community leaders who are protective, patriarchal, hide-bound, and adverse to change women, as Amara Sen has described it.

Once upon a time, biology was the battleground for debates about difference. Biological racism was gradually dismantled, and culture became the key battlefield. It still makes its point with multiculturalist language. Identity is the name of its monthly journal, and it defends 'local British culture' as a protective bulwark against a coffee-colored global capitalism that aims to eliminate distinction in order to facilitate the transnational flow of labour, goods, and services. From Nick Griffin's pamphlets to the pages of Prospect, cultural essentialism is increasingly prevalent. The concept of shared values as the basis for community, as opposed to the crass group identity of 'culture' in its contemporary political manifestation, is far from foolish.

However, the pressure will all flow in one direction inside the context of the war on terror, which will be the only context we have for the next generation or so. Immigrants were expected to demonstrate their right to belong not only via hard effort, but also by demonstrating a set of values that were deemed acceptable. Flags on lawns and the pledge of allegiance have already made Gordon Brown tear up. Muslims in the United Kingdom are frequently questioned by the media. If we want to avoid assimilation by the back door, we



must ensure that the smug guardians of the mainstream put their own beliefs under the spotlight, particularly the assumption that lousy values are a sufficient reason for the alienation that many people, not only young Muslims, experience.

Kunzru accomplishes this shift by showing Arjun wandering through Los Angeles, the place to which he emigrates from India on a work permit in the present day. In these moments, Arjun's lack of true agency in the United States is underscored, as the areas available for him to stroll imply the limitations imposed on his movement. The text does not identify him as Arjun, the main character from the previous chapters, until much later in the walk, hinting that he has lost his existential standing. Arjun lacks the financial, cultural, and social capital necessary for full involvement in the global city.

Furthermore, he is constantly demonstrated to be unable to attain this rank. As the neoliberal ideal of perpetual upward social mobility fades away from Arjun, his walks become increasingly frantic. He returns to the Los Angeles mansion where data bodies the corporation that had recruited him initially board its worldwide computer engineers after a three-month work, only to resume his walks. He was given credit, yet it was taken away from him. He is aware of what lay above him, the majestic mobility of those who travel without touching the ground. He's seen a glimpse of what's beneath, the other mobility, the forced motion of shopping cart pushers and cardboard box collectors. Kunzru appears to be mocking the portrayal of immigrant labour as a contamination, implying that the virus, with its negative meaning, is a better metaphor for failing global citizens like Guy.

Arjun, on the other hand, maintains a focus on connection and responsibility despite his more blatantly disruptive acts. Arjun's decision to disclose the virus was motivated by a desire to be accountable. He invents and distributes the 'Leela' virus in order for the company that has viewed him as disposable to see him as irreplaceable. While Kunzru almost completely supports his actions, Arjun is a far more sympathetic figure than Guy, owing to his desire for more responsibility rather than having it taken away. Arjun's activities result in a chaotic global environment, which he neither predicts nor manages. Guy, on the other hand, deliberately participates in the establishment of an authoritarianism that lays severe restrictions on the economically and geographically excluded under the cover of freedom and the direct control of cultural subjects like himself.

Variants were reported within twenty-four hours of Leela being identified and refuted. Some were clearly the product of copycats, with crude changes to the subject line of the delivery e-mail and code that was superficially weak. Others were more profound, prompting scientists to hesitantly categorise them as totally new species, implying that there were other people dreaming about Leela Zahir.



In *Transmission*, Kunzru sticks the scattered patches of the globe with the glue of technology in an interesting way, and creates an infinite sphere of 'cyberworld'. The Guardian Web analysed this art of Kunzru's writing in the following words.

*Kunzru is partly disillusioned and partly be glamour by the world of techonology and magic he writes about. And so he's written expertly, a successful and intelligent piece of entertainment, a more compelling read, if anything than his first novel, a book that, to a certain extent, subscribes to and is impelled by the romance of cyber world by which the character are undone. 4*

Kunzru proposes a form of multiculturalism that prioritises labour and the treatment of global labourers that it necessitates. As a result, rather than individualised joys, global action becomes about ethical and political duties to others. Kunzru's article claims that global subject positions are unavoidable, suggesting that we are always already entangled in global capitalism systems and that rejecting them is fruitless. As a result, we are participating in a 'really existing multiculturalist.' These global subject positions, on the other hand, do not have to perpetuate global disparities or duplicate global money flows. Instead, Kunzru imagines multiculturalists as a virus that evolves as it spreads over the world, opposing the idea that multiculturalism must be individualised.

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