



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)

VOLUME - 9 | ISSUE - 8 | MAY - 2020



IDENTITY OF THE DISPLACED: TWO CONTRASTING APPROACHES

Dr. Anjali Patil-Gaikwad

Asstt. Prof. of English, C.P. & Berar College, Nagpur.

ABSTRACT

Much has been written and said about the dilemmas of displacement and the search for identity that follows displacement. This is considered a modern phenomenon which has arrived with globalisation and is mostly treated as such. However, it would be pertinent to point out that though diaspora writing as a literary trend may be modern, the sense of displacement and the search for identity by the displaced must always have existed. Faced with a way of life that is completely divergent from what one has known all along, it can be confusing indeed to not only adjust, but also retain one's own ethos during this process of adjustment. It is all the more challenging for the next generation who identifies more with the new land and its mores than with its parent generation or its concerns.

This paper traces the fascinating real-life story of Princess Sophia Alexandrovna Duleep Singh and her father Prince Duleep Singh, both direct descendants of Raja Ranjeet Singh, the ruler of Punjab, popularly known as the 'Lion of Punjab'. While Ranjeet Singh was a venerated king, various quirks of destiny left his progeny at the mercy of the British in England.

Both father and daughter faced questions about their identity and their place in England with very different outcomes. While the father became a profligate philanderer, the daughter went from socialite to socialist. The father, in an attempt to redeem his identity, lost it; the daughter, though unconcerned at first, ended up claiming it.

KEYWORDS: *identity, displacement, struggle, disillusionment, purpose.*

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written and said about the dilemmas of displacement and the search for identity that follows displacement. This is considered a modern phenomenon which has arrived with globalisation and is mostly treated as such. However, it would be pertinent to point out that though diaspora writing as a literary trend may be modern, the sense of displacement and the search for identity by the displaced must always have existed. Faced with a way of life that is completely divergent from what one has known all along, it can be confusing indeed to not only adjust, but also retain one's own ethos during this process of adjustment. It is all the more challenging for the next generation who identifies more with the new land and its mores than with its parent generation or its concerns.

This paper traces the fascinating real-life story of Princess Sophia Alexandrovna Duleep Singh and her father Prince Duleep Singh, both direct descendants of Raja Ranjeet Singh, the ruler of Punjab, popularly known as the 'Lion of Punjab'. While Ranjeet Singh was a venerated king, various quirks of destiny left his progeny at the mercy of the British in England. Known as a fearsome warrior and astute statesman, Ranjeet Singh reigned over the Punjab for four decades from 1799-1839 with great successes in Sikh unification, secularism and progressiveness. Yet, upon his death in 1839, he left behind him not a legacy to be carried forward in a predictable, positive trajectory, but a mess of a political situation where palace intrigues were a dozen a day and insecurity ran deep in the collective psyche of the Maharaja's heirs. In the resultant mayhem, the princes were all massacred one by one until the only legitimate heir left was the five year old prince Duleep Singh. It fell upon him and his

inexperienced mother, Rani Jindan Bai, to rule the Punjab, once a stable and united kingdom, but now a veritable crucible for political ferment and unrest.

The ever opportunistic British were quick to gather that the prosperous kingdom was practically up for grabs and declared war on the kingdom of Punjab. The queen was quickly deposed and an English regent was installed. It is from here that the tragic journey of the unfortunate boy Maharaja Duleep Singh starts. This also marks the sowing of the seeds of uncertain identity for his children who were raised like the British, yet riled for their roots. What follows is an analysis of the queer turn of events in the life of Duleep Singh and his coping mechanisms that took him to the depths of despair, contrasted with the feelings of displacement of his daughter Sophia, and her ways of combating the same despair which earned her a respectable place in history. Father and daughter both faced the same questions of identity and social oddity, but their approaches to finding answers marks the difference between oblivion and recognition, between a sense of despair and a sense of purpose.

From the time he was deposed at the age of 10, Duleep Singh was separated from his mother, who was imprisoned in Lahore. He was put under the care of Dr. Login, whose responsibility it was to see to the Anglicization of the prince. Thus, at a very vulnerable and impressionable age, Duleep Singh was taught to disdain all that was 'native' only to be replaced by an admiration of all that was British. In effect, Dr. Login was to brainwash the child into thinking that the gross injustice heaped upon him was no injustice; it was in fact a favour. Duleep Singh was even converted to Christianity before he reached the age of 15, that is, before he could logically have addressed the spiritual question of whether Sikhism answered his need for organized religion or whether it was Christianity that gave him true solace. In a further turn of events that were to eventually suffocate him emotionally, he was exiled to England. Here, Queen Victoria took him directly under her wing, acting as his godmother, and wishing to hold herself up as a 'shining example of Christian charity'. She saw herself as the spiritual and material savior of an unfortunate prince whose misfortune lay in being born inferior. At no time was it evident to her that far from being charitable, she had sanctioned the snatching of Duleep Singh's rightful heritage as also the separation of mother and son at a time when Duleep Singh was still very much in need of maternal love and care.

At court, the Queen lavished upon him all the material comforts imaginable and showered Duleep Singh with genuine affection with the effect that the prince was led to accept her sincerity as his true destiny. As a young teen, the prince was made to feel privileged to have the Queen's attention. Not knowing any better, he pledged unflinching allegiance to the Queen and her Empire, his own kingdom included. However, with advancing age and consequently, an advanced faculty for discernment, Prince Duleep Singh slowly woke up to his real legacy throwing him in a state of utter confusion. Blessed with a natural disposition for making friends, the Prince had a large circle of British friends who looked upon him as a fellow Englishman. Yet, when it came to courtship and marriage, no nobleman would come forward to seek an alliance. This was jarring to say the least. Duleep Singh soon realized that the British gentry had befriended him, but stopped just short of being real friends. The Prince's realization of the discomfort of his identity made him bitter, and the bitterness only grew with age.

Although Duleep Singh was kept in all possible comfort, his reunion with his mother after nearly a decade and half became a turning point in his life. Jindan Bai, now blind with age, would talk to her son for hours and tell him about the riches they had to leave behind on account of the British. The irony of the very people who purported to be his material, social, and even spiritual saviours being his usurpers in reality was not lost on him. And yet, he saw no way out of his predicament, for though he lacked for nothing, the British government had kept a keen watch on him preventing his association with anyone who might incite him or be remotely connected with his legacy. Duleep Singh thus had no friends who he could have relied on for support. He took the peevish way out. He started spending indiscriminately and insisted that the Empire pay his bills as they had taken far more than they had provided for him. His logic was that he was only spending what was rightfully his. The Prince's spending became more and more atrocious, with the government officials having to look away as they were dealing with the godson of the Queen herself. However, when he went from spending on exotic birds and hunting parties to spending on nautch girls and decadent partying, the government had had

too much and decided to take up the matter with the Queen. The Queen was increasingly pressurised to intervene and ask the Prince to curb his expenses. Any and every such move was met with more rancour by Duleep Singh and he hit back by spending even more.

Duleep Singh's final years were not kind to him. He had grand dreams of going to India, drumming support for his return and garnering international recognition for himself as the rightful king of the Punjab. To this end, he travelled extensively, but was bitterly disappointed at the lack of support. In India, he did create ripples, but this was in no way sufficient to topple the British government over the Punjab, and international help was not forthcoming. Under the circumstances, Prince Duleep Singh was saddled not only with a sense of being cheated by the Queen who professed to have his well-being at heart, but also a deep sense of a loss of purpose. This he countered with more and more spending until he was bankrupt and until he could really spend no more as the government refused to keep up the steady supply of funds. He had so alienated the officials that even the Queen was embarrassed into silence and would refuse to persuade her ministers to be more indulgent towards the Prince in later years. Having already forsaken his Egyptian wife and his children, and being abandoned by his concubine, Duleep Singh died a miserable and lonely death, away from India as well as England, barely having reached his mid-fifties. His method of coping with depression arising from his displacement was ultimately to destroy him.

The story of Duleep Singh's life (and the manner of his death) is in sharp contrast with that of one of his daughters, Princess Sophia Duleep Singh. Although Duleep Singh had six children, two of them had died in childhood. Bamba, his wife, had become a severe alcoholic following his infidelities and profligate spending without regard to his family's needs or wishes. Of the three remaining daughters, one preferred to leave England and live in Germany with her nanny for the rest of her life. The two had become inseparable and did not care to live on on the family estate. The eldest, also called Bamba after her mother, went to India and reclaimed her heritage declaring herself Queen of Punjab, albeit with no official or legal sanction. Princess Sophia, though, turned out to be very different from any of her siblings. The journey of her life is fascinating to say the least.

Princess Sophia was a painfully shy child. Faced with an absentee father, an alcoholic mother, and the grief of losing a brother she was exceedingly fond of, she retreated into a shell of her own. What made matters worse was that despite being a princess (one acknowledged by the Queen, no less), she was not being groomed like one. Well wishers expressed concern over the goings on at the Singh household where the disinterested father would not pay heed to his children's upbringing, and the alcoholic mother couldn't. However, when the alcohol finally took its toll on Bamba Duleep Singh and she was found dead one morning, it was time for the girls to be moved to an environment considered more conducive to the rearing of cultured society women. To this end, they were moved to the residence of one Dr. Oswald and his gentle wife. The Oswalds looked after the princesses and took good care of them, teaching them the social niceties of the day and preparing them for their 'debut' at the Queen's court. Surprisingly, the hitherto shy girls took to the grooming like fish to water and soon blossomed into confident young ladies ready to mingle among the best of the nobility.

Sophia, in particular, underwent a complete change of personality. She became more outgoing and took a keen interest in learning mannerisms and about fashion. Being naturally blessed with good taste, she always turned out dressed up in the latest fashions, often procuring fabric and embellishments from Paris for the perfect look. Her debut at court had been a success and she found herself invited all over the best balls in London high society. Revelling in this new life, Sophia became the toast of the town. Her clothes, her sense of style, even her passion for breeding dogs, all became newsworthy on the society pages. Sophia, for her part, egged the paparazzi on, striking outrageous poses and ensuring she was the centre of attraction at all the important dos. Her life was filled with party after party, day after day, week after week, and Sophia was happily lapping it all up. If she ever gave a thought to whether her life lacked purpose, she never mentioned it.

However, Sophia Duleep Singh, the social butterfly, was to undergo yet another metamorphosis. A chance visit to India very powerfully brought home the immensity of her legacy and she was very moved to observe the second-class treatment meted out to Indians in their own land at the hands of the

British. While in India, she also had the opportunity to entertain the firebrand freedom fighter at her residence and was heavily influenced by his thoughts and deeds. She returned to England a sombre woman, who could no longer find meaning in her earlier life. She could not bring herself to pick up the threads where she had left them. In an effort to find out more about Indians' plight, she visited the dockyards where Indian goods were offloaded. What she found horrified her. When ships were loaded in India, merchants employed Indian coolies to work on their ships. However, upon their arrival at English ports, these men were no longer needed and were discarded with no thought to their survival. Dressed in their native cold, they had no chance against the wet and chilly weather of England. Many died. Those that survived did so only barely.

The dilemma for Sophia was very real. On the one hand, she had this immense legacy which made her a princess in India and in England as well. She was the granddaughter of the Lion of Punjab, a rightful heir to great riches and swathes of fertile land. Yet, she could not think of herself as an Indian. She had only set foot on her ancestral land in adulthood and could not identify herself with the manners and customs there. On the other hand, Sophia could not turn a blind eye towards her legacy either. It was plain for anyone to see that her heritage had been usurped and she had been living a sheltered life under her usurpers. Born and brought up in England, she had been thoroughly anglicised, but once the dots had been connected, the cost for her had been loss of identity.

For Sophia to contribute meaningfully towards the upliftment of Indians, it would have meant going against the government that funded her education and livelihood. Unlike her father, Sophia was pragmatic enough to recognise this. She spent much time in depression over her predicament wherein she could neither bring herself to believe in England's spirit of entitlement, nor oppose it. However, it was clear that she would certainly end up embittered and dejected if she did not take up something constructive. It was during this time that she met Emmeline Pankhurst, a proponent of universal suffrage. Sophia had finally found her purpose.

Sophia's life suddenly became lively. She spent considerable amounts of time and money on the movement, even courting arrest at times. Although she mostly refused to take the public platform, she turned out to be a great fund raiser and an asset. She became a peculiar thorn in the side for the British government. She was spending money on her work against the government by taking money from the government. Her father had been easier to deal with as he could be charged with working against the Empire. For Sophia, no such charge stuck. She was only involved in a movement championed by British women - no serious sedition matter.

Sophia became bolder and bolder, taking part in more and more outrageous behaviour at every opportunity. For the officials, the choice of whether to arrest her or not was not easy. She was the Queen's god-daughter after all. And yet, Sophia insisted that she be arrested. When the riot police did arrest her, they let her out sooner than the others as it was the politically incorrect thing to do. This made Sophia even more furious as she saw it as an injustice, and prompted her to take on even more radical acts of protest including arson and vandalism. It was a funny sight for many to see a princess rioting on the streets while officials had to sit twiddling their thumbs.

The Universal Suffrage Movement is a matter of public record and need not be discussed here in detail. The British women were finally able to wrestle their right and proved to be trailblazers for the women of the world. However, what concerns this paper is Sophia Duleep Singh's role in it and the movement's role in her life in turn. The anchor-less princess found meaning to her life in the work of the movement. Even when she was nearly broke, it did not stop her from donating to the cause even if it meant having to sell her baubles. She had finally found her identity, if not as an Indian and an equal, then as a woman and an equal.

Both father and daughter faced questions about their identity and their place in England with very different outcomes. While the father became a profligate philanderer, the daughter went from socialite to socialist. The father, in an attempt to redeem his identity, lost it; the daughter, though unconcerned at first, ended up claiming it.

REFERENCES:

1. Alexander, Michael and Anand, Sushila (1980). *Queen Victoria's Maharajah: Duleep Singh 1838-1893*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.
2. Anand, Anita (2015). *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary*. Bloomsbury, USA.
3. Ahmed, Rehana; Mukherjee, Sumita (2011). *South Asian Resistances in England: 1858 to 1947*. A & C Black, USA.
4. Anand, Anita (14 January 2015). *Sophia the Suffragette*. The Hindu. !
5. Crawford, Elizabeth (1999). *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*. UCL Press, London.
6. *Suffragette Sophia Duleep Singh, 1910*, British Library, retrieved 28 July, 2015.
7. Visram, Rozina (2002). *Asians in Britain. 400 Years of History*. Pluto Press, London.