

MELTING POT VS SALAD BOWL : A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN LYNNE SHARON SCHWARTZ'S *THE OPIATE OF THE PEOPLE* AND TAHIRA NAQVI'S *THANK GOD FOR THE JEWS*

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The race and ethnic relations have been long experiencing a long history in American life. A lot of theories have been developed to explain the relations, from assimilation through multiculturalism. Two of them are melting pot and salad bowl theory. The former theory occurs when all components of ethnic group can melt into one culture by erasing their former origins, while in the second theory the ethnic group can well- interact each other but the original cultures still stand in their daily life. The topic has become interesting topic to discuss, one of them is through works of arts. Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Opiate of The People* is one of examples of melting pot theory where the main character tried to fully blend into American life and did not want to implement his Russian original customs anymore. The second story, Tahira Naqvi's *Thank God For The Jews* reflects the salad bowl theory, where the characters can blend into American culture but they still kept their original beliefs and cultures. Factors that influences the assimilation process in the stories are immigrant appearance and customs, background of the coming, and time of coming.

Keywords : melting pot, salad bowl, assimilation, multiculturalism

A. Background

As the nation of nations, the existence of races in America plays an important role. Through the long historical experiences, the races interact each other, blend into what people today call as the American ways and culture. The process of interaction among the races cannot be separated with assimilation.

Talking about melting pot and salad bowl cannot be ignored from the long history of many races in America itself. Lots of theories on the races social contacts has been improved getting along with its respective developing era. The explanation below will be started with the development of the theory beginning with assimilation.

Definitions of asimilation run into many ways. J.Milton Yinger in Marger 1994: 116 defines it as a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies or of smaller cultural groups meet. Similarly, Harold Abramson (1980:150) in Marger 1994:116 defines in as the processes that lead to greater homogeneity in society. Rather than a fixed condition or state of relations, assimilation is best seen as path of trajectory on which ethnic

groups may move (Marger, 1994:116).

Assimilation process occurs throughout a cycle. Dale McLemore explained processes that an ethnic group has to go through. The groups first come into contact through exploration or migration. Once they are in contact, a competition between the groups is set into motion where conflicts probably erupt. After period of time, when one group dominant over the other, they develop regular ways of living together, that is called accommodation.

Beginning the first contact, various individuals within the two groups learn some of the language, customs, sentiments, and attitudes of those of other groups. As the groups continue to live together, then occurs a progressive merger of the smaller group into the larger (Park 1964:205 in McLemore 1983: 20-21). This process has erased the external signs which formerly distinguished the member over the other. When the external signs have been erased, the members of the smallest group has been said to be assimilated (McLemore 1983:21).

One of the examples of assimilation process is melting pot theory. The theory firstly was proposed by Israel Zangwill in 1909 who mentioned that America is God's crucible. The idea behind this theory is that racial and ethnic groups should move towards the culture and society of the host, giving up their distinctive heritage along the way. The host society itself should also change and the culture of each ethnic group should be blended into culture of the host group (McLemore, 1983:96). It means that people from over the world came to America, meet new people and new races, intermix, and came up with a new breed called "the American". Integration, amalgamation, intermarriage, and fusion would be desirable outcomes from this perspective (Kitano, 1985:27-28).

Experiencing long history, assimilation was developed into pluralism. Abramson (1950:150) in Marger (1994:129) defines pluralism simply as conditions that produce sustained ethnic differentiation and continued heterogeneity. In short, pluralism is a set of social processes and conditions that encourages group diversity and the maintenance of group boundaries (Marger, 1994:129).

Today, following the more dynamical society, multiculturalism comes as alternative to explain the diversity to substitute the pluralism. Multiculturalism is a dynamic concept that can energize the individual into searching for an authentic depiction of self and grouping (Hughes and Takaki in James Trotman, 2002: x). The term of "Salad Bowl" or "mozaic" became populer in the multiculturalism theory. The Salad Bowl concept describes America as the bowl consisting various ingredients that keep their individual characteristics. The immigrants are not being blended together in one "pot", and losing their identity, but rather they are transforming American society into multicultural one and still keep their identities.

The Opiate of The People and *Thank God For The Jews* are examples of implementation of melting pot and salad bowl theory respectively. The writer will explore the melting pot theory implementation in *The Opiate of The People* and salad bowl theory in *Thank God For The Jews*, and also elaborate the factors that might lead the main character's different attitudes in each story.

B. Melting Pot in *The Opiate of The People*

The Opiate of The People (TOOTP), written by Lynne Sharon Schwartz, a Russian-

American in 1984 tells about the assimilation process the main character trying to get through in his community in America. The setting is around 1960s or 1970s and it involves several years since it describes the main character since he was young when his daughter was still eleven years until she graduated from university. David, the main character, is depicted as a Jewish Russian-born who migrated to America. Receiving social and political oppression in his former land, Russia, David had a desire to make a new world for himself by making himself “to be a truly American”. He is described wanted to fully blend into American life and culture and ignoring his previous culture and ways of life in order to diminish his painful experiences in Russia.

There were many ways used by David to melt into American culture, one of them is marrying an American-born girl, Anna. According to Kitano (1985:28), intermarriage is one of the outcomes of the melting pot concept. In this story, David was content with his new life, his wife, and his three children, especially Lucy, the youngest.

Most of the time, if secretly, David was very proud of the way his life had turned out. Considering. He was proud of having married a good-looking American-born girl he fell in love with in high school. Anna kept a good home and took excellent care of the children, and when they went out to meet people she was just right, friendly, talkative, never flirtatious (Schwartz, 1991:178)

To materialize his dream to be a truly American, he effortedly tried to diminish his Russian accent in speaking English and changed it into American accent. He tried by listening the way his teacher speaking and enriched his vocabulary by reading *New York Times*. As McLemore explains, one of the requirements of melting pot theory implementation is that the ethnic group should give up its traits, one of them is the language.

He was proud most of all, though he would never have admitted this, of his perfect English, no trace of an accent. At school he had imitated the way the teachers spoke and stored their phrases in his keen ears. Walking there and home he moved his lips to practice, and when other boys ridiculed him he withdrew silently, watching with envy as they played in the schoolyard (Schwartz, 1991:178)

The efforts to blend are in line with his efforts in eliminating his previous habits in Russia. David tried to diminish his Russian accents and changed it hard into American, even though he had to pronounce Russian words. One day, Lucy, who was taking reading program in the nineteenth century Russian novel asked him how to make correct pronunciation of some Russian names. Lucy imagined that her professors would be amazed with her accent, but what she fancied did not happened. Her pronunciation was totally wrong. Beside making disappointment, the matter also raised some questions over her, why his father kept his own identity and did not want to share with others, even though to his own child.

Except the next morning at the exam she found that several of them were wrong. At least the professors pronounced them differently. Lucy felt a shudder of fear, as if the

room had suddenly gone cold. Who was David, really, and where was he from, if anywhere. And what did this make of her? The fantasy—“Where did you get such a fine Russian accent?” never happened. (Schwartz, 1991, 182).

The David’s oddity raised a lot of questions in Lucy’s mind. One of them is about the absence of Christmas tree in his home during Christmas. Since she was kid, she had never seen that sacred tree in her family’s house. When was a kid, Lucy questioned that matter to David.

“But why,” Lucy asked, cant’t we have a Christmas tree?”

“Don’t you know yet?” He was annoyed with her. “It’s not our holiday.”

“I know, but it doesn’t really mean anything,” she protested, leaning forward against the front seat of the car, flushed with the champagne they had let her taste. “It’s only a symbol.” (Schwartz, 1991:176)

At that time, Anna only explained that the tree reminded David over his past since he had to wear a yellow arm band when he went to school. Made of yellow cloth, yellow arm band was a symbol of Jewish that should be wore for everybody, including schoolchildren, in Russia during World War I. David felt that Lucy annoyed him by frequently asking questions that raised David memories about his childhood when he tried to erase his past memories.

“What was like when you were growing up?”

“We were poor,”he said. “We worked, we studied. We lived where ypur grandmother used to live. It was very crowded.”

“No, I mean before that. Before you came here.” She whispered the last words shyly, for fear of somehow embarrassing him.”

“I don’t remember.”

“You must remember something. You were the same age as I am now, and I’d remember this even I moved away.” (Schwartz,1991:176)

Even though David tried to assimilate with American culture, but sometimes he could not accept all the things what the Americans regarded it as a usual thing. He could not ignore his feeling seeing his twenty-year-old Lucy shared apartment with her boyfriend, Allan. Frankly speaking, he did not agree with cohabitation matters beside he was worried what his Russian friends said when finding that her daughter live with a man without marriage ties. It is different from Anna, who had considered that as usual matter.

“Oh yes. As a matter of fact he’s sharing apartment. I was going to tell you soon.”

He hung up. In the kitchen he found Anna and shouted at her in a rage made worse because she went on quietly chopping onions while he flung his arm about and ranted.

At last she said, "What did you think she was doing with him? Times have changed. Maybe it's better." (Schwartz, 1991:176)

C. Salad Bowl Theory in *Thank God For The Jews*

Thank God For The Jews is a short story written by Tahira Naqvi, a Pakistani American who was raised and educated in Lahore, Pakistan, but has been settling in US for teaching English and writing some stories. TGFTJ is about a Pakistani family which migrated to America, living around American society and find some interesting matters. Taking a setting in around 1980s, in a neat house, lived Ali family with wife, Fatima, a neat housewife who loved her husband, son, and her big family very much and always paid a careful attention to everything in her life. Even though living in American society whose majority of the citizens is Christians, but the family still kept their identity and way of life as Moslem.

The problem raises when someday her Aunt, Sakina, would come from Lahore to New Jersey for a visit. As like in Asian culture, she would serve her aunt as best as she could. While preparing the meal, she found that she had no meat in her freezer. It is not a merely meat, but what the family—including Sakina--- consume was halal meat, the meat prepared the Islamic way. Sometimes Fatima and Ali bought the halal meat from one of the many Pakistani shops in Queens or in Lexington, Manhattan. Because of the limited time, it was impossible to buy halal meat in those places. There was a piece of thought in Fatima's brain to buy fish and made it as special as she could, but she discovered that Sakina did not like fish. In the middle of her confusion, she remembered to call one of her friends named Samina, who she considered to be able to solve problems in Islamic faith. Samina suggested that she could eat kosher meat, Jewish prepared meat where the name of God is also mentioned before the slaughtering process.

"Yes, kosher chicken," Samina was saying, seemingly undisturbed by Fatima's perplexity on the matter of kosher. There's kosher hot dogs too, and all the meat's prepared just like ours. They recite God's name before slaughtering the animal and bleed the animal afterwards."

They? Fatima winced at her own stupidity.

"Anyway, what's kosher is okay for us." Samina spoke with greater authority than before. (Naqvi, 1991: 228)

Fatima felt relieved hearing that solving. Finally believed that this was they she could do

in emergency when making a trip to find halal meat is impossible or difficult. The Fatima's attitude in receiving the advice reflects the practice of assimilation, but her principles to keep in the path to use halal meat first reflects the salad bowl implementation. In this case, the Pakistani family can blend into American life and society, but on the other side, they still keep their principles alive among the community.

Different from TOOTP, the character in this story does not attempt to forget their origins. At the opposite, the family still kept in touch with their relatives in Pakistan. Beside the visit of their aunt, sometimes Ali family visited their families in Pakistan as well and made a good relation with them.

Aunt Sakina was Fatima's father's cousin. Last summer, when Fatima visited her in Pakistan, Aunt Sakina confessed secretly that she missed Kamal terribly, especially now that she had lost her husband and her daughter was also married. "A daughter-in-law will make this house come to life again," she said in quavering voice (Naqvi, 1991: 226)

Another example of salad bowl concept is that even though living in America, Fatima still made some Pakistani food, one of them was curry. The food, meat or fish blended with saffron and coconut milk with spicy taste, is well-known in Southern Asia including India and Pakistan.

"Okay," Fatima said. "I'll try the fish. But don't blame me if it's a disaster. I hope they had some bluefish at Grand Union, that's the only kind that works well in a curry. I am not going to try the frying recipe" (Naqvi, 1991: 225).

Even though living with their principles, they were also able to blend with American life. Fatima is described as a housewife who loved to watch American movies, such as *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and idolized Gregory Peck, or enjoying Hitchcock's *Catch A Thief*. Haider, her son also got used to see *Sesame Street*, American film series for children.

...she had settled comfortably on the sofa in the living room to watch the Eleven O'Clock Movie on Channel 9. *The Snow of Kilimanjaro*. Gregory Peck. The man who had invaded her daydreams many an afternoon when she was teenager. Even now she smiled and she wished she were Ava Gardner (Naqvi, 1991: 223).

D. The Comparison Between TOOTP and TGFTJ

From explanation above it can be seen that David, the main character in TOOTP would like to be an American person by fully blending into American character. In this case, the main character was doing an assimilation process. According to Rose, Peter (1997:85), one of the requirements for assimilation process is that immigrant appearance and customs resemble those of dominant group. Russian physical appearances and customs are closer to the American dominant

culture rather than those of Pakistan. Russian physical appearance is almost the same with the most America such as in their skin, hair, and tall even though the distinctive differences are also notable. It is added by Marger (1994:127-128) that the more compatible the culture of the minority with the dominant group's, the greater will be the force and speed of assimilation. The Russian customs are closer to those of American rather than those of Pakistan. In this story especially about their food and religion beliefs.

The second factor is the background of their coming (Marger,1994:127-128) David is described as a person who came to America because of social and political oppression in Russia. It is not depicted clearly what kind of oppression he received, but from the narration he was poor and always had to wear yellow arm band he during the schooltime in Russia. Yellow arm band is a symbol of Jewish in Russia. According to Marger (1994:205-206), one of the key motivating factors behind the mass emigration of Jews from Russia was the severe oppression they were subjected to under tsarist policies. Following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the bloody pogroms were sanctioned and numerous restrictions were placed on Jews at that time. Based on the painful history, David wanted to diminish all of his childhood memories in Russia by not practicing Russian customs anymore.

TGFTJ the background of Fatima is not known. She is not described as a person who had severe experience with her native land. She, on the other side, is described still kept a good relationship with her relatives in Pakistan by visiting them to Pakistan and did her favourite hobbies like cooking Pakistani food.

The third factor influencing the assimilation process is the time of coming. According to Marck (1963) in Marger (1994:126), the more recent a group's entry into the society, the more resistance there is to its assimilation. It is in line with the today's situation where globalization enables people to interact each other in one place to another in a short period and the awareness of people to be individualist. In TOOTP, David came into America after World War I when he was still a young boy, the age where he can easily absorb new cultures and ways. Meanwhile, even though in TGFTJ there is no indication when Fatima came to America, but the setting is more recent and she looked enjoy living in different country and keeping her original customs.

E. Conclusion

From the explanation above it can be seen that race and ethnicity in United States has been experiencing a very long history. Many studies has been developed to explain about the phenomena of race and ethnic relation in that country. A lot of works of arts has been created regarding the unique relations, the two of them are *The Opiate of The People* and *Thank God For The Jews*. The first one is implementation of Melting Pot theory, while the second one more implements Salad Bowl concept. A lot of factors influence the assimilation process in the ethnic relation. In both of the story, the factors include the immigrant physical appearance and customs, background of the coming, and time of coming. Another factors can be observed to enrich the readers' view on multiculturalism.

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