

LEGITIMIZED RACISM IN SHARON POLLOCK'S *THE KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT*

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ABSTRACT

Sharon Pollock (1936-) was one of the major contributors to the Anglophone-Canadian theatre that seeks to establish Canadian power through identity. Her effort coincided with the seventies' epoch of Canadian national theatrical awakening. Pollock was provoked by the rarity of Canadian stories on the stage. She realized that the literary production was dominated by the United States or England and the actors were intended to sound like English or the United States. During that Period, she focused on establishing the Canadian independent identity through the production of historical stories. Being newly de-colonized country, Canada wanted to establish a white identity through the racial selection of the desirables and the exclusion of the non-European immigrants. Pollock's historical Inquiry revealed the methods that Canada utilized. Pollock pinpoints that even those who were beneficial to Canada were cast aside because they were non-white. The paper adopts two principles of Critical Race Theory to further detect the use of Institutionalized Racism in the plays. Sharon Pollock tackled controversial Canadian history of oppression and segregation against minorities, such as the native people and the Sikh community. The Komagata Maru incident examines Canadian and East-Indian immigration policy under the Umbrella of the British Empire.

Keywords: Institutionalized; interest; immigrants; Everyday Racism; Identity (Minimum 5 to 8 key words)

INTRODUCTION

India was under British rule since the early 17th century. The British colonizers regarded the Indians as "natives." In 1773, the region of Calcutta became a British territory by the Act of 1773 that cited the citizenship of the East-Indians. Its citizens only were considered as English Subjects (Sik Ko 68). India was a member in massive empire of the British Common wealth that included: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the South Pacific, and great portion of Africa (Chan 18).

The Act of Nationality and Status of Aliens, in 1914 gave the situation a strong constitutional assurance (Sik Ko 69). Queen Victoria stated the responsibility of the Empire towards India "to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligations of Duty which bind us to all our other subjects; and those obligations, by the blessing of Almighty God, we shall faithfully and conscientiously fulfil"

(Naoroji 5). To be a naturalized British subject in the colonial era, is to be a British subject to be protected by her majesty's diplomats in foreign countries (Sik Ko 69).

Canadian policy towards the East-Indian immigration can be summarized in encouragement and exclusion. In the second half of the 19th century, Canadian politicians and immigration officials announced publically that their criteria of accepting immigration is narrowed to the Great Empire citizens and Northern European races (Avery 125-126).

The earliest visitors from India were the Sikh from the province of Punjab. They were soldiers enlisted in the British empire army. In 1897, those soldiers went from London and passed through Canada in order to get to their base in Hong Kong. Due to its being colonial grounds, Canada attracted these people, offering better opportunities for a better living (Hickman 5).

Canadian pacific Railway (C.P.R.) was established in 1881, to connect the Country with massive railway that was considered a 'National Dream' (New " A History" 83). The railway company's agents tried to compensate the traffic loss after Canadian government raised the head tax on Chinese immigrants to \$500. Consequently, they needed Indian immigrants to substitute them (Johnston 2).

The Indian immigration rate was raised to 5,000 between 1904 and 1908. Canadian government constrained Indian immigration, in 1908, by passing anti-Asian legislation. The anti- Asiatic feelings were stirred up by the racist Cartoons and commentary in papers (Hickman 5). The politicians of Trades and Labour Council, were hostile, and the press supported them in malicious campaign as in the front-page headline: 'Hindus Cover Dead Bodies with Butter' (Johnston 3).

Some immigrants went back to India forced by the social and economic pressures, restraining immigration policies. Immigration to Canada became almost impossible due to the exclusionary setting. The "continuous journey" law demanded that ships headed to Canada, should depart from their homeland in straight path without stopping (Agrawal and Lovell 13). The Indian subcontinent, was at a great distance from Canada therefore all the ships had to stop to refuel at a foreign harbor. The number of Indians coming to Canada remained very low until 1950. As the Immigration laws improved about 300 Indian immigrants entered Canada, in 1957 (14).

The Komagata Maru Incident was first produced in 1976. It's a story of overt racism and injustice. The play moves inwardly in the Canadian cities toward the province of the British Columbia, Vancouver Island, to examine the overt myth of racist superiority the institution adopted and legislated to prevent East-Indian immigrants from entering the Canadian soil (Zimmerman "Playwriting" 69).

The Komagata Maru is a Japanese steamship that arrived to Vancouver, in May 23rd, 1914, with 376 passengers from India. They were commanded to head back to India, after being held for nearly two months. 24 passengers were allowed to remain in Canada. They were obliged to leave Canadian waters on July 23, 1914. Pollock associated the story of an actual character that was part of the historical event, the immigration inspector, William Hopkinson, aka, Bill. She depicted his job accurately as an Inspector of Intelligence in the immigration Department (Ziraldo 43).

William Hopkinson converse with his beloved Evy and her friend Sophie along with Sophie's and her German lover Georg Braun, who is eager to be spy, in a WWI atmosphere (Holder 113). The East- Indians are represented by a Sikh Woman who interacts with her unseen and frightened child during the two months ordeal of waiting for an approval from a country that "only theatrically accepts British citizens of whatever origin" (Bessai "A Study" 48).

The setting of the play is restricted to three areas, the brothel, the wharf, and the cage to intensify the main theme and the dilemma of the incident. Evy is a typical good-hearted whore who has sympathy for the immigrants, since she is an outcast by society (Ziraldó 43). At the back there is "an open grill-like" (Salter 19). It symbolizes the imprisonment of a cage and the structure of a ship. This private area is specified for a fictional character, an East Indian woman and her child (Salter). The play examines another type of exclusion. It is the historical incident of the *Komagata Maru*. Pollack is shocked "I didn't know about the *Komagata Maru* either, something like this could happen again and I might not know about it"(qtd. in Page 13).

T.S. is a "Master of Ceremonies" is an elegant clothed character, with gloves, top-hat, and a suit (Ziraldó 56). He is a character who carries out the institution's political racist decisions against immigrants. The character of T.S. has a quintessential role in the play. It can be regarded as part of the theatrical technique of the setting. T.S. the "Master of Ceremonies" is an elegant clothed character, with gloves, top-hat, and a suit (Ziraldó 56).

T.S. is a controlling manipulator, who practices authority in a carnival like atmosphere. He directs the scenes, freezes the characters and re-stirs them. He controls the theatrical techniques with a bang of cane (Bessai "A Study"48).

T.S. Bangs his cane, spot out. Evy and Hopkinson are lit and animated

Evy: what is this?

Hokinson: it's a present.

Evy ... (opening the box which contains a brooch) it's beautiful. Here, pin it on me.

Hopkinson bends over to do so. T.S. bangs the cane, they freeze (Pollock 101-102).

T.S. breaks the fourth wall and talks to the audience directly from the moment they enter the stage "T.S. salutes, holds it [the spot light] for a moment, and then lets it drop as he moves into the brothel area" and says "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Right this way, ladies and gentlemen" (101). His character demonstrates absolute authority to give the feeling of an overwhelming institutional authority.

Pollock initiates the play with a personal dimension before she pores the political content. According to Pollock's belief "Theatre should hit people emotionally...that is why to avoid the documentary flavor...to learn and understand" (Page 18). The personal content is to make the story relevant to the viewers and to have an impact. Hopkinson 'private racial conflict' is at the centre of the play along with the political content (Bessai "A Study" 48).

The play begins before the arrival of the *Komagata Maru* in the Brothel. Sophie tells Hokinson "that Bella Sing at the end of the yard and to see!"(Pollock 105). It is a reference to Hokinson's unfortunate fate later in the play. His lover Evy remarks "I don't like rats coming around" (104). Evy does not like Hokinson's job. Still, he is fond of his occupation as, he says "Bella Sing is a loyal British subjects"(104). For him to spy on one's People is a mark of loyalty. He points that Indians are British subjects. Evy refers of Hokinson's mother, a subject that embarrasses him. She says:

Evy: My mother always said, don't trusts snitch, and don't play with snitchers. Didn't our mother ever tell you that?

Hopkinson: Evy, we've settled all this. (104)

T.S. says to Hopkinson that "The *Komagata Maru*. A Japanese steamer chuck-full of brown Hindus headed for...entry into the Whitish Canada" (102). *The Komagata Maru* anchored at the Harbour without a permission to land. Hokinson tells T.S. that they are British citizens consequently

they have the right to go in and the immigration department will not be able to stop them if they resort to court. T.S. responds "they won't go to the court...have you forgotten our two orders-in-council? If an immigrant wishes to enter the country through a western port, he must take a continuous voyage from his own country to here, have they done so?" (105-106).

T.S. voices the policy of his government. He explains to Hopkinson the legislative Acts that the government announces to face immigration from the East. After the full exclusion of Chinese it is the East-Indians turn. T.S. points, that the legislative Act of exclusion is grounded on the fact that no immigrant would be given a permission to enter the country if the ship sails from the original country of the immigrant and stops in a foreign anchor, T.S. is the speaking figure of the authority "Again, not surprising. The average Indian's wage is nine dollars per year. There- you see how we operate, Hopkinson? Never a mention of race, colour, or creed and yet, we allow British subjects; we don't allow them to enter" (106).

Moreover, the government drafts the law knows that there are no direct ships from India to Canada (Zirardo 62). T.S. says "And that's no surprise. There's not a steamship line in existence with direct India-to-China route and for our second ace-in-the-hole- a tax, two hundred dollars per head, to be paid before entry" (Pollock 106).

Through the comments of T.S., Pollock highlights the historical event and her country's treatment of the issue which according to her is shameful (Zirardo 44). Hopkinson informs T.S. about the Indian Community's reaction to the *Komagata Incident*. He says that one of his spies, Herman Singh tells him that the Sikh community raises the money for the immigrant's entry and that the money will be delivered that same night, T.S. replies "the word is no entry, Hopkinson" (Pollock 106). The emigration prevent the launch that would deliver the tax. Sophie the Prostitute reads the newspapers concerning the immigration officials stopping the head tax "you read it, Evy, what is it mean" (107) Hopkinson responds "I can tell you what it means. British Colombia wants no Calcutta coolies"(Pollock). The newspapers cultivates institutionalized racism in the consciousness of the Individuals. It is indoctrination media that forces the individuals to accept a set of beliefs. The effect is explicitly illustrated not only by Hopkinson but also by Sophie and Evy who comment on the event.

Hopkinson speaks about India. The fact that he knows the country, first hand, saying to Georg "I know India, and I know its people...did you know "loot" was an Indian word?"(107). Hopkinson describes his life in India to Evy, Sophie, and Georg in the Brothel, his father stationery in Punjab. He avoids speaking about his mother. Sophie notes his hesitation, she asks:

Sophie: What about your mother?

Hopkinson: "*Quai Hai!*"That's all, and they'd scuttle [Indians] like bugs.

Sophie: Did your mother like it there?

Hopkinson: she never said. You've no idea, Georg, of the size...when I was a boy I used to like to read at night, in a room that had dimensions." (107-108)

Hopkinson describes his father. His portrayal alludes to the critical theme of identity which Pollock installs. It demonstrates the characteristic that one should own to acquire Canadian citizenship. Hopkinson says "my father was a big man, blond curly hair, wonderful moustache he had, looked like a prince in his uniform. A prince-surrounded by little beige people"(107). Pollock statement clarifies that the driven power of state racism is the norm of a Caucasian identity. The association of racism and identity is further emphasized by Pollock through the German character, Georg, whose comments implicitly define the German Arian-supremacy covertly been acted on (Nothof 90). He says: "If you

examine the world and its history, you will see the laws of evolution that have shaped the energy, enterprise, and efficiency of the race northwards...this is the cosmic order of things...the European races must administrate (Pollock 109).

Mr H.H. Stevens the West coast member of the parliament from Vancouver, has made it clear that the exclusionist acts aforementioned, would keep Hindus away and at the same time the word Hindu was not mentioned in the act to avoid the embarrassment that could occur upon the Empire based on the fact that Canada and India both are British Dominions (Ziraldó 62). Being part of the British Empire, Indian citizens were British subjects, Sir Wilfred Laurier, Prime Minister 1896- 1911, suggested that Canada would not exclude British subjects of any kind or race. The government issued that the entry was permitted to any citizen from the Empire, as Chief justice Gordon Hunter administrate "every citizen of India was a British subject, and could go anywhere he pleased in the empire" (qtd. in Nothof 88). Hopkinson says "if it weren't for the British, they [Indians] couldn't construct a canoe" (110). He states his reasons for coming to Canada and leaving India, which is his personal ambition of promotion (108). He believes that there are two sides in the world the "ruler and the ruled" (Pollock 134). Hopkinson reveals his idea of the necessity of social hierarchy and stratification: "All I know, Evy, is my father didn't die in the service for the world to be overrun by a second-rate people"(113). Thus, Hopkinson was not there to help the Indians, but to control them (Johnston 2).

Hopkinson goes on board of the ship to inspect and see the East-Indian passengers deprived of their landing rights. He reports to T.S. that misery has taken over the passengers along with hunger. Hopkinson voices the common sense when he informs T.S. that " They're Sikhs from India, British subjects, and as such they do have right of entry to Canada...many are veterans of the British Army" (Pollock 105).

He further describes how they are hostile as a result of being caged. The Sikh Woman confirms the right of the Sikhs passengers' she expresses in anger and frustration "... My husband is dead. He died in their war. I am British subject, and my taxes have gone to their king" (Pollock 133), T.S. statement at the beginning of the play seems as a direct response to her proclamation "we don't mind them dying for us, we just don't want them living with us (laughing)"(105). Hopkinson tries to suppress the Indian side of him by blindly following orders. He is faced with situations that he cannot overlook. A Sikh woman, whose baby and herself display the emotions of the people on board, she says "Shhhh, don't be afraid" (106). His emotions are stirred when he sees The Woman, he tells T.S. in a rather shy voice "There is... a woman and a child" (110), T.S. replies "Irrelevant" (Pollock). He says "They seized me and we're ready to take off in our launch and head for shore...They say they'd rather be shot than die of hunger and thirst. I felt it only - humanitarian to grant one week provision" (112). T.S. views Hopkinson's emotion of compassion as a hope for the immigrants to stay, T.S. says "You disappoint us"(Pollock), T.S. reminds Hopkinson of his mixed blood inferiority and the fact that he should not question orders. Hopkinson is accepted because he shares the institution's belief in the superiority of the white race. Hopkinson becomes a puppet in the Hands of his superiors (Ziraldó 49), by prostituting his services to the government. The institution uses Hopkinson's guilty secret to make his obedience unquestionable (45).

He is one of the tools to implement T.S.' orders. The latter is a puppet master that maneuvers people "I expect every man to do his duty" (Pollock 56). The repetition of the words "yes sir" turns Hopkinson into a "Yes Man" Hopkinson endorses what he says without objection (Ziraldo 48).

Hopkinson: Yes sir.

T.S.: We brought you up. We can put you down

Hopkinson: Yes sir.

T.S.: We trust that our meaning's is sufficiently clear?

Hopkinson: Yes sir. (Pollock 112)

T.S. demonstrates that Racism is a matter of legalization and manipulation, Pollock is a believer in the ideological patterns "I believe every play has a politic" (Salter 13). She means that every play has an ideology and her job as a dramatist is to probe and shake such deep rooted assumption (Salter). She believes that the impact of racism is an effective political tool that can be used by the institution as a scapegoat for social, political, and economic problems (Nothof 89). T.S. explains this idea:

Ladies and gentlemen...it provides cheap labour for your factories, and market for your goods! All this plus a handy scapegoat! Who's responsible for unemployment? The coloured immigrant! Who is it creates slum housing, racial tension...the violence in our streets! The coloured immigrant! Can we offered to be without it? I say "No!" It makes good sense to keep a few around. (Pollock 119)

The strategy of food and water will force immigrants to leave. This policy is applied by the government with the blessings of the Premier of British Columbia, who states "to admit Orientals in large numbers would mean in the end the extinction of the white people, and we always have in mind the necessity of keeping this a white man's country" (qtd. in Nothof 88). The Mayor of Vancouver refuses to send food to the *Komagata Maru*. The Harbour is crowded with racists who want to expel the ship.

The Woman, on the ship, pleads for food, for the retreating journey overseas. She speaks about the lack of food and the agony of the passengers who are stuck for two months without provisions near the shore there is not enough food supplies, the woman "give us supplies and we will leave"(131).

According to T.S., the authorities do not believe that the Indians will leave. A navy crozier is brought to force the ship to return (Hickman 6). T.S. says "let the Rainbow push through the narrows; let her anchor near enough to the *Komagata Maru* for the sun to glint on her guns. Let our next message be- we won't necessarily fire on you –But we will fire on you if necessary" (131). The food supplies are given and the *Komagata* had to head to Calcutta, India. After the ship's return to turbulent Punjab twenty of the passengers are killed and hundreds are injured and arrested (Hickman 6). This incident highlights racism and segregation policy, sponsored by law. The institutional racism legitimizes individual racism. *the Komagata Maru* anchored in the Harbour, the local Sikh community resorts to the judicial system in an attempt to redeem the situation. According to the historical resources, specifically Hugh Johnston, five judges have judged the necessity to commit to the immigration Act and the orders-in council (63), as conveyed by T.S. "...congratulations... the courts have come through! Catch 2, regulation 23, paragraph 4 still stands!" (116)

As Pollock says that this event was "overshadowed by the outbreak of the World War One"(98), which She reflects at the end of the play '...war declared...the Sikhs on our side'(133). The refusal of the immigration request does not stop the Sikhs who were dragged to the war to support those who did not help them. Therefore, the game has changed because the Pawns were needed.

The East Indians are declared to be British citizens only when they participate in her Majesty's wars and during the expansion, they cannot be accepted as equals to the white citizens. To highlight the institution's white supremacist policy, Georg observes "My friends tell me they [the government] have promised them everything and will give them nothing. That's called diplomacy, eh Bill"(Nothof 90).

The Institutionalized racism is manifested in the Foucauldian biopolitics. This policy plays major role in the population acceptance of legal racism, due to the fact that it promotes its racist polity as deeds in the favour of identity protection. The Foucauldian Biopolitics, according to Lemake, "analyze processes of life on the level of populations and to "govern" individuals...by practices of correction, exclusion, normalization, disciplining, therapeutics, and optimization"(5). The institution is effectively using the polity of racial biology to intimidate its individuals by recognizing the Indian as one of threats to their life.

Due to social and the racial tension, the Indians were ascribed with a fair amount of grim qualities, T.S. says:

Master speaker; Prime Minister; Honourable Members... this is a white man's country! And I can tell you that our British legacy, our traditions...is placed in jeopardy by massive inflexible of coloured foreigners...he is criminally inclined, unsanitary by habit, and roguish by instinct. The less we speak of his religion, the better. Unless his ridiculous forms of worship are relinquished, he is an affront to Christian community. His intelligence is roughly that of our aborigines. He indeed belongs to a heathen debased class...Will the Sikh work for cheaper wages, and thus take away their jobs [the young Canadians]. (114)

This is an example of the kind of speech that circulated the realm urging the public with legitimized bigotry. To have a sight of what is going on outside the brothel, Evy witnesses the incident of Sikh turbaned man, in the lineup for employment who is beaten by white people. Evy describes the racist attitudes among individuals:

There was a man in a turban at the end of the line...a man stepped in front of him...and the long line of man, it seemed to turn...the man in the turban started to speak...I didn't sense any anger and then it exploded. They knocked him down...they were kicking, and then pushing and shoving. (113)

Evy declares that the men who attacked the Indian, looked as those in the harbour "There are... people at the Burrard, staring out at the ship....they look like the men in that line" (133). Consequently, they are members who represent a total community. She sympathizes with the immigrants, (Bessai "A Study" 48-49). Hence, she is more sympathetic than Hopkinson whose response "that's why we're sending the *Komagata Maru* back, so things like your fight won't happen. We don't want them here"(113). Because of the racist policy of his government, Hopkinson feels inferior. Evy is instrumental in exposing the secret of Hopkinson over racialism before the pure blood German Georg:

Evy: he's got a thing about race, about colour, haven't you noticed?

Hopkinson: you're boring and stupid, Evy.

Evy: He goes to the temple in disguise. He thinks he look like a Sikh.

Georg: eh?

Evy: I bet his mother's eyes are brown?

Hopkinson: My mother's eyes were Blue, you bitch! I'll kill you. (125-126)

She also recognises the authorities' usage of Hopkinson, and the immorality of his business "You're stupid, Bill...they all use you...they're using you and Billy Boy's too Dumb to know and stupid dumb Billy will keep on being used cause Billy Dumbos stupid!"(Pollock 126). She comments on the immorality of Hopkinson's businesses "Evy" I'm a whore and what you do is offensive to me!...I could vomit!"(115). Evy exposes Hopkinson's flaws veiled by his racist attitudes that is why she is an integral part of his character development.

Hopkinson's fate is sealed by one of the local Sikhs, Mewa Singh, for his role in the tragedy of the *Komagata Maru*. His last words are "I feel like a toy man"(136). He realizes the manipulation of T.S. that's why he surrenders to his fate and dies as indicated in his speech "I open my arms, I say: Now" (Pollock). He draws from the ancient scripture of the Sikhs which appeals to the god of death "the four armed one, by performing such an act he surrenders and accepts the revenge of his fellow Sikh (Grace "Making" 155).

Sophie, is less functional than Evy. Her role is to reveal the individual racism of main stream Canadians. People who attack the turbaned man, and the people at the Harbour are faceless, Sophie represents their faces. She is highlighted because to comment on the public racism charged by the institution. Being close to Hopkinson and getting notes from his spies, he is effecting her discourse of racism. Hopkinson's view of racism is established as that of disdain prejudice. Sophie and Hopkinson are micro- representations of the institution and its effect on people.

Hopkinson: Where's Sophie? Sophie!

Sophie: What?

Hopkinson: Was Bella Singh around!

Sophie: when?

Hopkinson: Day before yesterday. (Pollock 114)

After the judges' decision concerning the exclusion of the steamer. Pollock associates the historical, political event with personal dilemma. Hopkinson is forsaken as a scapegoat, the *Komagata Maru* meets the same fate. Hence, the *Komagata Maru Incident* is historical investigation of the Canadian legal attitude towards ethnic minorities (Ziraldó 64).

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