

Milan Kundera as an Immigrant Writer

Rajanikant B. Bhoi^{1*}, Dr. Sudhir J. Singh²

¹Gujarat University, Ahemdabad, Gujarat, India

²Associate Professor, R. H. Patel Arts and Commerce College, Navavadaj, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

ABSTRACT

By birth, Czech novelist Milan Kundera who migrated in France since 1975 is too preoccupied with betrayal, which scatters both his life and his novels. For emigrants, the perturbing sense of being disloyal is aggravated by what Kundera defines “an émigré’s artistic problem”: Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in which the allegations of infidelity are central, the novel involves the most important Czech rebel sat home and leading Czech intellectuals in exile. Kundera like Marquez, Fuentes, and Rushdie, generates a intricate, multi-dimensional novelistic value. Milan Kundera mentions this in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Sabina, the character from *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is not frightened to betray. Sabina betrays her father, she betrayed the Communist too, she betrays her mother land too. Critics who criticize Kundera for deceiving his motherland by largely changing his earlier works and alteration in Czech history disregard both his exilic “contrapuntal awareness” that widened his idea and the issues he raised.

KEYWORDS: *Migrated, betrayal, allegations, exile, infidelity*

INTRODUCTION

By birth, Czech novelist Milan Kundera who migrated in France since 1975 is too preoccupied with betrayal, which scatters both his life and his novels. Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in 1984 ignited a heated argue among some of the most well-known Czech unorthodox at home and leading Czech scholars in banish. Allegations of betrayal labeled against him are essential to the critics, but the main region of argument deals with the larger queries of the position, rights, and free will of a writer of fiction, as presented by two twigs of Czechoslovakian culture: exilic and dissident. By probing the heated discussion about Kundera’s best-known novel and inspecting the course of the treachery he purportedly committed in expel.

The hazards of living abroad, an exceptional state of nowhere felt by those moved across geographical, political, cultural, and linguistic fences, is a major theme in the novels of Milan Kundera, who left his homeland since 1975. His most loved novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* reveals the émigrés’ existential fight to overpass the past with the present, to stay true to their legacy and to not face fatality to the new civilizing environment by

How to cite this paper: Rajanikant B. Bhoi | Dr. Sudhir J. Singh "Milan Kundera as an Immigrant Writer" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-6 | Issue-5, August 2022, pp.386-389, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd50483.pdf



IJTSRD50483

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



complete incorporation. This novel presents Kundera’s answer to his own existential circumstances, with which he has faced as a human being and as an artist. Contrasting his characters, however, who fail to get a balance between maintaining faithfulness to their mother land and combining into life in the other country, Kundera presents his émigré experience into artful novel. Compelled to trample the disloyal land of exile, emigrants have to deal with the unpreventable feeling of betrayal that troubles them from the second they cross the physical border, whether only for the time being or eternally. The first treachery they must challenge with is, thus, the step of emigration itself, which is supposed by an émigré as a sign of betrayal. Having deceived the motherland actually, an émigré goes to deceive it morally. Leaving the mother land and compelled to bend to a foreign culture, anyone living in banish is bound to be hampered with feelings of remorse for having to prefer the unfamiliar over the inhabitant in order to become a working member of a new country. The course of accepting—of believing the unknown culture one’s own is a mind and emotion changing process. An emigrant stops to

be actively joined with the home culture, ceases to involve in it, drops touch, and may discover it difficult to pursue its development. Beleaguered with thoughts of hostility, of the past irreversibly slipping away, an émigré finds integration to a new culture as unavoidably negotiating his own, and the procedure of becoming habituated to the new civilizing atmosphere senses like compromising own cultural heritage. Triumphant mixing which is essential first move for endurance in the new country, is supposed by an émigré is a second infidelity—a spiritual infidelity.

Artistic persons living outside of their motherland are even more expected to consign infidelity in exile and to feel them more intensely. For emigrants, the perturbing sense of being disloyal is aggravated by what Kundera defines “an émigré’s artistic problem”:

The numerically equal blocks of a lifetime are unequal in weight, depending on whether they comprise young or adult years. “Away from home, culture, and language, the question of essence the palpable facts of character”. (Misurella-04) The adult years may be richer and more important for life and for creative activity both, but the subconscious, memory, language, all the under structure of creativity, are formed very early; for a doctor, that won’t make problems, but for a novelist or a composer, leaving the place to which his imagination, his obsessions, and thus his fundamental themes are bound could make for a kind of ripping apart.

Once betrayed his own country as a personage, an author in exile is prone to persist the betrayal as an artist too. The jeopardy of treachery waits behind an author’s preference of what readers to write for, and in what tongue, as well as what to present and about whom.

As a political exile, the political part of his being is what he finds closest to his mother tongue, whilst his childhood and concentration camp experiences are best verbalised from the distance given by the adopted tongue. Besides, memories of political activities are probably furthest removed from the emotional uses and meanings of the mother tongue. The adaption of language, readers, content, and style are inextricably linked. Any writer’s potential readership depends to a large extent on the language, in which he/she writes, and the latter, in turn, determines the public that will be able to appreciate the book as conceived, in the original. Language is also largely responsible for the stylistic nature of the work, while the choice of the target audience may have an effect on its themes and the narrative. Thus, betraying one element often prompts a sense of betrayal of another. Choosing to write in the adopted

tongue in order to reach a potentially wider audience, for example, is perceived by an émigré author as a betrayal of the readers in his/her homeland, since composing in a foreign language, he/she writes, first of all, for a foreign audience. It also represents a betrayal of his/her own language, an instance of giving up on it and privileging the foreign over the native.

Milan Kundera is a victim of this betrayal, which scatter both his life and artistic products. He has been labelled of betraying his mother country, language, and native readers and charged of taking too many liberal narrations in portraying Czech history. Kundera has also been deceived by the West, where he sought shelter, where autonomy is announced to be the highest asset and where people really consider they are liberated.

Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in which the allegations of infidelity are central, the novel involves the most important Czech rebel sat home and leading Czech intellectuals in exile. Two questions are useful in illuminating this labelled act of disloyalty to Kundera’s native readers: One is how radically does the style of his novels written in exile vary from that of his earlier novels, and second is what level does this transform symbolize a break with his initial artistic creation. As a novelist in exile, Kundera had the liberty to write about his native land in a way that would show that he commiserated with the rebel’s fight. But he did not, that he instead subjugated his liberty for other artistic aims seems to have meant to them that he was not one of them, but against all of them. Charged of deceiving his own mother land and its freedom-fighters, Kundera, one might call, he has found himself deceived by the natives. Having considered him a betrayer, they march to his work with bigotry against him. The accusation that Kundera is committed to the Western readers in predilection of his own Czech readers is at the center of considering Kundera as an emigrant writer.

The most severe betrayal that Kundera purportedly acted in exile and that gained him the brutal criticism tells to his narration of historical and political authenticity. Accusation of taking freedom with past details, providing an imprecise account of events and a indistinct account of reality are labeled against the him from both inside and outside of Czechoslovakia critics school. The critical question in deciding the worth of a literary work within the boundaries of Kundera’s home country thus became quite equivocal. This question was posed both by the representatives of the executive rule and by those who contrasted it. In the first case, the writer was

forbidden from publication; in the second—charged of being disloyal to the dissident cause. In both cases, he risked being labeled a traitor. Mockingly, while combating for freedom in their country and calling for autonomy of the literature from being overwhelmed by politics, the Czech rebellious who charged Kundera of disloyalty deprived him imaginative freedom and forced restriction on his art, as unbending as those practiced by the government they object. The writer who does not suite the Western label of an émigré writer and deceives the Western prospect in this reverence is not always welcome: The exile is the screen onto which we project our fantasies of exile, and as long as he lets us do this, he is welcome. He is welcome as someone who has suffered, as a victim of the regime, a fighter for democracy, a lover of freedom who couldn't stand oppression in the country he left. As soon as he steps out of his stereotype, he becomes undesirable, because he has betrayed our expectations. Kundera unintentionally despoiled the demands of the rebellious at home and thus deceived them. It is satirical that, using the language of freedom, both sides located Kundera in a situation of un-freedom by arresting him their own sets of chains. Both, therefore, have deceived him as a novelist and philosopher. Behind Kundera's infidelity, however, there lies a very audacious act that is an eventual appearance of the novelist's artistic autonomy. Kundera held perhaps the most vital chance obtainable to him by life in the in-between gap—a chance to investigate oneself, one's country and the globe at large.

There is one more reason criticizing Kundera for his persistent inquiry of Czech matters from outside of his fatherland and for a apparently tilted standpoint on Czech veracity developed in banish is quite short-sighted and mistaken. Kundera's novels should not be viewed as devoted to Czech matters completely. In that aspect, he does not narrate about motherland and the dissident. His leaving of mother land did not essentially change his creative philosophy, but instead widen his field of apparition, gave him new stuff to work with.

Hence, the allegation of treachery put forward against Kundera at the level of depiction of reality and history has, at first glimpse, the most strength, it is basically faulty, for it is formed on a misleading conviction that a fictional description must be not just pragmatic, but true to certainty, always presenting an authentic description of the past and life. It has been observed out that the misguided reading of Kundera in his motherland may be accredited to the fact that the performance of pragmatic criticism was at the time most extensive in the Czech literary history

Critics assume that the novels of Milan Kundera are betrayal to his mother country, a generalization of Czech history, the partial demonstration of Czech reality. Though, as the scrutiny of the novel's ending displays, the historical inexactness and discrepancy, for which Kundera is alleged, enhance the text and shack new light on Czech veracity, making the concerns more intricate and multidimensional, expecting the reader's lively, critical involvement with the novel, posing questions and compelling the reader to reflect reality not as it was presented, but as it could have been.

Kundera like Marquez, Fuentes, and Rushdie, generates a intricate, multi-dimensional novelistic value, where the sequential and spatial boundaries are fused, and where the borders between the real and the deceptive are indistinct. Kundera focuses that the novels of novelists like Kafka, Musil, Broch, and Gombrowicz who denied any obligation to give the reader the illusion of truth.

Kundera continuously indicates that his characters are unreal. According to Kundera the realistic novelistic institution forced certain restrictions on the novelist. Kundera explains the nineteenth-century novelistic custom as “the conventions that do the author's work for him: present a character, describe milieu, bring the action into a historical situation, fill time in the characters lives with superfluous episodes events. Milan Kundera in his novel *Slowness* too presents the enigma of migration via character of Martin and Irena. Both have moved to another country leaving their native land behind. Both suffer the nostalgic feeling. Deceived both at home and overseas, by readers and critics on both parts of the margin forcing their own fetters on the novelist and disciplining him in his concerns about what novel in exile should be like, Kundera has stayed true to himself as an artist and to his artistic creation. His history of disloyalty against his mother language, against his motherland and its history, therefore, represents a ironic case of a energizing, truthful betrayal.

“Betrayal means breaking ranks and going off into the unknown,”(Immortality page.176) Milan Kundera mentions this in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Sabina, the character from *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is not frightened to betray. Sabina betrays her father, she betrayed the Communist too, she betrays her mother land too. Sabina has no ultimate place, no true home land and falls into the chasm of a worthless existence, true nowhere. Her doom thus illustrates how a self-liberating infidelity can become a fence.

Like his Sabina, Kundera is culpable of betrayal; he is also aware of what it means to be betrayed. In fact,

what may be apparent as betrayal composes his writing as an émigré writer. Critics who criticize Kundera for deceiving his motherland by largely changing his earlier works and alteration in Czech history disregard both his exilic “contrapuntal awareness” that widened his idea and the issues he raised.

Betrayed by his mother land, by the Czech people, by the Western, and criticized for betraying his mother tongue, his Czech readers and his country, Kundera however, overcomes his state of exilic enigma and finds his true motherland in the artistic creation. The betrayals of Kundera must be seen, as an act of greatest devotion to that motherland.

Bibliography:

- [1] Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* trans Michael Henry Heim (1984, India: Faber and Faber, 2003)
- [2] Milan Kundera, *Immortality* trans. Peter Kussi (1991, India: Faber and Faber, 2004).
- [3] Milan Kundera, *Slowness* trans. Linda Asher (1995; India: Faber and Faber, 2003).
- [4] Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*
- [5] *Understanding Milan Kundera: Public events, Private Life* by Fred Misurella, University of South Carolina, 1993.

