



## MULTICULTURALISM VALUES IN HENA KHAN'S *AMINA'S VOICE*

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### Abstract

This paper aims to show how the forms of multiculturalism values are displayed in Amina's life and how multiculturalism can change the perspective of other characters towards multiculturalism in the novel *Amina's Voice* (2017), written by a Pakistani-American writer, Hena Khan. This novel tells about a girl named Amina who has a family background from Pakistan and has long lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, United States. Despite living in a dominant Western culture, the Amina family consistently upholds Pakistani cultural values and uses their native customs daily. The differences between these two cultures often lead to conflicts experienced by Amina and other characters in the story. Despite encountering obstacles, Amina is shown still to practice the values of multiculturalism in her daily life. This study uses the concept of indicators of multiculturalism values proposed by Tilaar (2004) and the concept of acculturation written by Berry (2005). This research shows that there are forms of multiculturalism values found in the three spheres of Amina's life, namely in the family, school, and social environment. The indicators of multicultural values are learning in diversity, mutual trust, mutual understanding, mutual respect, open-mindedness, appreciation and interdependence (mutual dependence), and conflict resolution. In addition, the present writer also found that the practice of multiculturalism that occurred in the text resulted in an acculturation process that succeeded in changing the perspective of Amina's family members towards the value of multiculturalism.

**Keywords:** acculturation, multicultural, multiculturalism values

### Abstrak

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bagaimana bentuk nilai-nilai multikulturalisme ditampilkan dalam kehidupan Amina dan bagaimana praktek multikulturalisme dapat mengubah cara pandang tokoh lain terhadap multikulturalisme di dalam novel *Amina's Voice* (2017) yang ditulis oleh seorang penulis Pakistan-Amerika, Hena Khan. Novel ini menceritakan tentang seorang anak perempuan bernama Amina yang memiliki latar belakang keluarga dari Pakistan yang sudah lama menetap di Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Amerika Serikat. Walaupun hidup di tengah budaya Barat yang sangat dominan, keluarga Amina secara konsisten tetap menjunjung tinggi nilai budaya Pakistan dan menggunakan adat-istiadat asal mereka di kehidupan sehari-hari mereka. Perbedaan 2 budaya ini kerap kali mendatangkan konflik yang dialami Amina dan tokoh-tokoh lain di dalam cerita. Walaupun mengalami kendala, Amina ditampilkan tetap mempraktekkan nilai-nilai multikulturalisme di dalam kehidupan sehari-harinya. Dalam penelitian ini, penulis menggunakan konsep indikator nilai-nilai multikulturalisme yang dikemukakan oleh Tilaar (2004) dan menggunakan konsep akulturasi yang ditulis oleh Berry (2005). Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah terdapat bentuk-bentuk nilai multikulturalisme yang ditemukan di tiga ruang lingkup kehidupan Amina, yaitu di lingkungan keluarga, sekolah, dan sosial. Adapun indikator nilai multikultural yang

ditemukan adalah belajar hidup dalam perbedaan, membangun saling percaya, memelihara saling pengertian, menjunjung sikap saling menghargai, terbuka dalam berpikir, apresiasi dan interdependensi, dan resolusi konflik. Selain itu, penulis juga menemukan bahwa praktek multikulturalisme yang terjadi di dalam teks menghasilkan proses akulturasi yang berhasil mengubah cara pandang anggota keluarga Amina terhadap nilai multikulturalisme.

**Kata Kunci:** akulturasi, multikultural, nilai-nilai multikulturalisme

## 1. Introduction

The basis of multiculturalism is culture. Essentially, that word contains an acknowledgment of the dignity of human beings who live in their communities with their own unique culture. According to Azra (2007), multiculturalism is a worldview translated into various cultural policies that emphasize acceptance of realities, diversity, plurality, and multicultural realities that exist in social life. Multiculturalism can also be understood as a world view acknowledging living cultural existence, regardless of size or size; world view is referred to as the politics of recognition.

The emergence of multiculturalism is caused by cultural differences that arise, which can present conflicts between cultures. Moreover, culture is a sensitive matter because culture has become the identity of every human being on this earth. Of course, there must be an understanding that is useful to mediate where this cultural diversity arises. Multiculturalism emerged as a belief that states that ethnic and cultural groups can coexist peacefully, which is marked by a willingness to respect other cultures (Choirul, 2008).

The United States of America is a country whose society consists of various types of ethnicity, ethnicity, religion, and culture spread worldwide. Economic factors and their status as a developed country resulted in the mass migration of people worldwide to start living again there. Of course, many cultures gathered in an area can lead to several types of disputes over existing differences. The arrival of immigrants from various countries made America's face very colorful and became a multicultural country. Differences in racial, state, religious, and cultural backgrounds are necessary to give rise to multiculturalism eventually.

The conflicts caused by cultural diversity and the practices of multiculturalism can also be seen in Hena Khan's novel, *Amina's Voice*. Hena Khan is a Pakistani American who was born and raised in Maryland. *Amina's Voice* is her first novel, first released to the public in 2017. Hena Khan brings elements of cultural diversity to a little girl's life and how she overcomes that diversity.

*Amina's Voice* tells the story of a Pakistani girl named Amina who has lived in America since she was very young. Her family decided to move and settle down as American

citizens. However, her family is still very strict with the culture and religion that has become their identity from the beginning. Her school life is the same as children's in general; she has a close Korean friend named Soojin. Nevertheless, things began to change when Soojin and her family became American citizens. Soojin began to befriend Emily, one of her school friends who often bullied Amina and Soojin because they were different.

In this novel, Amina is also confronted with the strict rules given by Baba (Pakistani language meaning Father), which makes Amina not accessible in doing what she wants. With the background of Muslim and Pakistani families, she and her siblings, Mustafa, cannot want something contrary to their culture. Initially, the identity they already belonged to as Pakistanis was a barrier to enjoying their lives as Americans. Set in Milwaukee, a small town in the Wisconsin area, United States, Amina has to face the challenges of cultural diversity. Amina also has to deal with how her culture, a minority in the region, has to survive with other cultures, where she faces many problems while maintaining her identity as a 'Pakistani.' Based on the above background, this study aims to show how the values of multiculturalism occurred in Amina's life are portrayed and how the forms of multiculturalism practices in Amina's family change their perspectives on multiculturalism.

The novel has never been analyzed by other researchers. The present writer cannot find a study that brings this novel into research. However, there are studies that discuss multicultural values in literary works found by the present writer. The study was written by Wawan Hermawan, Suyitno, Herman J. Waluyo, and Nugraheni Eko Wardani. Their article is titled *Multicultural Value in New York and Samawi Novels of Damien Dematra* (2019) discusses what multicultural values are contained in some literary works. The previous study helps the present writer with a basic understanding of multicultural values. However, the present writer will use different theories of multiculturalism and its values in this research.

## **2. Methodology**

This research uses qualitative research. This qualitative method is a research procedure that produces the data descriptions in written words or writings from people and behavior observed in the novel. This research aims to explain multicultural values in Amina's Voice novel. The research data are words, phrases, clauses, and sentences contained in the novel as a data source. The present writer uses the plot and characters and the characterization in the novel. The research starts with reading the novel, then noting essential elements that can be analyzed. The present writer reads, collects, identifies, classifies, and interprets words, phrases, and sentences from novels related to the values of multiculturalism and the practice

of multiculturalism. Then, the present writer looks for various theories about multiculturalism values. Then the writer will also look for additional literature that can be applied in this study.

### **3. Finding and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Multiculturalism Values in Amina's Life**

Multiculturalism is a term used to explain one's view of the diversity of life in the world or cultural policies that emphasize the acceptance of diversity and the various types of habits and politics that they profess (Mudzhar, 2005). Parekh (2008) also says that multiculturalism is not like differences from individual choices. These culturally acquired differences carry a benchmark of authority. They are shaped and structured because they are embedded in a system of meanings and meanings inherited and historically owned. So that cultural diversity is culturally attached. It can be concluded that multiculturalism exists where people with very diverse identities and cultures can coexist and respect each other with existing differences to prevent the impacts caused by cultural diversity.

Hanum and Raharja (2011) explain that cultural diversity affects human behavior, attitudes, and mindsets so that humans have different usages, folkways, rules, and mores. When the above situation cannot appropriately be understood by the parties concerned, disputes in the diversity of vulnerabilities can occur and end in conflict. Therefore, the values of multiculturalism are needed. Multiculturalism values can be used as solutions to prevent conflicts or disputes due to cultural diversity. Tilaar (2004) describes several multicultural values consisting of indicators including learning in diversity, mutual trust, mutual understanding, mutual respect, open-mindedness, appreciation and interdependence (mutual dependence), conflict resolution, and violence reconciliation. Meanwhile, to understand multicultural values in general, Tilaar also stated that there are four core values of multiculturalism values, including appreciation of the reality of cultural plurality in society, recognition of human dignity and human rights, development of world community responsibilities, and development of human responsibility to planet earth.

The present writer will use indicators of multiculturalism values mentioned by Tilaar (2004), including learning in diversity, mutual trust, mutual understanding, mutual respect, open-minded, appreciation and interdependence (mutual dependence), conflict resolution, and violence reconciliation to identify what are the values of multiculturalism in this novel.

Since she was a child, Amina Khokar and her family have lived in Milwaukee, the largest city in Wisconsin. Amina has just started middle school, but she feels that things are beginning to change in her life and a little lost and an element of everything. As a Pakistani living in America where many types of other cultures also coexist with him, many events are related to multiculturalism in this novel. Based on the novel, the indicators of multiculturalism values can be found in Amina's three different aspects of life.

### **3.1.1 Amina's Family Life**

Amina, still 11 years old, still relies on her family to do or know something. Their family background comes from Pakistan resulted in their lifestyle still adapting to Pakistani culture. The Khokar family also still uses the Pakistani language in their daily life. Furthermore, it is not explained in detail what is going on with the Islamic community in America. However, Baba feels that Thaya Jaan, Amina's Uncle, already knows about issues concerning the Muslim community in America. Therefore, Baba is worried that Thaya Jaan will think that they live in a 'bad' environment for them. However, Mama tried to calm Baba because they have a solid community and the community outside of them is also very kind to them.

"Nothing like that will happen here. We have a strong community, and so many Muslims live in Milwaukee. People have been good to us," Mama says." (Khan, 2017, p. 21) The quotations above show multicultural values, which refer to learning in diversity and mutual respect. This can be seen from the Muslim community in Milwaukee, where Amina and her family live side-by-side with other communities with different cultures and have excellent and very close relationships.

When the tragedy that caused the destruction of the Islamic Center caused by other people strikes Amina's family itself, Amina's family feels they have failed to show Thaya Jaan that their lives while living in America have been going well and are afraid to think that so far America is not a suitable place for their people live. However, unexpectedly, Thaya Jaan said the opposite. Instead, he took the good side of this incident. Because he could see that many people were helping them deal with the Islamic Center incident, he thinks many good things can be taken while living in America.

"There are many things about life here in America that are very good," Thaya Jaan says. "And I'm starting to think you may be right." (Khan, 2017, p. 88) The quotation above shows that there is multicultural values refer to open-mindedness. This can be seen when Thaya Jaan considers the other side of Amina's family living in America. Thaya Jaan thinks

Amina and her family cannot live in harmony because of the many different cultures that coexist with theirs. Nevertheless, after seeing many people helping the Muslim community during the incident, Thaya Jaan began to think openly about the diversity of cultures.

### **3.1.2 Amina's School Life**

Amina has just started middle school in this novel, only 11 years old. With Amina's background coming from Pakistan and living in an American country with much cultural diversity, many situations make Amina have to adapt to this cultural diversity.

In the end, Amina was able to overcome multiculturalism in her school life by having friends with different cultural backgrounds. Amina has had a close friend since elementary school named Soojin. Soojin herself is a girl who comes from South Korea but has lived long enough in America.

Until one day, Soojin told Amina that she and her family would receive American citizenship shortly. Soojin was very happy because of that and expressed her wish to change her name. However, Amina disagreed because she felt comfortable calling her by the name 'Soojin.' But Soojin felt uncomfortable with the name again. When Soojin heard that Amina was holding her back from changing her name, Soojin was disappointed. Moreover, Amina knows more about how Soojin feels difficulty with her Korean name. Finally, Amina gave up on her best friend's decision. Amina did not want to disappoint Soojin.

"Can I still call you Soojin?" I ask after swallowing hard to clear the lump that has formed in my throat. "I want everyone to use my new name and get used to it in middle school, so it's normal when we get to high school. It would be messed up if my own best friend didn't do it," Soojin peers into my face expectantly. "You will, right?"

"Yeah. I will," I promise, although I cross my toes inside my shoes. I decide I will call her Soojin for as long as possible." (Khan, 2017, p. 9)

The quotation above shows a mutual understanding and mutual respect where Amina respects Soojin's decision to change her name. Even though Amina wanted Soojin to keep her Korean name, because Soojin wanted it, she had to follow her and respect Soojin's decision.

### **3.1.3 Amina's Social Life**

From Pakistan, Amina's family has made Muslims an identity that makes them different from others. Because many Muslims live in Milwaukee, there is a Muslim

community standing there. One form of community activity is holding a Sunday School, held every week at the Islamic Center, where members of the Muslim community, including the Amina family, usually gather with other members and perform various types of activity.

When the Sunday School was held, Imam Malik announced that he would have a Quran recitation competition for students from all over the state. Furthermore, on the same day the contest runs, there will also be a Carnival where everyone from any group can join. To give Thaya Jaan a fresh look, who has a wrong opinion of the Muslim community who are not fit to live in America, Baba laid out his plan to invite everyone in Milwaukee.

"After dinner, as I sit on my piano bench and start to practice, my mind wanders back to the ride home from the Islamic Center. Baba was filling Thaya Jaan in on plans for the carnival and how he was inviting local churches, synagogues, temples, and interfaith organizations to attend...." (Khan, 2017, p. 56)

The quotation above shows the value of learning in diversity where the existing cultural diversity does not prevent inviting other communities to join events held by a community. The community that Baba had invited was a stark contrast to their own. This attempts to explain to Thaya Jaan that the Muslim community can stand together with other communities.

A few days before the Quran recitation competition and carnival were held, a tragedy occurred at the Islamic Center where some of the facilities and buildings at the Islamic Center were damaged by unknown persons. Of course, this is a grief for the Muslims in Milwaukee because they spend their time gathering in that place. People assume that the perpetrators of the incident do not like the existence of a Muslim community and Islamic Center established in Milwaukee.

"Muslims have far over more friends than enemies in this country. Some people don't understand Islam or are misled and fear us. But I'm getting so many calls of support from our friends and neighbors in the community," Imam Malik says (Khan, 2017, p. 87).

The quote above is Imam Malik's statement from an interview with a reporter covering the tragedy. This quotation shows multicultural values, namely learning in diversity and mutual understanding. Imam Malik stated that many supported them and all that support came from other communities that were different from them. There is also the value of interdependence where fellow communities depend on each other, namely the support that makes them realize that they are not alone even though they try to bring down their community.

The Quran Recitation Competition is in sight, but the Islamic Center cannot be used to hold the event. However, two weeks before the competition, Mr. and Mrs. Park offer to have a competition at the church where Soojin usually attends. When they submitted it to the committee in the church, it was responded very well, and they were allowed to hold the event in their church.

"Assalaamwalaikum. My name is Amina Khokar, and I'm going to recite surah Fatiha for you today," I begin. "But first I want to thank my friend Soojin Park and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Park, for generously arranging to have our Quran competition here at the Milwaukee Central Presbyterian Church." (Khan, 2017:94)

From the quote above, there is a mutual respect value, where Mr. and Mrs. Park understands that this event is an important event for their community. Nevertheless, when the tragedy of the Islamic Center nearly failed to organize the event, Mr. and Mrs. Park were here to help them keep the event going. The value of interdependence can also be seen from the quote above when the Muslim community depends on other communities willing to help them even though their communities have very far contrasted.

### **3.2 Practice of Multiculturalism in Amina's Family**

Harmony in a multicultural society consisting of various types of cultural origin, religion, race, and other identities is undoubtedly the result of applying the values of multiculturalism in everyday life. It means that although standing together with different cultural backgrounds, people can live with mutual respect and appreciation for these differences. To carry out the practice of applying these multicultural values, it takes a process of adaptation of different cultures by individuals or communities that result in changes to the original cultural pattern or one of two distinct cultural groups, which is then called acculturation. If the individual acculturation will involve changes in behavior, then the group involves changes in social structures and institutions.

According to Berry (2005), acculturation is a process that includes cultural and psychological changes that occur as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their members. At the group level, acculturation involves changes in social structures and institutions. While at the individual level, acculturation requires behavior change.

In the novel, the acculturation process occurs in Amina's family. Both Amina's parents are Pakistani who then chose to settle in Milwaukee, a small town in Wisconsin, the United States of America. Amina and Mustafa grew up where they still use their original

traditions. They in everyday life have to adapt to a new culture that is contrary to their authentic culture. With the existence of a Western culture that must be coupled with Eastern culture, which is the original culture of the Amina family, of course, it is necessary to adapt to existing differences to result in individual changes in himself and at the group level, namely his family so that the result of these changes is also the result of the practice of multiculturalism both with Amina and in her family.

In a particular context, Amina must experience the psychological changes and what influences she will face in the future. One of them is his love for Western music, which he has been working on for a long time. Amina took a piano course which her parents supported.

However, the arrival of Thaya Jaan makes Baba nervous about his brother's arrival because Baba wanted to show that he managed to raise his children well and that he made the right decision when he decided to stay in America and not return to Pakistan. Thaya Jaan has a lousy view of America itself in seeing the Muslim community living in cities scattered throughout the United States in America.

Nothing happened after Thaya Jaan arrived at Amina's house a few days. Thaya Jaan focuses on teaching Mustafa and Amina for the Quran Competition. Nevertheless, when Thaya Jaan finds out that Amina is into Western music and playing the piano, she tells Baba to distance Amina from all Amina's hobbies. Even though Baba had said that Amina was born with this talent, Thaya Jaan still did not admit it. When Amina listened to this, a stress-acculturative sequence occurred, which made Amina think that all this time, what she had been doing with music was wrong (Khan, 2017, p. 57).

Finally, Amina told her anxiety about what Thaya Jaan had said to Mama. Mama's response was very different because she disagreed with Thaya Jaan's opinion. Baba argued that he agreed to it because he was still afraid of Thaya Jaan, who saw their family life which had begun to take elements of western culture in his family.

"You have to talk to him," Mama says with a frown. "I respect Bhai Jaan and his beliefs, but this is too much. We have a right to teach our children values. What if Amina had never said anything to us and thought she was doing something wrong for loving music?" (Khan, 2017, p. 63)

The quote above shows an acculturation process where Mama says that they have educated their children with their family values, namely by combining two different cultures in their family life. They still use Urdu at home but still allow Mustafa and Amina to learn what they like, like basketball and piano, which is not in their native culture.

Another form of adaptation of Western culture into Amina's family is when Amina talks about the upcoming Halloween. However, Baba doubts whether Amina can participate when Thaya Jaan is already at their house. Because Thaya Jaan still thinks very conservatively, Thaya Jaan believes that Halloween is not right to do. However, Mama even gave a contrasting response with Baba, who allowed Amina to still participate in Halloween. Thaya Jaan was already at their house.

"If he's here on Halloween, can we still go?" Soojin and I already decided that we would dress up together, as ketchup and mustard bottles. "Yes, yes, of course, you can go," Now it's Baba's turn to sigh. He looks at Mama, who sits down with a glass of water across from me" (Khan, 2017, p. 32)

The quotation above shows that Mama did acculturation when she let Amina and Soojin get out to participate in Halloween. Her response shows that nothing was wrong for her daughter as a Muslim to have fun with her friends on Halloween day. Mama gave her permission, although Thaya Jaan was at home. Mama seemed very sure about her decision.

#### **4. Conclusion**

From the finding and discussion above, it can be concluded that there are six multicultural values shown in Amina's Voice by Hena Khan. They are learning in diversity, mutual understanding, mutual trust, mutual respect, interdependence, and open-mindedness. The values are found in Amina's family life, school life, and social life. The practice of multiculturalism in Amina's life successfully brings a positive impact to her family. The multiculturalism values in Amina's life successfully changed Amina's family members from conservative thinking of Pakistan culture to multicultural understanding. The practice of acculturation, a process of adapting different cultures to individuals or groups, is shown by the other family members, Mama and Baba.

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