

# Ravan and eddie – unity in diversity



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The topic that is going to be presented today is the theme of U. I. D. with reference to Ravan and Eddie and ironically relating it to a secular country like India. The book Ravan and Eddie will appear to be one of the funniest novels when one first reads it. However, the greater number of times one reads the book, the better he/she will understand what it is actually trying to convey to the reader, according to which no unity in diversity exists among Indians. Although this story is set right after India got independence, this book seems to be about life in our decade.

One cannot help but compare the similarities of people's behavior at that time and in the present. Although Ravan and Eddie appears to be a childish and playful novel, it actually forces us to deal with imperative questions that each one of us see in our day to day lives, but we ignore them in spite of knowing their significance. Surprisingly, these questions are posed to us by children, much younger than ourselves, yet who seem to have a vast knowledge and perception of society. Despite them not being highly educated, they are extremely intelligent but naive which forces us to like them.

The theme of unity in diversity is brought about through juxtaposition of two very different cultures- Hinduism and Christianity that is represented by the protagonists- Ravan and Eddie. The author uses irony and humorous differences to point this out, not missing out on even the smallest detail. From the title itself the reader is presented with two names- Ravan and Eddie both which can be easily recognized and identified with a particular religion. Hence it should not come as a huge surprise to the reader when the

author discusses the society of a chawl that is distinguished into two main groups.

This is done through the use of bawdy humour, vague imagery and sarcasm. From the beginning of the novel itself, the reader is able to identify the many cultural differences between these two communities, within each community as well as others. For example the Sabha-a group of Hindu revivalists does not admit Muslims even though it quoting claims to encompass each community. The fact that it consists of Hindu revivalists in itself gives a hint to the reader, foreshadowing the many issues that these two communities will face in the future.

This proves that the Sabha was just interested in promoting Hinduism and it's lack of interest in other cultures. Among the Christians only two families in the chawl flew the national flag on independence day which points out to the disinterest and the lack of enthusiasm that people felt towards their own country. It is ironic that although Hindus and Christians were not particularly fond of each other, they envied the other community in terms of their historical background, the extracurricular activities they participated in and even the way how each community performed their funeral rights!

On the day of Victor's funeral, a huge Hindu crowd had gathered, flabbergasted by the quoting ' indescribable beauty of a Catholic funeral. ' Instead of being mournful or even slightly sad that someone from their society had died, the Hindus were just thinking about the pomp and glory in a Christian death. Although they were born as Hindus they would not mind and in fact, would feel proud if they died as Catholics. This is how the author

uses scathing humour and makes his writing fun to read. Eddie was the brightest and most active member of the Sabha.

Lele Guruji was particularly fond of him and treated him with partiality. Eddie's inclusion in the Sabha brought about a visible change in his personality and he started making classes more interesting. Lele Guruji also refers to him as the 'prodigal son' who has now returned to his original home, probably indirectly referring to his future change of religion from Christianity to Hinduism. Eddie loved the childhood escapades and mischevious tricks played by Lord Krishna and wondered why Jesus was so 'goody-goody' and not tough and muscular.

Although Eddie was so fond of Hindu mythology, he treated Hindus with dislike and contempt- which goes against the assured claim of Unity in Diversity as mentioned earlier. Eddie was able to admire Lord Krishna's naughtiness but could not appreciate the miraculous powers of his own Lord – Jesus! However, Violet's reaction to these books serves as a stark contrast to her son's. Violet refers to the Mahabharat as 'a passage of hell' lined with thirty-three million gods and goddess'. 'She flung the book outside the window, threatening to kick her own son out of the house.

She referred to the mythological book as 'satanic book' and 'Ravan-the Hindu boy as the Devil himself.' At this point, one cannot help but compare the different thought process' of Hindus and Christians, bringing out the sarcasm used by the author. On one hand- Parvati (Ravan's mother) called him so as she did not want anyone to have a bad influence on her child. However, Violet probably misinterprets his name, which is further

compounded by the fact that he is a Hindu and refers to him as the ' devil himself.

Eddie had foreseen this and had tried to hide his book, but unfortunately had failed to do so. This makes the reader wonder how did Eddie know about or predict the attitude of his mother towards the Hindu religion. It was just his gut feeling and nothing specific can be said. Probably, Eddie had realized this through the general behavior of Hindus and Christians towards each other and the distance they maintained. Through this the author makes us realize how similar the situation is today. For example, when Paul Monteiro named his child Mohan after he was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi.

However, none of the residents of the society called him by his real name, they all called him Paul Junior. Mr. Nagarkar mentions that it was unfashionable in those days to give vernacular names to Christian children. But is it fashionable nowadays to give vernacular names to Christian children. It clearly is'nt. Ravan and Eddie's similar behavior could also be attributed to the fact that Eddie did not have a father and it was almost the same with Ravan, who claims to be as attached to his father as he was to a ' chair' or a ' fan' of his house.

This reveals to the reader that Shankar Rao played a very insignificant role in his son's life. In both their houses, their mother's were the sole breadwinner's and acted as the men of the house. Probably, this also had an effect on Ravan and Eddie's behavior and made them understand greater responsibility at a younger age. Ravan was totally fascinated by the tae kwon do, something that originated from the West. In lai tondo class as

pronounced by his mother that exposes her Marathi dialect, Ravan was Mr. Billimoria's favourite, just as Eddie was Lele Guruji's favourite.

The author refers to Ravan as the younger version of his sir- someone who did not tolerate laziness but had far more patience. Even if people belonging to these communities wanted to communicate with each other and extend a hand of friendship they could not because they hardly shared anything in common, not even a common language. The author sarcastically portrays these two communities living so close to each other and hence similar in behavior and all the other aspects but unfortunately this was not the case then and even now. Christians spoke in English, Konkani and Portuguese whereas Hindus spoke in Marathi or a dialect of it.

Mr. Nagarkar gives several other irreconcilable differences between them right from the time they had their bath to the movies they watched. Hindus ate betel nut, chewed paan and tobacco, something Christians felt disgusting even to touch, while they ate beef and pork, something that is considered unholy for Hindus to this day. Apart from these differences, Mr. Nagarkar also points out to the watertight rigidity within a caste system, through the questions posed to the reader by the naive children as mentioned in the introduction.

For example, when Eddie asks himself why Dronacharya refused to teach Eklavya. Although they belonged to the same religion, they belonged to separate castes, Guru Drona taught only the Kshatriyas whereas Eklavya belonged to the lowest sect-Shudra(untouchable). Lele Guruji who was the leader of the Sabha gave the example of Mussolini the disgraced Italian

leader who stressed the importance of time. He should have given the example of Mahatma Gandhi who was an integral part of our own country's rich history and explained the importance of time correctly.

Furthermore, Gandhiji himself was a Hindu who believed in Hindu-Muslim unity, yet ironically the Sabha is acting against the principles of the very man they should follow by not allowing Muslims to join the Sabha as mentioned earlier. When Ravan first called Eddie, the distance was so great between them that he felt he had uttered a forbidden word and ventured beyond the point of no return. At the end when Ravan and Eddie embraced and probably wanted to accept each other as friends, Eddie's mother spoilt this by whisking Eddie away. Each one wants to propagate his own religion.

If Ravan attended the Sabha late, he would be made to copy a couple of chapters from the Bhagvad Gita, so also when Eddie wanted penance, he was made to say twenty hail-mary's every day. Religion is something that has effectively divided people into groups who have maintained the same attitude and ignorance towards each other. What is fascinating about this is that Hindus and Christians are known to live in harmony and co-exist peacefully; it has always been maintained that differences only exist between Hindus and Muslims. But through this novel, we realize how each community lives in worlds.