



Sociological and Psychological Aspects in Milkha Singh's "The Race of My Life" and "The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr."

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Abstract:

The autobiographies of Martin Luther King Jr. (*"The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr."*) and Milkha Singh (*"The Race of My Life"*) provide significant insights into the interplay of psychological and sociological elements in these notable people's lives. In his story, Singh delves into the sociological effects of the partition of India on his family and explains how his willpower and psychological fortitude helped him become the 'Flying Sikh.' The way mentors and role models influence Singh's athletic journey is a clear example of the theory of social cognition in action. King's autobiography, on the other hand, explores the social and psychological aspects surrounding the Civil Rights Movement. King's tenacity, which is derived from his status as a leader in the civil rights movement, demonstrates both social change and psychological fortitude. King uses the principle of cognitive dissonance to negotiate opposing viewpoints and social expectations. In conclusion, these autobiographies provide a thorough insight of how unique lives are shaped in a variety of sociocultural situations by the interaction of personal experiences, cultural influences, and psychological dynamics.

I. Introduction

The autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr. and Milkha Singh's *"The Race of My Life"* are both noteworthy literary works that provide deep insights into the lives of two extraordinary people who, despite coming from very different backgrounds, left a profound mark on the sociological and psychological terrain of their respective societies. Readers may examine the intricate interactions between societal systems, personal agency, and psychological aspects of resiliency and willpower through the unique perspective offered by these memoirs.

Milkha Singh, known as the "Flying Sikh," describes in *"The Race of My Life"* how he went

from the partition-era Punjab in the 1940s to become a legendary figure in Indian sports.

Singh explores the sociological facets of India's post-independence period in his book, illuminating the difficulties people in this rapidly changing country confront. His stories of surviving the partition and his unwavering quest for athletic greatness provide readers with a first-hand understanding of the cultural and social forces that created his identity and motivated his ascent to success.

Similarly, a thorough examination of the socioeconomic and psychological components of racial disparity and institutional discrimination in the US can be found in his memoir of Luther King Jr., who played a key role in the civil rights movement in the United States. King's story emphasizes the psychological costs of racism on both those who are oppressed and the oppressors, highlighting the connections between personal experiences and larger social institutions. His battles against racist discrimination and his dedication to peaceful resistance shed light on the psychological fortitude needed to function in a prejudice-filled world.

The sociological facets investigated in these autobiographies go beyond the personal stories to provide readers with a complex picture of the social environments that influenced Martin Luther King Jr., and Milkha Singh. Both of these books analyze historical events, cultural influences, and societal structures to add to a thorough understanding of the complex lives of the characters.

Furthermore, the psychological aspects examined in these memoirs highlight the influence of individual experiences on the growth of *resiliency*, *willpower*, and a *sense of direction*. Both Milkha Singh's character and King, himself, struggle with trauma and suffering, giving readers broad perspectives into the human mind and how people overcome obstacles to become influential characters in their communities.



To summarize, beyond their distinctive narratives, Milkha Singh and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s autobiographies provide a complex tapestry of societal and psychological insights. While exploring the psychological intricacies of these remarkable people's travels, these works challenge the audience to critically commune with the socioeconomic environments that molded them. These autobiographies are priceless contributions to the scholarly conversation on sociology and psychology because they explore the intersections of psychological resilience, societal structures, and personal narratives to provide readers with insightful lessons that cut across cultural as well as temporal boundaries.

II. Review of the Literature

A strong basis for examining the intersections of psychological and social aspects in the histories of these well-known figures can be found in Milkha Singh's as well as Martin Luther King Jr.'s autobiographies. Their identities as well as their experiences are explained via a sociological lens, and their personal development is examined from a psychological viewpoint that explores the complexities of resiliency, determination, and the effects of adversity.

Singh, M. (2013). **The Race of My Life: An Autobiography*. Rupa Publications. A personal description of the societal factors that shaped Milkha Singh's path may be found in the titled "The Race of My Life". He was born in Punjab before the partition, where he experienced the terrible consequences of the split, which shaped his outlook and willpower. The sociopolitical environment of post-independence India is highlighted in the text's references, which also provide light on the difficulties experienced by those trying to succeed in a quickly evolving country (Singh, 2013). Singh's account of overcoming preconceptions and social expectations while competing as an athlete also provides a fascinating look at the complicated socioeconomic issues surrounding the quest for greatness.

King, M. L. (1998). **The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.** Warner Books.

Likewise, the autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr. makes a substantial contribution to the sociological conversation on racial disparities in the US. King's account goes into great length about the effects of discrimination and segregation on African Americans throughout the civil rights struggle, as well as the sociological foundations of

systemic racism (King, 1998). His analyses of the Birmingham Campaign and the boycott of Montgomery buses offer a sophisticated view of the social forces that drove him to involvement and shaped the course of the movement for civil rights. Both autobiographies' psychological aspects deepen our understanding of these people's lives.

The psychological fortitude needed to triumph over hardship is demonstrated by Milkha Singh's voyage from the anguish of the partition to his ascent to world athletic prominence. Singh (2013) provides fascinating insights into the inner working psyche of humans via his descriptions of his hardships and accomplishments. He demonstrates how an individual's trajectory can be shaped by personal drive and a resilient attitude. The psychological elements of Martin Luther King Jr.'s memoir are deeply entwined throughout his story. King's dedication to peaceful opposition to racial injustice is indicative of his deep awareness of the psychological effects of persecution on both the victimized and the oppressors (King, 1998). His investigation into the thought process of compassion and the transformational potential of forgiveness highlights the leadership's psychological aspects in the face of difficulty.

Scholars and academics wishing to comprehend the complex interactions between psychological elements and societal structures in Milkha Singh's along Martin Luther King Jr.'s lives would find great value in these autobiographies. A beginning point for delving deeper into the complex nature of their observations and the wider ramifications for the disciplines of psychology and sociology may be found in the sources supplied.

III. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

❖ Resilience And Identity Theory

"The Race Of My Life"

"Milkha Singh: The Race of My Life" offers a compelling narrative that intertwines *Resilience Theory and Identity Theory*, providing a profound insight into the life of the legendary Indian athlete, Milkha Singh. This autobiography traces the incredible journey of Milkha Singh, also known as the *Flying Sikh*, as he overcame adversity and made a mark through the relentless pursuit of excellence in the world of athletics.

Resilience Theory, as applied to Milkha Singh's life, underscores his ability to bounce back from traumatic experiences. Born into a tumultuous period during the partition of India in 1947, Milkha



Singh witnessed the horrors of violence and loss at a young age. This tumultuous start, instead of breaking him, became a crucible that forged his resilience. Singh's story exemplifies the theory's central tenet that individuals can not only endure adversity but also thrive in the face of it. The partition served as a foundation for his unwavering determination, fueling his ambition to rise above the circumstances and make a name for himself on a global stage. Simultaneously, Identity Theory plays a pivotal role in Milkha Singh's narrative, delving into the process of self-discovery and the construction of one's identity. The book captures his evolution from a young refugee with no clear path to a national hero and an international sports icon. Singh's identity was not merely confined to his athletic prowess; it extended to embodying resilience, discipline, and an unyielding spirit. His journey reflects how personal identity can be shaped by external circumstances, experiences, and the pursuit of meaningful goals.

"On 14 August 1947, British India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Then, at the 'stroke of the midnight hour' on 15 August 1947, India became an independent nation. Almost simultaneously, borders were being drawn along the west and the east that would divide the subcontinent. We found ourselves on the wrong side of the border. Almost overnight, the unrest intensified, plunging the lands along the newly drawn borders into chaos and confusion. Politics had poisoned people's minds and hitherto friendly relationships were destroyed by the sweeping waves of hatred and communalism. People no longer behaved like human beings, they had become animals. Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were brutally massacred, thousands of homes destroyed, mothers lost their husbands and children. There was only bloodshed everywhere" [page no. 19 Chapter 2 "BHAAG MILKHA BHAAG"]

The recounting of Milkha Singh's races, particularly his historic run at the 1960 Rome Olympics, illustrates the intersection of Resilience and Identity Theories. The challenges he faced, both on and off the track, symbolize the hurdles that life presented him. His ability to overcome these obstacles not only solidified his resilience but also reinforced the image he held of himself—an identity rooted in determination and an unwavering will to succeed. Milkha Singh's autobiography serves as a testament to the symbiotic relationship between Resilience and Identity Theories. His life story demonstrates that resilience, far from being a passive reaction to adversity, is an active process of

growth and transformation. Through the lens of Identity Theory, Milkha Singh's journey becomes a canvas where the strokes of his experiences, struggles, and triumphs paint a portrait of a man who not only ran races but also defined his own identity against the backdrop of a challenging era.

"Autography Of Martin Luther King Jr."

Carson Clayborne's "The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr." provides a profound exploration of resilience theory and identity theory as they relate to the life and experiences of the iconic civil rights leader. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s journey, as portrayed in his autobiography, exemplifies the interplay between resilience and identity, shaping not only his personal narrative but also influencing the broader societal context. Resilience theory, in the context of King's life, is evident in his unwavering commitment to nonviolent activism despite facing immense adversity. King confronted systemic racism, violence, and imprisonment, yet consistently displayed resilience by adhering to his principles of love, justice, and equality. The autobiography unveils the internal strength that fueled King's resilience, showcasing how he navigated challenges with an unyielding spirit, whether during the Montgomery Bus Boycott or the Birmingham Campaign.

"Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light injustice must be exposed with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion, before it can be cured."

Martin Luther King, Jr. – Letter from Birmingham Jail.

[Publisher Warner Books; Reprint edition (January 1, 2001), ISBN-100446676500, ISBN-13978-0446676502]

King's resilience was deeply intertwined with his identity as a Baptist minister and a proponent of the philosophy of nonviolent resistance. The autobiography delves into King's formative years, revealing how his identity was shaped by his family, education, and spiritual beliefs. His identity as a black man in America was a catalyst for his



activism, and his commitment to justice was inseparable from his sense of self. The book illustrates how King's identity as a leader was intricately connected to his role within the civil rights movement, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between individual identity and collective resilience.

Moreover, the autobiography highlights the evolution of King's identity as he grappled with the complexities of being a leader, husband, and father within the tumultuous socio-political landscape. King's multifaceted identity played a pivotal role in his ability to mobilize and inspire others, making him a symbol of hope for those seeking equality and justice. The intersection of resilience and identity is particularly evident in King's response to the violence directed at him and his followers. His commitment to nonviolence was not just a strategic choice but an intrinsic part of his identity rooted in his Christian faith. The autobiography narrates instances where King faced personal threats and attacks, yet his resilience stemmed from a deep conviction in the righteousness of his cause and the transformative power of love.

"Hate is just as injurious to the hater as it is to the hated. Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Many of our inner conflicts are rooted in hate. This is why the psychiatrists say, "Love or perish." Hate is too great a burden to bear."

[Publisher Warner Books; Reprint edition (January 1, 2001), ISBN-100446676500, ISBN-13978-0446676502]

❖ Cognitive Dissonance and Social Cognitive Theory

▪ Social Cognitive Theory:

Observational Learning

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the role of observational learning and modeling in shaping behavior. In the context of "The Race of My Life," Milkha Singh's journey reflects elements of observational learning. Throughout the narrative, Singh discusses the influence of his early experiences and the people he observed, such as his coach and fellow athletes, on his development as an athlete. The interactions and observations of others played a significant role in shaping his beliefs, attitudes, and skills related to running.

Self-Efficacy:

Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations, is evident in Singh's narrative. The challenges he faced, both personal and professional, required a strong sense of self-efficacy to persevere. The book explores how Singh's belief in his own capabilities, nurtured through experiences and positive feedback, contributed to his success on the track. His journey serves as a case study in how self-efficacy can influence one's motivation and performance.

❖ Cognitive Dissonance Theory: I. Conflict and Resolution:

Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance theory posits that individuals experience discomfort when faced with conflicting beliefs or attitudes. In Singh's case, the psychological struggle arising from the impact of partition, the loss of family, and the challenges in his athletic pursuits could have created cognitive dissonance. The book details Singh's internal conflicts and how he navigated through them. His ability to reconcile conflicting emotions and motivations is a testament to his psychological resilience.

II. Justification and Attitude Change:

Cognitive Dissonance theory suggests that individuals seek to reduce dissonance by justifying their choices or changing their attitudes. In the narrative, Singh's commitment to his training, despite the difficulties, can be seen as a form of justifying his pursuit of excellence. The internal struggle he faced compelled him to reshape his attitudes and beliefs to align with his goals, leading to a transformative journey. In summary, the Social Cognitive Theory helps us understand how observational learning and self-efficacy played a role in shaping Milkha Singh's athletic development, while Cognitive Dissonance theory provides insights into how he dealt with internal conflicts and justified his choices on the path to success.

❖ Social Cognitive Theory:

I. Observational Learning:

Martin Luther King Jr.'s autobiography reflects the principles of Social Cognitive Theory, particularly observational learning. He was greatly influenced by his father, who was a prominent preacher and



activist. King observed his father's dedication to social justice, which played a crucial role in shaping King's beliefs and actions. Throughout his life, King continued to learn from the experiences of others, adapting and integrating their strategies into his activism.

II. Modeling Behavior

Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the role of modeling behavior, and King was a powerful model for others. His leadership during the Civil Rights Movement showcased the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance. King's ability to model peaceful protest and resilience inspired countless individuals to join the movement. His speeches and writings also served as models for effective communication and persuasive rhetoric.

❖ Cognitive Dissonance Theory:

I. Dissonance in Activism:

Cognitive Dissonance theory suggests that individuals strive for cognitive consistency and may experience discomfort when faced with conflicting beliefs or actions. In King's autobiography, there are instances where he grapples with the dissonance between his commitment to nonviolence and the violent acts committed by some within the Civil Rights Movement. This internal conflict is evident in his reflections on the challenges of maintaining a peaceful approach in the face of intense opposition.

II. Resolving Dissonance:

King actively engaged in strategies to reduce cognitive dissonance. He consistently emphasized the principles of love, peace, and nonviolence in his speeches and writings. By promoting these values, he sought to align his actions and beliefs, addressing the dissonance created by the challenges and violence surrounding the Civil Rights Movement. In summary, the autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr. provides a rich context for understanding the psychological aspects of his activism through the lenses of Social Cognitive Theory and Cognitive Dissonance Theory. These theories help illuminate the influences that shaped King's beliefs, the role of observational learning in his development, and the internal conflicts he faced in maintaining a commitment to nonviolent resistance.

❖ Self Determination Theory

“The Race Of My Life”

1. Initial Struggles and Passion: - Milkha Singh endured great adversity in his early years as a result of seeing the terrible 1947 partition of India. An innate will to triumph over hardship drove his resolve to climb beyond these obstacles and establish himself as a prominent athlete.

2. Intrinsic Motivation: - When someone is motivated by intrinsic rewards rather than by outside incentives, they are engaged in an activity for its own sake. Milkha's love of running stemmed from his strong appreciation of the sport. His sincere love for running served as his motivation for striving for greatness rather than only extrinsic motivations like celebrity or financial gain.

3. Goal-Setting: Milkha Singh's path highlights the need of establishing specific, difficult objectives. His goal was to not only compete in races but also to succeed and leave his imprint on the global scene. He was driven to push himself to the utmost and put forth endless effort to reach his goals because of their distinctiveness and complexity.

Trauma Theory

1. Childhood Trauma: Milkha starts his story with his horrific experiences as a young child during India's partition. He is profoundly affected by seeing his family members brutally killed; it changes his mentality and determines how he will act in the future.

2. Survivor's Guilt: Singh's survival regret and guilt as a result of surviving the bloodshed and mayhem of the partition. Throughout his life, this remorse recurs frequently, affecting his self-esteem and fueling his ambition for success.

3. Physiological Effects of Trauma: Singh's traumas show themselves literally, especially in the form of powerful feelings he gets during races and recurrent nightmares. These outward manifestations affect his attitude towards life and sports and act as concrete reminders of his terrible history.

4. Quest for Reconciliation and Redemption: His desire for athletic greatness might be seen as a search for solace and atonement. He hopes to overcome his painful background and regain control over his life story by succeeding on the track.



“However, I was completely unprepared for the sinister incident that almost broke my legs. The night before the selection race, I was suddenly jolted out of a deep slumber by a hard hit on my legs. A bunch of people had pinned me down and thrown a blanket over my head, so I couldn’t see them. They continued to hit me with sticks, and only stopped when my screams alerted my companions in the barrack. By the time help arrived, my assailants had fled. Even though I could not see them, I knew who they were but never had the proof to confront them directly. I only knew that I had become such a threat that people thought the only way to prevent me from winning was by breaking my legs. This was also the first time I realized there are people who firmly believe in taking short cuts to excel in sports.”
[page no. 36 Chapter 5 “This was Not Sports”]

“The Autobiography Of Martin Luther King Jr.”

1. **Intrinsic Motivation and Passion:** - The strong passion that Martin Luther King Jr. had for fairness, equity, and civil rights served as his intrinsic motivation. His sincere faith in the values of equality and respect for humanity was the source of his dedication to these causes. According to the Self-Determination Theory, King’s unwavering fight for civil rights was motivated by an innate desire to live in a society that is more just and equal.
2. **Individual Autonomy and Independence:** King’s autobiography emphasizes his independence and self-determination in the fight for civil rights. He actively led the movement for civil rights and was a key figure in several demonstrations, such as the March on Washington and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. According to the Self-Determination Theory, people are most driven when they believe that they are the source of their motivation. King’s leadership in the struggle against racial injustice is a prime example of the idea of personal agency since he aggressively claimed his individuality.
3. **Social Connection and Relatedness:** - The Self-Determination Theory places a strong emphasis on the role relatedness and social connections have in promoting motivation. King’s advocacy sprang from a strong sense of belonging and connectivity. He encouraged and motivated a varied collection of individuals to collaborate towards a shared objective. King’s capacity to create coalitions, make alliances, and bring individuals from disparate backgrounds together highlights the importance of connection in the achievement of common goals. His image of a

cherished community revolved upon the concepts of shared humanity and connectivity.

Trauma Theory

1. **Racial Trauma and Collective Trauma:** The trauma of racial injustice and prejudice in America is intricately entwined with King’s story. King’s life is characterised by the ubiquitous pain of racism; it represents not just his individual encounters with trauma but additionally the collective trauma of an African- American community. This is evident from his earliest memories of seeing separation and racial discrimination to his involvement in the fight for civil rights. His support for racial equality stems from his awareness of the pervasive injustice and suffering that his people face.
2. **Trauma and activity:** King’s activity may be viewed as a way to deal with trauma as well as a reaction to it. His dedication to peaceful resistance becomes apparent as a tactic for confronting structural injustice and offering a structure for group empowerment and healing.
3. **Psychological Toll:** King’s unwavering quest for justice has a negative impact on his mental health, resulting in periods of uncertainty, anxiety, and hopelessness. His internal conflicts and mental distress are exacerbated by the continual danger of assault and the burden of obligation.
“And in every one of us, there’s a war going on. It’s a civil war. I don’t care who you are, I don’t care where you live, there is a civil war going on in your life. And every time you set out to be good, there’s something pulling on you, telling you to be evil. It’s going on in your life. Every time you set out to love, something keeps pulling on you, trying to get you to hate. Every time you set out to be kind and say nice things about people, something is pulling on you to be jealous and envious and to spread evil gossip about them. There’s a civil war going on. There is a schizophrenia, as the psychologists or the psychiatrists would call it, going on within all of us. And there are times that all of us know somehow that there is a Mr. Hyde and a Dr. Jekyll in us...There’s a tension at the heart of human nature. And whenever we set out to dream our dreams and to build our temples, we must be honest enough to recognize it.”
[Publisher Warner Books; Reprint edition (January 1, 2001), ISBN-10 0446676500, ISBN-13 978-0446676502]

III. Conclusion

Both Milkha Singh’s “The Race of My Life” and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “The Autobiography” deftly weave together the sociological and



psychological themes that shape the lives of their respective characters. The life of Milkha Singh offers a comprehensive examination of the psychological fortitude needed to overcome both individual and societal traumas, such as the death of his family during the Indian-Pakistani split. His transformation from a troubled young man to a global sports superstar represents the meeting point of individual ambition and the shared goals of a recently established country, underscoring the sociological significance of athletics as a uniting factor. Singh's story demonstrates the power of athletics as a tool for communal healing and integration by showing how individual accomplishments may promote pride in one's country and social togetherness.

(I would like to quote Milkha Singh's last words from his work here, which he borrowed from one old Urdu couplet from Allama Iqbal (Moh. Iqbal);

**“मिट्टा दे अपनी हस्ती को अगर कोई मर्तबा चाहे
की दाना خاک में मिल कर गुले गुलज़ार होता है”**

Translation:

*Destroy Your Entire existence if you want to reach the zenith,
Coz a seed has to become one with the dust to sprout and blossom into a flower.*

However, “The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.” explores the sociological ramifications of civil rights activity in the United States as well as the psychological fortitude required to fight systematic racism. King's leadership in the civil rights struggle demonstrated the value of group action in combating societal injustices in addition to being a monument to his own bravery and moral conviction. His narrative highlights the psychological cost of combating ingrained prejudice as well as the sociological significance of underprivileged populations coming together. King's perspective enables us to witness the transforming potential of nonviolent resistance and the crucial role that empathy plays in overcoming social divides.

“I have decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to humankind's problems... Hate is too great a burden to bear. If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. Those who hate do not know God, but those who love have the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

[Publisher Warner Books; Reprint edition (January 1, 2001), ISBN-100446676500, ISBN-13978-0446676502]

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