

Multicultural Identity: Conglomeration of Reader's ideology

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Abstract

Multiculturalism has added a new dimension to the reader's world. Culture becomes central to this new dimension of knowledge, in which the urge to prove one's identity requires intensive endurance. The problems of the minority nations have created a discourse among the fiction of V.S. Naipaul and Monica Ali. The issue draws an analogy between the Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony and multiple voices. In order to prevent the state from being fallen apart, Bhikhu Parekh recommends the practice of the plurality within diversity. Examining literary conditions, it has been significantly found that the formation of new perspectives towards the cultural diversity still exists. The different factors of culture shock highlighted by the writers affirm its relevancy in the present world. Reader along with the character tries to understand the human experience within a hybrid neighborhood. The rigorous efforts are provided to prove one's homogeneity despite heterogeneity. Challenges and growth in the path of a multicultural character set the ideology of a reader in such a way that makes him form a puissant relationship with the self and the text.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Hybrid, Culture Hybridization, Multicultural society, Identity, Cultural Conflict, Reader, Cultural diversity.

Multiculturalism in literature has provided its enormous growth within the reader's domain, giving them ample space to understand the multiple voices ingrained within the text. When the text allows a space and vision, it is subjected to various interpretations. The word 'culture' becomes significant in this critical analysis. It makes one comprehend the true nature of society and one's place in it. Amalgamation of different regions, religions, and ethnicity constitute the state of immigrant with regard to the circumstances, causes great suffering and unexpected ending. While going through a text, a variety of reading behavior is expected. At the beginning of the book, the reader is introduced to the protagonist and the new set of circumstances. From this particular point of time, the journey of both reader and the character begins to move. The challenge in the path of the protagonist, especially his struggling in the multicultural environment, creates a finite period of dystopia. Author escalates in proximity, where one finds similarity and feel along with the minority community. One draws on the background knowledge and decodes the present details of events. Understanding the state of detachment from one's own country, everything looks unpleasant to the reader's heart and mind.

The universal theme of multiculturalism is embedded in the text, oftentimes establishes a story arc, unfolding over many episodes. When one interprets the true nature of the multicultural story, one knows what reading it is. One gets introduced to the numerous other aspects of the cultural diversity that depicts the exclusion of minority among the majority. The struggles of the

cultural hybridization bring about the formulation of new perspectives, forming the possible relationship between the text and the reader. The development of new culture by mixing the other cultures makes one succumb to the imperative solitude. On the grounds of historical injustices, the literature has made a significant attempt to give voice to those who are marginalized in terms of cultural plurality. The particular problem of the minority initiates with the frustration, turning to adjustment and finally the acceptance of something undesirable.

The voice of dissent has been observed in the works of V.S. Naipaul and Monica Ali, where the narrative structure of the multicultural setting is highly influential. Taking into consideration the quote of Edward Said, "... culture also becomes one of the most powerful agents of resistance in post-colonial societies..." a notional link can be established between post colonialism and culture conflict. Naipaul himself has admitted of identity confusion in his interview with Rahul Singh, "...I was born in Trinidad. I have lived most of my life in England and India is the land of my ancestors. That says at all. I am not English, not Indian, Not Trinidadian. I am my own person..." (Times of India Feb. 19, 2002). This is illustrated in the autobiographical works of the writer.

Naipaul's exiled life and issues of an identity crisis are shared with Willie Somerset Chandran in *Half a Life* (2001). Set in "an undefined place, at an undated time", the protagonist bears the consequences of his Constant exile life from India, Africa, England and Germany, which becomes a reason for cultural alienation. He has "no idea of what he wanted to do, except to get away from what he knew, and yet with very little idea of what lay outside what he knew". He remains unable to achieve the meaning of his life and struggles with the self-identity. Other characters, Ana and Willie's father share this same condition of being isolated in the novel. The feelings of meaninglessness of life, displacement and disorientation of relations with one-another takes the toll on immigrant's life. The disjointed narrative style of the novel challenges the readers to pick the different components of the text and piece together to make sense of it. It makes one question where the other half of a life has been gone? The solace is nowhere to be found like home. Through his being clogged between half identity and half culture of his father and mother, one could feel the triviality of cultural cringe along with Willie.

Another novel by Naipaul, *Miguel Street* (1959) toys with the idea of multi-ethnic society, in which racism becomes one of the dominant themes. The building of episodes is restricted to a street around the West Port of Spain, where a Trinidad is put under the microscope to be viewed during wartime, suffused with the lively hybrid geographical area of a multicultural society. It is a semi-autobiographical novel that reflects the author's experience woven-in-between. This is a topic, which Naipaul has chosen to write, while the theme is an expression of his own exile life. Coming to the story, the namelessness of a narrator is a suggestion that narrator is suffering from the identity crisis. In such a period of utter statelessness, he feels unable to adjust and leaves the country at last. "--I left them all and walked briskly towards the aeroplane, not looking back, looking only at my shadow before me, a dancing dwarf on the tarmac". The comic tone of the text helps realize the tragedy of the other characters. To name few, Man-Man, B. Wordsworth, Hat, Boyee, embraces the idea of escapism in a postcolonial world. For them, living the life of 'outsider' becomes a complex task. Through the actions of these individuals, one is able to feel the futility of inner-city life. Having a multicultural society doesn't imply a connection, a relation

between the people. This does not generate life or a dialogue. It just specifies one thing, i.e. isolation. One is willing to be vulnerable here.

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), is an outcry of the immigrants like Chanu and Nazneen; a tragedy of being adapted to the largest ethnic community. For Bangladeshis, living outside their country, there is a possibility of chances of being attacked. The culture clash between the East and the West is beyond question, generating the feelings of estrangement against the minority. The constant effort to deny one's heterogeneity fails to prove the homogeneity; one knows the Asian countries are quite different from the Western ones. Chanu takes a responsibility of teaching and encouraging his daughters to speak Bengali at home, thereby assuring himself to preserve his cultural heritage, in the non-native country. As observed in this quote,

"... 'I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one's sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. I'm talking—....' (Ali, 113)

The cultural resistance is also seen through the pages during Mrs. Islam and Razia chapter; the mother believes mixing up with the other nationalities would result in giving up their own. She specifies the clothes as a way of upholding their tradition against the other.

"...Mixing with all sorts: Turkish, English, Jewish. All sorts. I am not oldfashioned,' said Mrs Islam. 'I don't wear burkha. I keep purdah in my mind, which is the most important thing. Plus I have cardigans and anoraks and a scarf for my head. But if you mix with all these people, even if they are good people, you have to give up your culture to accept theirs. That's how it is...' (Ali, 29)"

Razia, Mrs. Islam's daughter, adopts the British way of clothing, wearing Union Jack sweater and pants. This disturbs her Bangladeshi friends. The other female protagonist, Nazneen, feels unable to communicate with the people around her, because she knows only two words, 'thank you' and 'sorry'. As a result, she turns to writing letters to her sister to express her feelings of isolation. The embodiment of cultural diversity is deep-seated in value clashes, assimilation, identity confusion and racism. Understanding of cultural acceptance in a hybrid world yields to develop prejudice against white people and their countrymen.

During the initial days of culture shock, one gets infatuated with people, food and new world views. Later, it takes the shape of the frustration. Incapable of comprehending the language, signs and gestures, communication becomes miscommunication. A short period of being uprooted, depression and loneliness starts taking place. Immigrants adjust themselves to the new environment, despite their core resistance. Not accepting fully, but familiarity with the new culture makes them feel at ease. It allows them to identify with another group of society that has

similar mindset and attitudes. On a literal level, one starts looking for opportunities to experience this new nation. Sometimes, missing home culture is okay; it gives one an assured sense of unity and belonging within cultural diversity.

Bhikhu Parekh, a political theorist and an author of *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (2002), has publicly supported the unity, which is nested in the plural society. Emphasizing on the limitation of culture, Parekh feels that believing that the whole civilization should have got all the desirable characteristics would be considered as disillusionment. One is in a continuous struggle to defend one's ethnicity. If the initiative to establish the relation could be taken by both a minority and majority, there would be no possibility of homesickness. This makes the idea relevant, as well as all the more critically important to survive in the composite society. Otherwise, without the composite society, there would be civil wars, the government would fall down and the culture will flounder. If the insights of the multiculturalism could be carefully reformulated, the conviction can be carried out. Parekh has supported his argument with three insights. Firstly, Human inherits the culture where they grow, and live within a tightly structured environment. They organize their social relations deeply rooted within the system. Sharing particular characteristics, does not mean they cannot rise above such class division. Rather, they can overcome the influences slowly and gradually. Secondly, all culture are not the same as another. They represent distinct meanings of life. To be thoroughly familiar with the part of human existence, the help of other culture is needed to perceive the intended meaning better. Stretching its intellectual and moral horizon in this modern interdependent world, one can enjoy the access to the lifestyle, making one's life likely to be richer and expressive. Thirdly, every culture being plural grows out of intercommunication consciously and unconsciously. This proposes the need to self determine their origins, being subjected to external influences always. They need to respect their internal differences, as each is carrying a bit of another self. Parekh has rightly defended the cultural diversity and coherence within the plural society, making the world realize that each culture is in relation to itself and in turn is being shaped by its relation to others.

Culture being internally plural shares the concept of polyphony by a Russian philosopher and a cultural historian, Mikhail Bakhtin. In Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, the concept of polyphony becomes allegorical, intends to communicate the notion of multiplicity of voices. Evaluating Dostoevsky's novels, a combination of different melodies comes at the forefront. When reading the text, the inbuilt Multiple views and voices promises the reality to the readers, yet making it a bit complicated at the same time; the line between the one who is dominating and the one who is being dominated gets blurred. The idea of ethnic diversity puts forth the argument that the whole text cannot be developed by one individual character or one culture. In order to set accurate plot within the connected events, real or imaginary, an author has to rely upon many characters, many culture and global civilization. This is validated on the ground that it makes an individual come across the diversification of visions shared by the community, making it more dramatic. In this type of narrative pattern, the characters are left to develop themselves through the reader's perspectives. The conflicting views are formed unevenly. The polyphonic writings reveal the different rituals and strand of thoughts. The power

of inner impulses is present, yet it assimilates the hybrid nature in autonomous ways. It gives the idea that just like a text having multiple character shares multiple culture; a community can also embrace multi-ethnic society. But calling it culture assimilation would be unjustifiable, since in assimilation, one loses his own culture in adopting another. Whereas according to Bakhtin's polyphony, the significance of one's origin is found in the relationship with others.

This concludes the argument that Literature has helped build a potential bond between a reader and a text, making one gain a deeper level of knowledge of a character's alienation in a multicultural society. The particular problems of the minority nations have been addressed, where defining one's identity through cultural resistance produces powerful imagery. Whether consciously adopted or uncritically revised, tremendous efforts have been made to preserve one's integrity. Undertones of characters in a cross-cultural environment like Willie could be heard through his internal struggle with the history, culture, heritage and roots. The Title of the novel itself has depicted the divided and incomplete life of the protagonist from post-independence India to the pre-independence Africa. His aimless journeys and homelessness demonstrated the loss of origin in the novel. The fragmentary nature of the narrative starting in the middle of the action summed up the timeline of events in which his dreams and aspiration remain unfulfilled. This transcontinental migration and multi-ethnic social cultural environment has yearned for the absolute panacea from time and space. The variety of assumptions and reactions through multiple characters present in Naipaul's *The Miguel Street* has depicted the situation of culture-clash and Diaspora in a colonial Britain. The saga of culture shock has continued with the episodes of Chanu and Nazneen. The colonial as well as postcolonial issues dealt with Ms. Islam and Razia have grown into a universal cry of resistance symbolizing the whole mankind, society and nation.

Parekh has suggested ways to overcome homesickness in a new country. His critique of diversity continues to be valid in the present world of mixed culture, where the struggle of the minority is apparent. There is no denying the fact the Parekh became a distinct voice in the growing chorus of unity in ethnic mosaic, suggesting the government bodies to implement a policy that deals with the cultural plurality. The legal, social, economic, scientific and other religious institutes have to practice uniformity and group harmony. To quote his point further, the diversiform range of speech pattern would certainly encourage free expressions among the individuals, thereby promoting interactions between self and the other. There would be fewer differences at the regional level. The rightful cultural policy would not only help nurse the victims of cultural attack, but would also become a reason to celebrate their nativity, enhancing the human values of uniqueness and individualism.

On the grounds of grievances meted out in the past, the initiative to enforce the idea has been significantly provided a voice to the marginalized community through a multicultural dialogue. An engagement with the text puts the reader's knowledge on the pedestal, open to various predictions. The hoping of back and forth with the timeline of events of the immigrant leaves one abruptly in the middle of the individual's story. This is without indication of what direction the life of minority might take. Leaving out too many tensions at the threshold of the novel, incite the reader to care more about the resolutions at the end. Intensifying of the idea into

magnitude, keeps up the interests of the audience. It makes them wonder whether the long tale of multicultural anxiety will end. There is a latent concern in the readers' insight of the text that gives it a unique edge.

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