

Embracing Diversity: The impact of Literature on Fostering Multiculturalism

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Abstract

In today's global landscape, the tapestry of nations is woven with threads of diverse races, religions, and cultures, giving rise to multicultural societies. The term "multiculturalism," popularized in the 1960s and 1970s, emerged as a lens through which scholars began to explore the intricate interactions among different cultural groups. Historically, during the colonial period, European culture held sway as the dominant force, often asserting its superiority over other cultures. However, the post-colonial movement challenged these Eurocentric perspectives, paving the way for a more inclusive understanding of cultural diversity. Multiculturalism advocates for the recognition and celebration of all cultures as equally valuable, rejecting the imposition of mainstream cultural norms onto subcultures or minority groups. In this context, literature emerges as a powerful tool for the dissemination of ideas promoting peaceful coexistence, harmony, and tolerance across all spheres of life. Through literature, the unique characteristics and nuances of various cultures are vividly portrayed, fostering greater understanding and appreciation among diverse communities. India, with its rich tapestry of cultures and languages, stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of multiculturalism. From ancient times, Indian society has embraced a multitude of cultures that have flourished in close proximity and interaction. Literature has played a pivotal role in this narrative, serving as a bridge that connects disparate cultures and fosters a sense of unity amidst diversity. By depicting the complexities of Indian society through its myriad literary works, writers have contributed to the cultivation of mutual respect and harmony among different races, religions, and linguistic groups. In essence, literature serves as a mirror that reflects the kaleidoscope of human experiences, inviting readers to explore, appreciate, and celebrate the rich tapestry of multiculturalism that defines our world.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, tolerance, embracing, harmony, multilingual, cultural, interaction, society, tapestry.

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I. Introduction

In contemporary times, the World has shrunk into a small village. We often hear that World has become a small town. Today trade and commerce, sports, social media, cultural interaction have blurred the boundaries between nations and continents. People these days easily take breakfast in one country and go for dinner in some other nation. Most of the societies in the World today are bilingual and in some cases multilingual. Literature and cultural books from original language are translated in many other languages. In short, people all over the World have come closer to each other by obliterating differences. Today people love each other and humanity in general. They respect each other's cultures and traditions. Many people belong to two places and nations and they equally love both the places and nations. Many people possess dual citizenships. Multinational companies and corporate houses show that nation is no more a boundary for doing business. Spirituality draws millions of people from all over the World to India. Today yoga is not confined to India only. One can find yoga and meditation centres in every nook and corner of the World. Bollywood and Hollywood impact is prominent and they take inspiration from each other. OTT platform have literally eradicated boundaries among nations and took the cultures of the country to each and every other country in the World. In short, today's World is multilingual and multicultural. All the countries in the World today are of different races, religions and diverse cultures. So we can see that multiple cultural communities coexist and live peacefully in a country.

Cultures and Multiculturalism: Definition and Features

Culture and multiculturalism are related terms, so let's first define the term multiculturalism and take a look at its salient features. Edward Tyler was the first philosopher anthropologist who has given a scientific definition of culture. According to Edward,

Culture.....is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities habits acquired by (a human) as a member of society.

As the above definition signifies, Taylor has shown that culture is acquired. Secondly culture is learnt. It is not biological or natural. He also made it very clear that culture is characteristic of human society alone. American anthropologist A. L. Crober and Clyde Kluckhohn defines culture in their book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* which is widely used in contemporary discussion. They define culture as

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior; acquired and transmitted by symbols constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditions (historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture system may be on the other hand as conditioning elements of future actions.

So, culture is inclusive of everything we do. It is the way we act, think and live. Culture includes traditions and ways of behaviour. The culture us learnt and transmitted from one generation to another. There are some characteristic features of culture:

- Culture is acquired.
- It determines our behaviour and patterns of action.
- It is shared behaviour and is associated with various social groups.
- Culture consists of universal as well as distinctive, individual features.
- There is a cultural difference from one society To another society.
- It is transmitted from one generation to another generation.
- It undergoes changes over the period of time.
- Culture is not static; It is dynamic.
- It consists of numerous components.
- There are two types of cultures--- material and non material cultures.

The term multiculturalism is used across discipline such as social science, management and humanities with slightly varied meanings. It is not yet defined in precise terms. All the countries in the World in contemporary times consist of diverse communities with different races, faith, religion, sexual inclinations and so on. Rosado defines multiculturalism as:

as a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognize and respect the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within the organization or society

Multiculturalism champions the protection and empowerment of minority communities within contemporary society, envisioning it as a vibrant 'salad bowl' or 'cultural mosaic'. At its core, multiculturalism upholds the pillars of freedom and tolerance, ensuring that every individual within its embrace possesses the liberty to choose their religion and cultural practices. In this inclusive framework, each group is accorded equal status, dismantling the notion of cultural hierarchy by affirming that no culture is inherently superior or inferior. Rather, every cultural expression is celebrated as a unique facet contributing to the rich tapestry of society, preserving its distinct identity while enriching the collective whole. The hallmark of multiculturalism lies in its celebration of diversity, encompassing a spectrum of races, religions, nationalities, and beyond. This diversity not only fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures but also serves as a catalyst for personal growth and societal cohesion. Multiculturalism staunchly rejects all forms of domination and exclusion, striving to dismantle stereotypes and prejudices that perpetuate harm against minority communities. In its essence, multiculturalism stands as a beacon of inclusivity and equality, fostering a society where every voice is heard, valued, and respected.

Role of Literature in Promoting Multiculturalism

The term multiculturalism is used in literature with variety of meanings. Literature can be used as a potent medium to teach and spread multiculturalism in a country like India. It can also illustrate multicultural themes and ideas in a country. Literature reveals the beauty of peaceful coexistence. Multilingual writers bring a unique richness to literature, catering to diverse audiences across borders. Their works not only bridge linguistic divides but also offer insights into cultural nuances and societal complexities. Through the subtle interplay of languages, they weave narratives that reflect the intricacies of identity, belonging, and heritage.

In multicultural literature, writers delve into the heart of national discourse, exploring historical legacies, contemporary challenges, and the evolving tapestry of human experience. By illuminating the intersecting threads of individual lives within broader societal frameworks, they invite readers to ponder universal truths amidst the kaleidoscope of cultural diversity.

Moreover, multicultural literature serves as a beacon for marginalized communities, amplifying their voices and shedding light on their struggles, triumphs, and aspirations. By portraying the mosaic of human existence in all its shades, it fosters empathy, understanding, and solidarity across boundaries of race, ethnicity, and lifestyle.

In essence, multicultural literature is a testament to the power of storytelling as a means of celebration, critique, and reconciliation in our increasingly interconnected world. It also offers an opportunity to look into other cultures. It enriches readers understanding of culture and helps them in understanding cultural diversity in a much better way. Multicultural literature teaches readers to empathize with other people's culture and accept pluralism and diversity as part of life. According to Sanders:

Multicultural literature is a body of literature that spans all literary genres but generally focuses on primary characters who are members of underrepresented groups whose racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation or culture, history has been marginalized or mis-represented by the dominant culture.

Multicultural literature offers a wide range of representation in depicting all cultural groups. Literature of indigenous people and immigrants help to promote multiculturalism. It also exposes them to culture of other people. It also provides an opportunity to cross cultural interaction so much so that it gives a platform to perceive similarities and differences among culture. Multicultural literature promotes the intercultural harmony, tolerance and it also changes the perception of the people regarding the various other cultural groups.

Multiculturalism in Indian Society

India stands as a testament to the rich tapestry of human civilization, a mosaic of cultures and traditions woven together across millennia. Its ancient roots stretch back through the annals of time, fostering an unparalleled continuity of heritage and wisdom. Within its borders lie a myriad of cultures, each with its own unique identity and contribution to the collective narrative of the nation. For countless centuries, India has been a melting pot where diverse peoples, languages, and beliefs converge, creating a vibrant tapestry of humanity. With over 122 languages and 432 dialects spoken, the linguistic landscape of India is a testament to its unparalleled diversity, from the classical elegance of Sanskrit to the global resonance of modern English. Similarly, the spectrum of races and religions that call India home is as varied as it is profound, encompassing a kaleidoscope of beliefs and practices that have coexisted and intermingled for centuries. Yet, within this rich tapestry, lies a deeper complexity—a myriad of subcultures and communities, each adding their own hue to the vibrant palette of Indian society. These cultural threads, distinct yet interwoven, converge to form the rich fabric of Indian identity, constantly evolving and adapting as different social and cultural groups interact and negotiate with one another. To reduce India's multicultural essence to a single ideological concept would be to overlook the intricate interplay of history, tradition, and diversity that defines this ancient land.

Contribution of Indian Writers in Promoting Multiculturalism

The rich tapestry of cultural diversity woven into the works of prominent Indian writers such as Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Rohinton Mistry. These authors skillfully explore the interactions and intersections of various cultures, drawing from their own experiences in both their adopted countries and their homelands, as well as the legacies of their ancestors.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* exemplifies this exploration by delving into the lives of characters straddling two worlds, India and America, and the complex interplay of cultures shaping their identities. Rohinton Mistry, on the other hand, focuses on the Parsi community, particularly in Mumbai and beyond, capturing their struggles to adapt to a new culture while preserving their own way of life. His works are often described as "ethnocentric" and "community specific" due to their deep immersion in Parsi culture.

Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* stands out for its meticulous portrayal of cultural diversity, capturing the nuances of Indian society with intricate detail. Through these authors' works, readers are invited to explore the complexities of cultural identity, the tensions between tradition and modernity, and the enduring influence of heritage on individual lives.

II. Conclusion

Culture serves as the foundation upon which individuals build their identities and navigate society, influencing our thoughts, actions, and way of life. However, in today's interconnected world, isolation is no longer a viable option for any country. Multiculturalism has become a defining feature of societies worldwide, where diverse races, religions, and cultures coexist.

Multiculturalism celebrates the richness of diversity, rejecting any form of cultural hegemony and advocating for the equal recognition of mainstream culture, subcultures, and minor cultures. It stands against the dominance of any single culture, particularly ethnocentric, white, European culture, promoting instead intercultural harmony and tolerance. Subcultures play a vital role in enriching the broader cultural landscape, contributing unique perspectives and traditions that enhance the fabric of society. They teach us the importance of acceptance and respect for all cultures, fostering religious and racial harmony.

Literature serves as a powerful tool in promoting multiculturalism, disseminating the values of harmony and tolerance while revealing the intricacies and nuances of various cultures. Through literature, readers are transported into the lives and experiences of diverse individuals, fostering empathy, understanding, and appreciation for cultures different from their own. Ultimately, literature serves as a bridge, connecting people across cultural boundaries and promoting a more inclusive and harmonious world.

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