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MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE: A CRITIQUE OF INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT

Dr Nagnath Ramrao Totawad

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,
Vivekanand College, Samarthnagar,
Aurangabad, MS, India*

Abstract:

As John Rex states, "Diversity has to be recognized within ethnic communities," and thinks that multiculturalism highlights the notion of diversity and individualized particularity and uniqueness. As a mode of study and knowledge multiculturalism enriches and widens one's life and horizons. Postmodernism also celebrates the right of all classes and castes i.e. Women, Asian-Americans, Afro-Americans, Dalits, Homosexuals and so on. It is also known as a manifestation of postmodernism which tries to break the hegemony of the dominant culture in advanced capitalist countries. Culture of Indian-Subcontinent is a culture of many languages. It is also known as a multicultural one which represents Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and Jews. The cultures are broadly divided into two categories including the religions: Majority and Minority.

Keywords: *Culture, Identity, Minority, Majority, Marginal, Traditional, Diverse, Zoroastrian, etc.*

Multiculturalism is closely associated with 'identity politics', 'the politics of difference', and 'the politics of recognition', all of which share a commitment to revaluing disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups. Multiculturalism is also a matter of economic interests and political power; it demands remedies to economic and political disadvantages that people suffer as a result of their minority status. The novel *Untouchable* highlights the world of minority communities through the representative Bakha. The dominant cultures' social control over power structures and helplessness of the minority cultures is the main concern of the writing.

Multiculturalists take for granted that it is 'culture' and 'cultural groups' that are to be recognized and accommodated. Yet multicultural claims include a wide range of claims involving religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and race. Culture is a notoriously overbroad concept, and all of these categories have been subsumed by or equated with the concept of culture. Language and religion are at the heart of many claims for cultural accommodation by immigrants. As a postcolonial critique, Multiculturalism stands for the rights of the marginalized and weaker sections of the society. It challenges the center while being the periphery. According to Edward Said Western histories have only projected oriental culture as inferior and worthless. Multiculturalism acknowledges the very presence of many cultures as cultural pluralism based on race, ethnicity and language. It also believes on the principal of equal respect and value to all the cultures and each is special, valuable and admirable.

Culture of Indian Subcontinent is known as multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural society. Diversity in unity of all types is the very soul of the culture of Indian-subcontinent. The religious minorities are diverse groups mostly based on religious, linguistic and

cultural lines. The religious minorities are recognized by the constitution are Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and the Jains. Hindus who are constituted as majority in the country are a minority particularly in North-East states like Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram etc.

The oneness of the culture of Indian-subcontinent has absorbed and retained the minority communities as an individual entity. It's a great heritage and a reflection of history, culture and language shows the unity in diversity. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India highly appreciates the culture of Indian-subcontinent and its diversity as follow; "Invading cultures, beginning with Aryans and continuing through the Muslims and the British, all became absorbed in the oneness of India..... Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu and English all have become Indian languages giving birth to their Indiannized varieties. Many cultures, sub cultures..... Including minorities in their aggressive bid for recognition also threaten the unit of oneness that holds together the wealth of diversity".

R. Parthasarathy, the well-known Indian poet expresses that the minority cultures are the clash and din of many tongues. Muslim is one of the largest minorities in number. He further said that the minority communities though they settled in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Britain and U.S. express the uniqueness and belonging. The minority communities also help to make Indian-subcontinent's identity diverse and unique comparing to other nation. Minority communities, on the other hand are preserving their ethnic values, beliefs, modes of interaction and faiths. It is the greatness of the tradition of Indian-subcontinent which holds all the minority communities together despite of many ethnic differences. English language plays a very dominant role in this regards, it is the only language which hold all the communities together despite of their ethnic differences. English is the only medium of communication of all the minority communities which helps to communicate and understand to each other properly. It helps them to unite with each other besides their own national or cultural language. The minorities remained the same from the very past in keeping their faith and tradition. The English language has also supported them to communicate overseas.

Culture of Indian-Subcontinent is a land of religious multiplicity consists of many religions and their faith. Swami Vivekananda, the idol of youth has first introduced the Indian Religions in the U.S. in 1890. According to him India is a nation stood for simplicity and the West for materialism. It is the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come. It is above all the land of introspection and spirituality. India, thus, is the great attraction to other due to its religious multiplicity. Feroza Jussawalla, the eminent writer marks the identity of minority writers through interviews with them. According to him Khushwant Singh represents the Sikh minority Salman Rushdie- the Muslim, Rohinton Mistry, Farrukh Dhondy and Bapsi Sidhwa represents the Parsi. Jussawalla further states that minority writers have affirmed their community in their own way.

Mark Twain, an American novelist marks his experience as about the diversity in unity of India as follow; "He had come at last to the land that everyone desires to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give up that glimpse for all that shows of the world combined.... India was the mother of history and the grandmother of traditions; it was the home of thousand religions and two million gods".

The multiplicity of religion is a fusing of memories and experiences. Religion is often called as a lived religion of shared experiences which unite people into a community. Religion is also known as a part of culture and patterns of behavior and thought which transmitted from one generation to another.

Minority literature is known as a literature of protest against cultural and social categories. As a protest literature, it voices out against the existing system and tries to find an alternative. It also aims to bring out a picture of minority lives 'as in' in a fictional representation'. Minority literature is pitted against the mainstream literature which has a long history while minority literature is a recent offshoot. The voices of minority religions rose since Indian Independence. It is the literature which

talks about the minority experience. The minority literature tries to build a bridge between mainstream and minority texts within the context of cultural categories. It is the literature raises voices against the social inequalities of cultural categories like caste, creed, gender, sex and so on. The minority writers and their literature documents and chronicles their personal community experiences. It's an important and significant mark of the minorities and important concept to comprehend and intercept. Quite contrast to it, the mainstream writers takes a spiritual subject and a vast canvas.

Majority and minority are the terms used to refer systems of beliefs taken place through centuries within the Indian- subcontinents. The communities like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are the indigenous to the subcontinent while Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism are known as non-Indian-Systems originated outside the subcontinent; Islam, Judaism and Christianity have common origins and belief pattern. On the other hand Zoroastrian have its origin in Iran and roots in India. All these communities have many similarities and variations. The communities believe in reincarnation means all living things will die and again will be reborn. The communities also believe in 'Karma' which focuses on the idea of all actions that lead to rebirth. Religion is often used as 'Dharma' in Indian context while religion in Western.

The diversity in unity and oneness is the soul feature of Indian-Subcontinents, is divided in many languages, religions, sects and sub sects. It is thus, difficult to think of minorities and ethnic identities in this vast multicultural nation. On the other side the ethnic groups (communities) have made their own identity at cultural, traditional and societal level. Each and every entity like community, religion and language are the part and parcel of the nation. The writing of minority writers is very much important in this regard, as it expresses the uniqueness, belonging and diversity of the nations. The literary piece, voices of minority in fiction makes much contribution to the reaffirmation of people's ideas, goals and values. It is also a systematic study of cultural contact and cultural change. The literary genre, fiction written by minority writers is of special importance in this regard. The fiction helps the reader to have a glance and intimate peep into their cultural, psychological & religious level. The minorities and their overall identity, status and cultural practices are very complex, critical and unresolved. The careful analysis and appraisal is much essential to demystify the concept and its proper care. The feelings and sensibilities of minorities and their position begin to create a mind set at each and every level. The well-known novelist D.S. Maini expresses his views on the different contexts of literature as follow:

In fact, a most expressive evidence of a corporate mind-set is a critical reading of a people, art and literature. For in art, particularly in fiction, such a mind-set gets structured and mirrored through the very processes and energies of art. Its inner dialectic hoists the show.... In sum, it's a slow and long process of emotional orientation which in the end disorients the corporate sensibility and begins to cause problems of a deep psychological nature. Communities or minorities find themselves trapped, engulfed and victimized, both as fact and fantasy? (Maini, 22)

It is necessary to study the concept of minority community, minority voices and their role is much important in the modern context. What is the role of minority culture in India? How do they find expression? The minority identity, division and separate status didn't affect the unity in diversity. The writing of minority writers is unique in this sense which expresses the belonging and diversity in unity. The Indian tradition holds all together in spite of their ethnic differences. The minorities though they Parsis, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians have a common bond of unity. The minorities live in any nation (India, Pakistan, Britain and U.S.) have a same affection and unity towards each

other. Each community holds together with other in and across the boundaries respectively. It's the great Indian heritage has hold the entire ethnic group together since the sixty years of independence. It is thus, much important to study and listen the voices of minority community. It's the greatness of India which holds together the diversity into unity. The minorities have identity and status at one side and on the other they face invisibility, religion and its loss of identity.

In short, India is known as a multicultural nation and multiculturalism is its dominant feature which represents unity in diversity. Multiculturalism is one of the multifaceted and flexible notions that keep India integrated. The writers like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulkraj Anand have very well portrayed the nation as a multicultural one through their novels such as *Kantapura*, *Guide* and *Untouchable* respectively. Based on the principles of co-operation, tolerance, respect, love and variety, multiculturalism coexists many cultures and subcultures altogether to develop healthy society. The Indian novelists try to focus on the social, cultural and religious history of India though the Indian society is divided on the basis of religion, caste and class.

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To Cite the Article: Totawad, Nagnath, R., "Multicultural Literature: A Critique of Indian Sub-Continent". *Literary Cognizance*, I-2 (Sept., 2015): 36-39. Web.