

Nuances of Multiculturalism: A Strategic Response to Postcolonial Hegemony.

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Introduction

Postcolonial literature directs the readers to new arrays of interpretations – whether it is ideological, political, societal or familial – the individual voice is now having more strength rather than mere echoes. The role of the individual in the ‘glocalised’ scenario is clearly throwing light on the contradictory patterns in appreciating literature as such. The angst and perils of the contemporary human being is illuminated through the gloomy rays of the artist’s weapon for justice.

The writers in the latter half of the twentieth century expound serious issues in their works for a more just and democratic existence with the portrayal of usually underprivileged others. These characters’ search usually intersects with social and civil movements. Therefore we can say that the real intention behind the postmodern thought is to re-establish the ‘individual self and its relations’ in a more pragmatic way than mere depiction of commonalities.

Celebration of estrangement, dilapidation, ethical binaries, realistic narratives, diversified mythical patterns of story telling, all have their own predominance in the genre of fiction. One man’s voice in the mouths of many and vice versa could be experienced more fruitfully in the literature of the period. The ways in which the present day writers approach

literary texts, vehemently puts forth the significance of the literature in mankind's struggle for existence.

The individual is one who is also the representative voice of his period whether it can be generalised or not. Whatever happens to the individual is also a matter of due relevance because he is one among the many, who still plays his role in society, affecting others and is responsible for his actions. It is meaningful to people who made it, live and understand it, precisely because they are at home in it. The transformative power of postmodern ethics elevates the path where one's knowledge translates into ethics. To live in a multicultural society, one needs an efficacy which should be formulated from the vivified pattern of experience.

Objectives

1. To delineate the significance of the theory of Multiculturalism with reference to the novel "White Teeth" by the Jamaican grounded British author Zadie Smith, who's known for her contributive struggle against racial and political discriminations in contemporary life situations. He aims to find out how far the familial nuances problematize the characters' quest in the contemporary world.
2. The researcher aims to bring forth the relevance of analyzing the fiction of Zadie Smith as the representative of distanced native and how far the ethical prospects in the novel substantiate the significance of the writer, which enables her to become the real representative of contemporary human having hybridized consciousness.

Placing Zadie Smith in British Fiction

Zadie Smith was born in 1975 in North London to a native Jamaican mother and an English father. She finished her high school and college in London, and graduated in 1998 from Cambridge University. She is a one of a kind writer because of her only two published novels. "White Teeth" was the winner of two literary awards, while "The Autograph Man" penetrated the British literary scenario in the periods after 2000. The novels clearly elevated Smith in the literary plane of novelty and artistic calibre.

Even though she was not born or brought up in Jamaica, she finds in tune with the patterns of tradition, language, customs and culture of her real 'motherland' Jamaica. Therefore the cleft in direct experience can be rightly assumed as not a necessary prerogative for analysing the double minded strands in her works. She, within her achieved lacuna, tries to speak for a good many number of people and their struggles. Zadie doesn't have a lot of good childhood memories to relate. Her parents mutually filed for a divorce when she was

only 14, which made her doubt the very strand of relationships. She grew up in a multiracial, multi-ethnic neighbourhood of London – Willesden Green.

As far as her first novel “White Teeth” history and origins are concerned, she says that it all began as a small story. She watered and nurtured the plot with her resilient thoughts. Smith is comfortable in her identity as British, attributing this partly to the fact that “I’m not an immigrant” although she “was around people who had that experience, who felt separated or cut in two, who had moved from one country to another, who had that sense of leading two lives” (Ellam n.p.). Smith, then, is well situated to represent how both immigrants and their offspring found ways to negotiate their identities and develop a sense of belonging in Britain.

White Teeth’s exploration of the role of history and culture questions how presumptions of homogeneity and white superiority cause, or at least play into, racist philosophies in Britain; immigrants have to negotiate this historical posturing when forming British identities, particularly given the heightened ethnic tensions of the 1970s and 1980s Thatcherite racism. For her Indian-born Samad, as for the white British, “tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles. That didn’t mean he could live by them, abide by them, or grow in the manner they demanded, but roots were roots and roots were good” (WT 161).

Samad persistently takes refuge in traditional, idealized, past narratives at the expense of his present self. Like those who still hold onto a homogeneous notion of “Britishness,” Samad fails to recognize that Britain has changed. The example of Samad allows Smith to satirize the reliance on a history—a history that is seldom the bedrock that one takes it to be; history can be variously comprehended. Samad serves to demonstrate that while history is relevant, it is also relative. History informs the present and the future; however, it always involves interpretation.

Multiculturalism as an Ideological Doctrine

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused pity and contempt. one ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn as under.”

The above words are taken from W.E.B. Du Bois's work "The Souls of Black Folk", published in 1903. This clearly drives our attention to the mental trauma experienced because of racial hegemony and the fixed notions of the period.

Cultures are inherited from ancestors and are responsible for shaping human lives. We have different visions of good life which can only be made possible when we have access to other cultures. No doubt all cultures are internally plural and have assimilations of each among them. Cultures grow out of conscious and unconscious interactions with each other. We need to understand other's cultural values in order to better understand our intellectual and moral horizon. We can leave narcissism behind and can become richer in cultural values. From a multiculturalist's perspective, no political doctrine or ideology can represent the full truth of human life. Each of them – be it liberalism, conservatism, socialism or nationalism – is embedded in a particular culture, represents a particular vision of the good life, and is necessarily narrow and partial.

The globalized world is torn between the notions of society and the individual. A novice finds it very difficult to survive, for we are not the real whole, but parts of the whole. To live in a multicultural society, one needs an efficacy which should be formulated from the vivified pattern of experience. I would like to concentrate on the standards of life and the resistance cult in our world of atrocities. Leading a life on ethical prospects is not always a fruitful endeavour. But the way in which one resists and leads his life to the path of achievement is something admirable. The silence in the violent world of gestures and its pros and cons, all gain importance in the gateways of knowledge.

Homi K. Bhabha in his "The Location of Culture" (1994) looks for 'in-betweenness'. According to him, Hybridity is the composite notion of the contemporary post-colonial condition. In his famous essay "Cultural identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall re-evaluates the traditional notions of culture and identity. He puts forth the idea that identity is not a completed phenomenon, on the other hand, always in the process of rectification and refinement. "Being and becoming", both are equally interesting and relevant.

When different cultures grow in the same space in harmony, then that society is called multicultural. It is a state of cultural and ethnic diversity within the demographic of social space. Multiculturalism is neither a political doctrine nor any philosophical view but it is a perspective of viewing human life. Human beings are culturally embedded that they grow up in a culturally structured world where they organize their lives

and maintain social relations in terms of culturally derived system of meaning and significance.

The multiculturalist maintains that each person is simply a representative of a particular biologically defined perspective who must agree with his own group's worldview (unless he wants to be ostracized) and thus be unable to rationally discuss and meaningfully evaluate and critique ideas with representatives of other groups. The immigrant experience, although it can be usefully generalized, creates different issues of identity for males and females. Differences in the social and material conditions of gendered lives, particularly when considered across seas and cultures, require different strategies to negotiate identity.

Multiculturalism thus destroys an individual's confidence in his own mind—this occurs when a person allows his group to tell him what to believe. The long-running Western colonialist perspective of nation seems to be: that simply by drawing lines on a piece of paper and forming a government within those lines, a cohesive political entity can be created. A perfect example of this lies in the formation of modern India. Prior to British colonization of India, there existed, in relative harmony, one of the most diverse and heterogeneous populations on the planet. Communities and culture gave people their identity. By the time India achieved its independence, however, the British had created a bureaucracy, boundaries and centralized government, in the likeness of the prototypical Western nation-state. Another example could be a participant in the Negritude movement in Africa, who could celebrate being black only by contrasting black with white. And yet another example lies with any country, any nation, which is at war with another. Nationalist sentiment reaches a crescendo during war by differentiating one's own country from that of the enemy.

The White Teeth

Of mixed heritage herself, Smith recognizes that identity is always complex and in flux. *White Teeth* suggests that immigrants negotiate their identities across many different boundaries and increasingly take advantage of the changing circumstances of life in Britain that have been created by the struggles of preceding and contemporary immigrant groups. Britain's collective "social imaginary" gradually opened itself to ideas of a multicultural British identity. Nevertheless, Smith points to how, despite improvements in "race" relations, ongoing discrimination led to missed opportunities in transitioning to a truly multicultural society.

Compared to their parents, second generation migrants had more choices in identity formation, but, they also experienced more confusion about belonging to either one

culture or another. The suggestion is that towards the end of the twentieth century, this confusion—this sense of belonging everywhere and nowhere—left some young British Muslims susceptible to indoctrination by religious-political groups which offered a strong identity framework. The present day newspaper reports and experiences clearly bring forth the dire need to concentrate on this injustice,.

Homi.K.Bhabha puts forth his idea of hybridity to explain the very unique sense of identity shared and experienced individually by members of a former colonized people. He maintains that members of a postcolonial society have an identity which has been shaped jointly by their own unique cultural and community history, intertwined with that of the colonial power. In Bhabha's definition of hybridity, the notion of cultural diversity, meaning the existence of "pre-given cultural 'contents' and customs" that support "liberal notions of multiculturalism" and are being based upon "a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the inter-textuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity" (155), is rigidly put into question and replaced by the concept of Cultural Difference.

The basic assumption of Bhabha's idea of Cultural Difference is that, "Cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation of Self to Other". On the one hand, Bhabha denies the possibility of a pure culture with this statement; on the other hand he dissolves the strict binary oppositions emerging from thinking in such categories. Multiculturalism is anti-individualistic in the sense that it expects each person to agree with the perceptions, thoughts, and judgments of his group in order for his own perceptions, thoughts, and judgments to be legitimate. The multiculturalist believes that a person's thoughts are either the collectively constructed thoughts of his racial, ethnic, or sexual group or are the thoughts foisted upon him by the dominant white male worldview. A ruling premise of multiculturalism is that ethnic origin carries with it irrevocable attributes—if a person has a certain name and physical features, then he must have a particular perspective on life and the world.

Conclusion

The significance of a work of art primarily exists in its universality, its appeal to all people regardless of time and culture. The perceived breaking of the relationship between man and man, and man and the world are the main sources of modern literary artists. After all human life in one way or the other passes through the same dilemmas and confusions to a great extent. Literary works that enable us to draw significance from our own

experiences, or that writing which opens the way to a kind of truth about ourselves, fascinates the reader. In philosophy, the same idea is phrased theoretically: whether stories are able to yield structures, which connect our own lives and life situations.

To claim to be representative of an entire identity is a huge undertaking for an author trying to convey a postcolonial message. Each nation, province, island, state, neighbourhood and individual is its own unique amalgamation of history, culture, language and tradition. Only by understanding and embracing the idea of cultural hybridity when attempting to explore the concept of national identity can any one individual, or nation, truly hope to understand or communicate the lasting effects of the colonial process. Thus Post-colonial writing comprises a strong reaction against negative stereotypes constructed during the colonial period.

Multicultural literary works examine the lives of individuals posing questions that strike at the very core of our humanity and what it means to survive, or pass away. They follow characters as they struggle either actively or passively to retain a human centre when confronted with a brutal, oppressive reality. The person who has achieved harmony with the society and the unification in his own nature achieves harmony with the universe. It may seem as if we must have certain knowledge about ourselves and our motivations at any moment in order to be honest about the ethics that guide our actions, which make the process of maturation in the most significant level. The multicultural writer's characters demonstrate that the struggle to adopt ethically responsible attitudes is deeply connected to the struggle to know oneself.

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