

Multiculturalism: Concepts, Theories, Uses and Future Possibilities

Abstract

The multifarious influences and exchange of thoughts have always been contributing towards the enrichment and dynamism of different kinds of literature in the world. Since the advent of revolution in the realm of information and communication, the process of exchange of ideas, values and expressions have become more pronounced and intensified. The present paper deals with the concept of multiculturalism defined in various ways and its various theories propounded by different critics. Besides, there are certain methods and techniques that can help to generate and progress multiculturalism. It is of much use in the present scenario. But if it is utilized in proper way, it can be of great importance.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Globalisation, Migration, Diaspora, The Decoupling of Culture, Unity in Diversity.

Introduction

The concept of Multiculturalism in the present era initiated the intermixing of diasporic population with native communities. The existence of multiple cultures has cast a deep rooted impact on literary expression of present times. The essence of multiculturalism, the undergirding concept of education, is the ability to celebrate with the other in a manner that transcends all barriers and bring about a unity in diversity.

Aim of the Study

My objective in this research is to make it clear that cultural diversity is an important aspect of literature and contemporary literacy world today in recreating itself out of the social turmoil of the 1960s and the reaction against institutional literature, produced as a factor in its own redefinition a multicultural frame of reference within itself.

Review of Literature

The proposed section of the subject for the paper has become a burning topic which has started attracting the attention of critics, scholars and guides all over the world. In fact, multiculturalism is an interdisciplinary phenomenon and involves the scholars from other disciplines also.

Concepts and Hypothesis

Multiculturalism is a term that was introduced into the political bureaucratic language decades ago, and has since become synonymous with diversity and tolerance all over the world.

Research Design

The content analysis method is used. A study of primary sources as well as secondary sources would be made and the researcher has tried to trace out religio-philosophical, literary and spiritual influencing factors.

We are living in an age of globalization, the effects of which increasingly influence considerable parts of our life. Globalisation no longer simply describes international cashflows the semantics of the multiculturalism has broadened to include other dimensions too. Thus globalization refers not merely to the sphere of economics but also draws attention to the colonial/neocolonial underpinnings of the wealth of the Western world and the deprivation of the so-called developing countries. In this context, the international movement that has formed against the effects of globalization demands that Europe's and American's role in the international trade must be reconsidered. From its origins as a merely descriptive term, globalization has become a critical vocabulary demanding social justice and global responsibility from the countries of the Western world whose wealth depended and still depends on the exploitation of the resources of the southern hemisphere.

If the global village disguises a global pillage, globalization also forces us to rethink issues of culture and community. What is at stake in

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this context is not so much a McDonaldisation of the world or the ubiquity of CNN or MTV but the increasingly multicultural character of Western societies. In the wake of colonialism and neocolonialism large numbers of people all over the world have turned their backs on their home countries and migrated either in order to escape persecution or poverty. While the large-scale migrations from Africa, the Caribbean and the Asian subcontinent into the Anglo-American Diaspora have altered the composition of Western societies profoundly, the changes that these immigrants to Britain, Canada or the US have initiated have been more than sociological insofar as they have also brought with them cultural identities of their own. The major demographic, social and cultural changes of the last decades demand a new critical perspective that takes into account the issues of minority communities.

As will be discussed in greater detail below, multiculturalism as a new paradigm can be said to recognize the effects of globalisation by accounting for the migrant's cultural differences. No matter which view on multiculturalism as a policy one takes, it seems beyond dispute that a truly multicultural perspective cannot but acknowledge that migration is a move with far-reaching consequences for the host societies but also, often more drastically, for the individual migrant. Arguably one of the most pressing problems for those forsaking their homes for a new country is the construction of a new identity. In more accessible terms, the central concern for many who feel themselves uprooted, is how to make life in the diaspora 'liveable'. We cannot but acknowledge that migration is a move with far-reaching consequences for the host societies but also, often more drastically, for the individual migrant.

The concept of 'multiculturalism' has been defined in various ways and the socio-political and literary luminaries have endeavored to define the term in their own ways. As Kymlicka has tried to define it, "Much of the post multiculturalism is characterized as a feel-good celebration of ethno-cultural diversity encouraging citizens to acknowledge and embrace the panoply of customs, traditions, music, and cuisine that exist in a multiethnic society."

But Rosado was of the view that, "multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects 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 an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society." And Yasmin Alibhai-Brown calls this "the '3S' model of multiculturalism in Britain - saris, samosas, and steeldrums." Whatever may be the definition, but one thing is clear that 'Multiculturalism' is a term that was introduced into the political bureaucratic language decades ago, and has since become synonymous with diversity and tolerance all over the world. It is an empirical demographic condition referring to a society (which may or may not be a nation-state but may also include an empire) having two or more ethnic groups, each having cultural traits that may have some overlap with the other groups, yet is distinctive enough to form a different cultural identity and

community. The relationships of the groups may be at par in terms of power-sharing, or the groups may stand in relation to one another in a hierarchy, with marked social inequality in certain desirable attributes such as wealth, education, status, political influence etc.

The meaning of multiculturalism changes with the change of time and place. As in modern times multiculturalism shares several points in common with earlier broad movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example labor movements and nationalist movement as it is the making of claims of cultural nationalism. The postmodern approach is completely different from the modern view of identity. The postmodern view has challenged 'group', identity as it emphasizes concepts such as 'fluidity', 'migration', 'diaspora', 'crossing', and 'decent ring', (Benwell and Stokoe). The term diaspora, once synonymous with ethnic or homeland identity, has come to refer to a dynamic and heterogeneous notion of community (Brooker).

"Diaspora represents the identities of those moving between cultures 'unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of the other'" (Hall). The term hybridity is used to "destabilise a fusion of cultural identities and attempts to "destabilize traditional binaries and myths of cultural homogeneity" (Benwell and Stokoe). Crossing is a sociolinguistic term that defines the interethnic adoption of styles or codes of talk of an outgroup. Though the poststructuralist approach has challenged essentialist notions of identity, the membership of a specific, named collectivity may be a marked and politically motivated strategy to make oneself and one's interests 'visible' and 'included' (Spivak).

Thus multiculturalism may be defined as reaching out both the native-born and newcomers, in developing lasting relationships among ethnic and religious communities. It encourages these communities to participate fully in society by enhancing their level of economic, social and cultural integration into the host cultures.

There are two aspects of multiculturalism: they are cultural diversity and communal diversity. Andrew Heywood differentiates between two forms of multiculturalism. "The term 'multiculturalism' has been used in a variety of ways, both descriptive and normative. As a descriptive term, it has been taken to refer to cultural diversity... As a normative term, multiculturalism implies a positive endorsement, even celebration, of communal diversity, typically based on either the right of different groups to respect and recognition or to the alleged benefits to the larger society of social and cultural diversity".

In our present social, economic and political conditions multiculturalism is immensely useful. It not only enables the migrants to share all the activism of communities but also increases their economic and social status besides their cultural integration with the hosts. There came drastic changes as an after-effect of a host of migrations. But the notion of multiculturalism made them to acknowledge the fact that the contemporary society is made up of discrete and assorted groups. Various critics have discussed this value of multiculturalism as C. James Trotman

opines that it “uses several disciplines to highlight neglected aspect of our social history, particularly the histories of women and minorities... and promotes respect for the dignity of the lives and voices of the forgotten. By closing gaps, by raising consciousness about the past, multiculturalism tries to restore a sense of wholeness in a postmodern era that fragments human life and thought”. But some of the critics argue that multiculturalism is a concept not about racial minorities but to bring harmonious relations between different cultural societies. Bhikhu Parekh views that, “multiculturalism is in fact ‘not about minorities’ but is about the proper terms of relationship between different cultural communities”, which means that the standards by which the communities resolve their differences e.g. “the principles of justice” must not come from only one of the cultures but must come “through an open and equal dialogue between them”. It is true that multiculturalism is a weapon of justice which can solve quite a number of differences between various cultural communities including minorities.

For the proper study of the rise and fall of multiculturalism throughout the world, it is important to put multiculturalism in its historical context. Canada is said to be the first nation which initiated the ideology of multiculturalism because of people’s compulsion on the social importance of immigration. Australia has also adopted it where it has been displaced by assimilation. This has been followed by certain European countries and it became their official policy also. Under Tony Blair’s administration the British Government adopted multicultural policies. There are more than 150 different ethnic groups in Russia. India is the country where multiculturalism has not been much used, but diversity is often applied. And across the globe, India has been regarded as the culturally, most diverse country racially, linguistically, ethnically and religiously. Multiculturalism is predominantly found in Mauritius which consists of various ethnic and religious groups.

But there came a sudden change in the prospects of multiculturalism after the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001. This gave a jolt to the free flow of multiculturalism and a new political climate emerged which was fearful of multiculturalism.

The diversity of cultures appeared to provide a base for more terrorist attacks and Islam particularly was seen as doing this. An attempt was made by the United States to establish a coalition of nations against terrorism that would destroy terrorist bases across the world. On the other hand, there was little chance of those opposing this coalition seeking a multicultural solution. Rather they established their own international networks of opposition and regarded any party, sect or nation not joining these networks as allies of the American-led coalition. The war against terrorism continued in 2002, making multiculturalism an impossible and unrealizable ideal except in the limited sense in which the coalition or the international network of resistance used it to strengthen its own unity.

Edward A. Tiryakian examines the recent history of multiculturalism as a concept. For Tiryakian

, the decoupling of culture, nation and state, together with global movements in migration, have fostered multiculturalism as an ideology and as a demographic reality that needs to be addressed. Along with the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation and environmental destruction, one of the principal problems confronting world society today is the problem of racial / ethnic hostility and cultural insensitivity i.e. the new wine of racial / ethnic ferment in conflict with the old wineskins of intolerance.

Multiculturalism arguably works best when it is genuinely multicultural that is, when immigrants come from many different source countries, rather than coming overwhelmingly from a single country.

Because it is seen as a part of the package of mutual rights and responsibilities in which the state makes good faith efforts to accommodate immigrants and immigrants make good-faith efforts to integrate, so as to coproduce new relations of democratic citizenship. Support for multiculturalism therefore depends on the perception that immigrants are holding up their end of the bargain, and making good-faith effort to contribute to society. It is vital to the success of multiculturalism that the state provide some visible means for immigrants to manifest this good-faith effort.

Unity in diversity being one of the essential of multiculturalism, there are tremendous possibilities in this field. And multiculturalism may very well be part of an on - going process which enables everyone to become world citizens - persons who are able to transcend their own racial, ethnic, gender, cultural and socio-political reality and identify with humankind throughout the world, at all levels of human need.

They are thus transcending people who know no boundaries, and whose operating life principle is compassion. This is the principle that should be modeled at all levels, in the process of living diversity.

It suggests that multiculturalism in general has a bright future. These are powerful forces at work in modern Western societies driving toward public recognition and accommodation of ethno-cultural diversity. Public values and constitutional norms of tolerance, equality and individual freedom underpinned by the human rights revolution all push in the direction of multiculturalism, particularly when viewed against the backdrop of a history of ethnic and racial hierarchies. The minority rights, liberal democracy and human rights can comfortably coexist is now a fixed point in both domestic constitutions and international law. And there can be no credible alternative to multiculturalism in these contexts.

Findings

Multiculturalism in contemporary literature has been influenced by political and civil right movements of 1960s and era of globalisation accelerated the pace of change on international plane.

Conclusion and Suggestions

As we are living in an age of globalization, our tools of research have been greatly expanded.

The technological innovations or the globalization era have enabled us to evaluate various trends which have gone in the making of the literature of different strands and streams. In this way we can

determine the multiple factors which have generated the concept of multiculturalism and its impact on the themes and style of literature all over the world.

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