

Religion, Culture and Multiculturalism, with References to Post-colonial Indian English Novel.

Writer: Gitima Deka

Assistant Professor

Dept: English

Silapathar College

Dhemaji, Assam

Abstract: The paper entitled as “Religion, Culture and Multiculturalism, with References to Post-colonial Indian English Novel” discusses a few postmodern concepts like culture, multiculturalism and religion with references to some significant Indian English novels like Anita Desai’s *Bye- Bye Blackbird*, Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*. The study focusses on the cultural changes taking place in the globalized Indian society which can also be termed as multiculturalism. The purpose of the study is to look into the conflicts of the multicultural India. The study is analytical in nature based on both primary and secondary data.

Key words: Culture, religion, multiculturalism

Introduction: Religion, culture and multiculturalism are some words related to mankind. A human society is a place where people having different individualities live together. Both religion and culture are some patterns to organize different human beings socially. Religion creates culture and culture reforms religion. While religion unites people belonging to different cultures, culture counteracts the divisiveness of religion.

Religion is a set of beliefs, values and behavioural aspects. Talking about cosmology is regarded as the first aspect of all religions. Its second concern is human being in terms of socio-psychic behavioural patterns. For example, Islam doesn't say much about food as the Muslims were originally inhabitants of a less fertile land. But Hinduism says much about food as the Hindu belongs to a highly fertile land. There is class divisions in India based on profession, such as Brahmins (instructors), Vaishnavas (businessmen), Khatriyas (Warriors) and Khudras (doing lower category Jobs). In Christianity, there is no such division, as it was not required in early Christian time.

Culture is defined by many critics in different ways. The essential character of culture is that it is an ever-changing matter. Cultures must be allowed to change and adopt positively new matters, so that cultures can grow and help the spiritual growth of all members belonging to different cultural or ethnic groups. This growth provides individuals flexibility and a mind open to the broader horizon of humanity. We have lots of plans and purposes that cannot be fulfilled individually. So, we live in society obeying the natural principles of social behaviour and giving respect to feelings and rights of one another. Culture is something that inspires us to do good for the society. Culture includes all impulses that motivate us towards action; it reforms our errors, inspires us to enjoy life that is full of miseries, and confusions. It broadens our intellectual horizon, exposes our talent in a disciplined way, makes our world better and healthier

Multiculturalism is an ideology of the present age. Multiculturalism cannot be described in terms of assimilation. It is like 'Salad Bowl' or 'Cultural mosaic' where all cultural, religious and ethnic groups are addressed with equal dignity and sense of values. No specific community is considered as central. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the early 70s marked the rising of the multicultural movement at first in Canada and Australia and then in the USA, U.K, Germany and other places. Since its very emergence multiculturalism in its different forms has now invaded the entire human society.

Culture and multiculturalism consist of facts both beneficial and harmful to mankind. Religion creates divisiveness among people. Our ancient scriptures and their stories which are based on myths have different

interpretations. These interpretations are the root of many social conflicts, doubts and feelings of insecurity. Thus, religions have negative influences on the believers. Again, if the local culture of a nation or an area is isolated, its uniqueness is protected, but this isolation broadens its gap with other cultures. Religions and culture are closely related to mankind's ego. This ego serves as blockage to separate a human being from greater love beyond religions and cultural boundaries. Again, a multicultural society consists of some negative characteristics. If it nurtures dominant cultural attitudes, some people may fear of falling into cultural insignificance. Another fact is that a multicultural society cannot fulfil all the necessities of different cultural groups.

Discussion: Post Colonial English literature comes to a new stage with some new themes like cultural diversity, imperialism, multiculturalism, nationalism, nativity and struggle for cultural existence etc. In 1970s the British Empire and American poets first celebrated multiculturalism. Conflict between Western culture and Asian/African/ non-European culture, and conflict between native religions and Christianity provide materials to the writers like Edward W. Said, Salman Rushdie, John Mcleod, R.Radhakrishnan, Homi K Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Chinua Achebe, V.S. Naipaul and Mathew Arnold etc.

Today's Indian English novels depict the story of a changing Indian society. In past, myths, folklores available in local languages were the basis of Indian cultural history. In early English novels by Indians like Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* etc, there is just patriotic documents of Indianness. However, Nirodh C. Choudhary gives up the traditional theme of patriotism and spiritualism. He criticizes the absence of colonialism in Indian English Writing.

Cultural identity in the context of post colonialism is one of the most discussed Topic in Indian English fiction. The influence of Western cultures has brought revolutionary changes to the cultural life of postcolonial world. In India, the British left their cultural legacy behind, which, we, Indians have inherited. We have our own civilizations, cultures, languages, arts and religions. There is a vast difference between our native culture and the Western culture, yet we imitate the westerners in every walk of our life, which is the consequence of the British colonialization in India. Today's young Indians are more familiar with the Western music, film and discotheques from their very childhood. They are more influenced by the lifestyle of the Westerners than by their own ethical values and traditions.

During the Emergency there was a change in Indian English writings. Now the literature by Indian diaspora dominates over the publishing world. Today's Indian English reflects on globalization, liberating itself from the bondage of any particular culture or heritage. Indian English has achieved a universal recognition because of its unique style, unique presentation of thernes like Indian multiculturalism. Even the earlier writers like A.K Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan and Bhabani Bhattacharya are discussed in terms of both old critical theories and the new styles of multiculturalism. post -coloniality and diaspora. V.S Naipaul is seen in search for Indianness that is in his blood. Salman Rushdie who is described by Temoti Prennan as a "third world cosmopolitan" dominates over post- colonial Indian English literature with his unification of history and language, exploring the fascinating mythical realities of Indian society. In his epoch-making novel, *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai, the protagonist represents Rushdie himself. Saleem is a cosmopolitan and also a learned Muslim having good knowledge of Hindu Literature. Another writer Amitav Ghosh deals with postcolonial realities. Women writers like Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande explores the plight of women in postcolonial Indian society. Anita Desai, "an original talent that has the courage to go its own way" deals with themes like rootlessness, question of identity, frustration and loneliness of immigrants' life. As Srinivasa Aiyengar says, Desai does not project the familiar cities like Delhi and Calcutta but reflects on the difficulties of adjustment abroad and the difficulties of returning to India. Dr. J.P Tripathi says that her novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* confirms Kipling's view that "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet" Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita Desai has two famous novels to her credit. She, herself being an immigrant, brings to light the disappointments and the miseries of immigrant life in her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. According to Kiran Desai, every Asian and every dark-skinned person from anywhere in the world faces the same problem (named as colored people, inferior to the White people) in the West

In past, people possessed a sense of strong cultural belongingness, security and identity, as they lived within a narrow social boundary, practicing their inherited customs, cultures, languages, values and world-views. But today's human life is more complex than it was in past. Globalization has definitely contributed to the creation of words like multiculturalism, but people in a multicultural society suffer from cultural and religious discontentment, and insecurity. In novels of writers like Anita Desai and Kiran Desai, the stories revolve round the continuous clashes between the Occidental and Oriental cultures. The Western people suppose themselves to be more rational and superior, and places the people of the East at the periphery. They define the Eastern people as primitive, violent and conservative. In Anita Desai's *Bye, Bye, Blackbird*, the author captures the confusions and conflicts of Dev, who has come to study at the London School of Economics. London depicted here is a place, full of varieties and multiplicities, where people live a superficial life. They are silent, and strangers to one another. For Dev, London is an alien place where he lives with an attitude. Kiran Desai in her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, reveals the same sentiment through the character of Achootan who wanted a green card in U.S.A. with a purpose to take revenge. Desai has depicted the protagonist of the novel, Jemubhai, as a man belonging to nowhere. Jemubhai went to Cambridge for higher study. But he was not culturally prepared to live in the English society. He could not talk like the English people. His condition was so pathetic that he hardly opened his mouth as his English had the Gujrati accent. He could not mix freely with the opposite sex. He carried about him a distinct Indian smell and he feared to voice his thoughts, though his mind was full of words unuttered. Strangely enough, Jemubhai's hatred for his Indian origin made him live like an alien in his own country. Again, he envied the British as he could not be like them. However, after returning to India, he pretended to be an Westernised Indian. That he believed in the superiority of the British language and culture is evident when he tried to influence a soldier by speaking in British accent. Jemubhai was, in fact, a man without a cultural identity, a man who denied his inborn identity, hankering after another that he could not acquire.

Keeping aside religion, it is impossible to tackle the theme of culture, as religion plays a vital role in our cultural life. Post colonial Indian English literature reflects Indian ethos that is based on different religious systems. Novelists like Salman Rushdie takes elements from almost all religions. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem, the protagonist is brought up in a Muslim family, while Shiva, his rival, in a Hindu family. Saleem's ayah, Mary, is a Christian. The names of different characters in the novel such as Parvati-the-witch, Durga, and Shiva and their characterizations remind us of various Hindu gods and goddesses. Saleem compares himself to Mohammed, Ganesha, Moses and the Buddha. India is a secular country, where people belonging to any religion can practise their religious beliefs and principles. Saleem embodies the fusion of these religious faiths. In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, different characters express their attitudes towards different religions. Mrs Sen cites the example of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who ate pork, eggs and bacon, drank wine, instead of being a Muslim. Again, she says that the Muslims were not original inhabitants of India. But they came from some other place. Babar came first with his companions. And thereafter, they began to multiply their population in India. Mrs Sen finds it very shameful that the Muslim males have more than one wife and give birth to a huge number of children. Again, during their visit to Gymkhana Library. Sai and Noni express their disbeliefs in Hinduism, whereas the librarian, who is also a Hindu, says in support of his religion.

Conclusion: Humanity resides above all religions and cultures. In postcolonial Indian English novels, some characters are depicted with cosmopolitan outlook like Saleem Sinai and Adam Aziz in *Midnight Children*, Father Booty and Sayeed Sayeed in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Modern people should realize that they belong to a multicultural society that is representative of their different life style, choices, values and cultural backgrounds. They must be tied in mutual human bond that inspires them to respect one another regardless of their differences.

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