

Multicultural Elements in the Select Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai- An Exploration

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore multicultural elements in the two novels, *The Namesake* and *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, by Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai. In these novels, the novelists advocate migration but advise for co-existence, and peace and harmonious living. They produce the novels in the background of multiculturalism. In fact, Multiculturalism makes possible the removal of all kinds of limitations and barriers, like traditional, cultural, linguistic, social, educational, etc. In the present day world, the relations between people of different origins will reduce mutual misunderstanding and conflict. The migration of people from their nation to diverse parts of the world brought about in progressing the social diversity (Tasnin, 2016). In the globalization to continue human survival, welcoming multiculturalism is the best option, which is the concluding section of this paper. Both the novelists suggest the same idea through their novels, with different approaches that captivate readers.

Key words : Multiculturalism, Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, Kiran Desai, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*.

Introduction

The book, *Multiculturalism in Indian Fiction*, in English (2010) by Ashok Chaskar states that, Multiculturalism is not an intellectual discipline but a movement for social change. (Chaskar, 2010). In the global world of today, the world has shrunk countries and people have come closer with the development of a better understanding of the differences and respect for each other. Multiculturalism seems to have become a part of life and its influence is so strong that it is starkly visible in metropolitan cities. People belong to two places: their connection with native nation and adoption of the host nation provides them with two

homelands. They belong to both 'here and there'; they are free to incline toward 'this or that', which results in creating their own transnational identities. With the rise of decolonization and globalization, the world has scattered and implanted its communities and cultures in the west through Diasporas (Cohen, 2008). Among this flux of diasporas, millions have migrated, created the horizons of opportunities. At this opportune time, the notable young diasporic writers Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai had the opportunity to produce the novels, with a special emphasis on multiculturalism. In the specified novels, they reflected local and global facts with their experience and observation, their narrative technique and language skill.

The term multiculturalism is said to be a "salad bowl" and "cultural mosaic". It is often compared with 'salad bowl' due to the coexistence of culturally varied groups of people in terms of social structure

, religions, languages, race, foods customs and rituals.. In this diversity a plethora of colorful Asian cultures was emanated with Asian writers. Peace and prosperity in the world depends upon mutual understanding and respect, along with space for diverse groups of people. A kind of 'give and take' relationship has been set up in the contemporary world where every group of people or community has an equal right. These groups have succeeded in establishing a congenial ambience in the world which endorses mutual coexistence. (Anil, 2016) South Asia has a unique culture. The diversity of South Asia is remarkable regarding ethnicity, languages, and religions. India is the most pluralistic and diverse. cultures' nation. The continuous flow of diasporas have established its communities worldwide which has contributed significantly to the global phenomenon. Bikhru Parekh the author of *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political theory*, says thus:

"It is neither a political doctrine nor a philosophical issue but actually a perspective on as a way of viewing Human life. Increasing cultural diversity focuses on the promotion of rights for different religions and cultural groups. The rights for cultural groups form basis for multiculturalism" (Parekh, 2000).

Contributing factors for Multiculturalism in the Phase of Globalization

There are various factors that played their toll to spread the concept of multiculturalism in the globe. Education, trade and business, industrialization, science and technology etc., have been initiated. For

example, the exchange of ideas is quite visible in education sector; where Indians have brought in the pattern of 'student - centered education system' and 'grading system' from the west, the west has replaced punishment with meditation. 'Multinational companies reflect the idea that corporate world is not limited to one particular national company rather it has become an amalgamation of various nations. In the west, teaching has become a complex and herculean task, as teachers handle every tiny move of their students; therefore, people in west generally avoid getting into such professions. As a result, the importance of South Asians is further asserted by regular advertisements for teachers, engineers, nurses and, so on. In terms of food also, Indian beverages like 'mango delight', food packages and various Indian spices have become prominent at food corners in the west(Pundir,2015).

Lahiri deliberates her situation with these words:

"True to the meaning for her name, she will be with out borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere (Pooja,2019).

In India 'Iskcon Temple' in Vrindavan, UP is known for captivating Krishna hymns sung by the British. The same influence could be seen in England, where the British are seen dressed in saffron or red - colored robes and visiting Indian Temples or dancing and chanting Hare Ram. Foreigners in abundance are driven toward India in search of peace and spiritualism. Swami Vivekananda was the first Indian who received a standing ovation in America during a Religious Conference. In the contemporary world, eminent writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai have won literary awards. Consequently, South Asians have succeeded in creating opportunities for themselves and in securing a place for their existence in the global race. In the realm of literature, South Asian writers have made their presence felt on the global front by presenting varied and vivid themes like cultural adaptation, religion, socio-cultural institutions, hybridization and assimilation (Vijayalaxmi,2019).

Multiculturalism in the select novels of Jhuma Lahiri and Kiran Desai

Multiculturalism allows the ethnic diversity within a society and has enlightened people from diverse backgrounds. Different themes such as cultural diversity, recognition, mutual concern and peaceful

co-existence of different cultures are brought together by multiculturalism. Jhumpa Lahiri presented the impact of west upon east and vice versa, which has drawn a trail for cultural relativism, cultural tolerance and transnationalism to follow. In her novel 'The Namesake', there are four characters, each representing a different aspect of Diasporas. Ashoke can be a representative of 'English modeled Indian,' his character presents the impact of west upon Indians.

Ashima, Ashoke's partner, is seen upholding the theme of 'cultural isolation' and 'ethno-consciousness'. Gogol, their son, presents the example of assimilation and hybridization. But Sonia, their daughter, displays transnationalism predominantly through her character. Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake' (2003) beautifully carves out the nostalgia, acculturation, and contra-acculturation of Indian immigrants. This novel shows Ashima and Gogol as cultural Survivors in America's multicultural milieu (pooja,2019).

In India after independence, its youth started taking journeys to foreign lands in search of better opportunities. In 'The Namesake', we find Ashoke who goes to America in search of a bright future. We see him striving hard for making his respectable place in America and becomes a professor and owns a well-furnished house, has an obedient Indian partner. The impact of west upon Ashoke is apparent in the novel. He takes care that he is well dressed, in a tie and formal pair of shirt and pants while going to university. He had read all the possible English novels at an early age. Another example of his foreign taste can be seen when Ashima was admitted in the hospital. Unlike Ashima who has read Desh numberless times, the only Bengali magazine that she brought on her way to America, Ashoke preferred American Boston in globe. Lahiri acclimatizes both the societies of her homeland and the host land, makes a social commitment to rise above her individual awareness and subsequently accomplishes all-inclusiveness. (Pooja,2019).

The character of Ashima is contrasted with that of Ashoke. She purely represents Indian cultural identity and cultural isolation. Throughout the novel, we see her in Indian saris, cooking Indian food, making attempts to celebrate Indian ceremonies as ritually as possible, pining to visit her homeland. Unlike Ashoke, Ashima is deep rooted in her culture, in the legacy which has been passed down to her by her elders. Out of the four characters in 'The Namesake', Gogol's

character is the most complex one. We see Ashima's clear inclination towards her land. Ashoke remains in a kind of neutral zone. Sonia is more of a transnational kind. Contrary to them, Gogol hangs in the middle of two nations and two cultures. His character sets an example of assimilation. He is not loyal to any of the sides. Although he does not like Indian culture over American, despite the reality that he cannot put his privacy and individualism on stake for the sake of his family, still there are few delicate threads which survive inside him to keep him connected with his family and this connection does matter to Gogol. (Vijayalaxmi,2019)

Sonia's character is a simple one, far above from the complexities of borders and cultures. Her acceptance of New England without any dilemma becomes clear right on her annaprasana ceremony when she was an infant. "She plays with the dirt they've dug up from the yard and threatens to put the dollar bill into her mouth. One of the guests remarks, 'this one is the true American'. She appears to be a transnational because she is balanced and unaffected by both the nations and their cultures and succeeds in assembling their characteristics equally in her personality. She gets married to a Jewish American without ending up with a conflict or divorce, which is shown as very common in the novel. She is concerned about her job and her mother, for whom she decides to get an apartment near the city where her mother resides. "Sonia is staying on with Ashima, thinking of getting an apartment in Boston or Cambridge so that she will be nearby." She also sets a perfect example of mingling of two cultures without friction in between. We see her celebrating both Christmas and taking part in Bengali pujo . Ashima had contributed to enhancing multiculturalism by keeping alive her original identity: She maintains the sanctity of Indian culture. But contrary to this nature of West, Gogol's character has shown the Quality of assimilation, adapting , and adjusting, which comes to promote mutual understanding. Different cultures existing in one society is the marvel of multiculturalism . The entry of foreign communities or the acknowledgement and promotion of this phenomenon, is instrumental for the formation of multicultural society. The long history, unique geography and diverse demography shaped Indian culture.(Lahri,2006)

Where as the other eminent Indian English novelist, the man Booker Prize winner Kiran Desai In view of the present trend, the novelist evinced interest and lavished her whole energy to represent the brilliant concept of multiculturalism. Desai opted for two

critical multicultural points to deliberate the concept in the novel (Devidas,2016). As the theme is close to the present day world the novel is successful and hailed by many people. The two central points of multiculturalism are post office and guava orchard. In the novel, the post office is a central point of multiculturalism, where mails come from different places in the same way, from distinctive caste and community. Sampath Chawla comes to know the facts of the individuals by reading the content of the letters of diverse people groups. Except reading letters, Sampath is not willing to do any hard work in the post-office. He is bored with the work in the Post office and makes him repetitive, so he does not want to continue the work but live a peaceful life. He spent time to know data of the world from their postcard. For him, post card is the asset of information. By reading letters of individuals : Keeps latest information. In the Guava Plantation, this information makes him different when he meanders the visitors. He continuously hates the post office, but it is the conclusion of his travel. Most critical multicultural point is Guava plantation, where different pilgrims from diverse areas come together for the favors of Heavenly Baba, appears multicultural perspective within the minds of the individuals. In the Guava Orchard, multicultural aspects are discovered through the study and it is as important as its title. (Rameshbabu,2019)

For living tranquil and concordant life, Desai wishes to go back to nature. In the mechanized life tenses, dissatisfactions, sufferings and clashes have become more and more. To be solace and comfort, nature is the only solution. This very idea reminds us of Wordsworthian concept. The novelist's love for nature is conveyed through The Guava Orchard and the characters. People from different places gather in the Guava Orchard and make Hullabaloo. Practically, Sampath Chawla isn't running from commitments but needs peace for his exhaustion. Sampath wants to be free from this worldly life (Desai,1998) Therefore, he strongly decides to go somewhere to feel comfort and happy. He praises Guava tree by saying "... cool and green and calm -looking. Guavas are tasty and refreshing and should be eaten wherever possible". He determined to live on the Guava tree. Sampath beautifully describes the tree by saying that "How beautiful it was here, how exactly as it should be. How beautiful it was here, has exactly as it should be." In the age of multiculturalism, individuals are taking after each other's culture and community. They are not curious about other caste or community, but

they accept humankind as a single caste framework within the world.

Mr. Chawla had enough faith in caste and community of individuals. Desai paid attention to his response related to caste and community after knowing the relationship between Pinky and Hungry Hop. He exhorts Pinky to stop the relationship as Mr. Chawla considers that the ice-cream family belongs to a lower caste, but he ignores that his family condition. The perspective of multiculturalism with nourishment partners has a gigantic part in the novel, particularly in the life of character like Kulfi Chawla. She is depicted as a character with the picture of hungry she has around food and offers everything in the house for her craving. In Orchard, very interestingly, she made delicious food for Sampath provided with all sorts of comforts and the more elaborate his living arrangements, the happier he was. Peaceful lives with satisfaction helps for both body and health. An important aspect in the novel is the importance of girls' education. Mr Chawla's Opinion about present India is focused by saying that "it is very important for young girls to know something useful, not just sit at home and get married. This is the modern India. You should take a typing course". Girls' education is encouraged by him, according to the present need. Worship presents attitude of the Indian people who believe easily related to holiness. The people believe Sampath and his thoughts easily.

The novelist gives important place for monkeys: since ancient times, they are given imperative place in India because they are treated as God, Hanuman. Desai gives reference to the Ramayana, to convey Rama and Hanuma's association (Rameshbabu, 2019). Though living in America, Desai's concern with India is shown in the novel. She recollects the epics and the references used in her debut novel 'Hullabaloo, in The Guava Orchard'. Sampath Chawla deserves a

comfortable life and finds happy life in the Guava orchard. Sampath's foolish behavior worries his family members. Pinky's utters painful words for Sampath. "Get out of the tree - the whole family is being shamed" Though Sampath was asked to come down from the Guava tree, he has not come down. Late, he became popular and people were telling a remarkable man was up on a guava tree. He had known everything. His family and social assignments compel him to leave his own environment. He is willing to pass his life in his new profession of telling fates of the individuals. His way of talking and telling fortunes and incidents attract the people.

Conclusion

Multiculturalism is one of the noteworthy aspects of globalized literature. The aim is to assimilate its people, localities, borders, cultures into the mainstream societies and it is meant for the World Peace on the broad level. Both the novelists expect the 'Unity in Diversity'. The peace and harmony between cultures is humanity and respect different cultures. Lahiri and Desai, through their characters in their stories, express that change is necessary, in tune with time and circumstances, to continue life. But respect and tolerance for living together with peace and harmony is helpful in this changing world, is their advice. Rajeev Bhargava makes it clear that Multiculturalism helps to maintain a stable identity, having interaction with and contribution of cultural groups, preserving differences. (Kavita, 2019) Multiculturalists opined that "culture" and "cultural groups" are recognized and accommodated. Yet multiculturalism challenges religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and race (Sukhdev, 2016). Both the novelists, Lahiri and Desai, wonderfully presented the concept of multiculturalism in the novels with a broad social out-look.

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