

Portrayal of Multiculturalism in One Night at the Call Centre

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Abstract

Culture represents belief and ideology of a particular community. The human world is bedecked with diversity of cultures. Every nation has its distinct culture and within it there are different cultural mores. India is a secular country rich in varied cultures and traditions. This diversity – cultural, linguistic, religious- gives us distinctiveness in the rest of the world. The world looks at India as a good example of multiculturalism. The term multiculturalism represents a society with diverse cultures. It can also be described as a society, state, country or a region that is composed of people belonging to different cultures. The variety of cultures acts as bridge among the people but sometimes they become the cause of concern. The diversity of cultures sometimes creates conflicts and is responsible for political skirmishes. These differences occur despite the fact that all humans are naturally equal. Chetan Bhagat in One Night at the Call Centre portrays inner world of new technocrats in multicultural society. They are caught in the web of contradictions where they are not able to prove their mettle forcing them to lead suffocated life. As a result they lose their identity leaving a deep mark on their thinking and perception.

Key Words: Culture, Indian diversity, Multiculturalism, New Technocrats and Perception

The term multiculturalism represents a society with diverse cultures. It can also be described as a society, state, country or a region that is composed of people belonging to different cultures. The earlier terms used before multiculturalism were multiethnic or polyethnic societies. The terms cosmopolitan society or poly society do have affinity with multiculturalism. The words like multiracial and multiethnic societies were also used to represent the same but the term multiculturalism is nowadays more preferred term because of its positive connotation.

Multiculturalism means approval, appreciation and promotion of various cultures in societies, schools and nations. It promotes harmony in diversity and advocates equality of all the religious and ethnic groups in a society. It believes that all the ethnic groups must be encouraged to maintain their status in the society. It is compared to a bowl of salad where every piece has its distinctive taste that adds flavor to the whole. It makes life colorful with flowers of different colours. It has no room for the terms like 'us' and 'them'. It believes to safeguard the cultural rights of every individual and every group. It does not believe to develop hostility among the groups but acts as bridge among the cultures and develops understanding among them.

Multiculturalism encourages the interaction between different cultures. This helps to develop the culture as a whole. It offers a good atmosphere in which the individual is free to develop and preserve his culture and express himself freely without any restriction in different cultures. It does not act as an obstacle but helps to restore unity among people of different cultures.

Multiculturalism is a school of thought where each distinct cultural and religious group is given parallel status in the society. No culture is considered completely perfect or completely worthless. It is believed that culture evolves with the passage of time and this process remains going on. It believes in the coexistence of many cultures in the society without any distinction of any other culture. It allows that human differences must be allowed to develop sense of toleration among the people of different cultures. It plays an important role to eradicate multiple evils in the society namely racism, sexism and other forms of discriminations.

Multiculturalism preserves and promotes differences to safeguard the collective goal. It supports the freedom of religions and traditions. It does not want restriction of state in the matters of religion and culture of people. As we have in India, the constitution guarantees full freedom to people in matters of religion and culture. Here we have no restriction in such matters. India is diverse society where people do have different religions and every religion is followed by people as per their own principles. For example Sikhs in India use turban and they have full freedom to use it even in defense forces. The Muslims can keep beard in India in police and Army services. Therefore, multiculturalism allows minorities to have full freedom to maintain and safeguard their religious and ethnic identity. As Gandhi ji said that no culture can live if it attempts to be in isolation. So it is essential to celebrate diversity of different cultures that prevents terrific war and cultural clashes. If diverse ethnic groups do not synchronize with each other the nation building gets affected.

India is the secular country rich in varied cultures and traditions. It is a given fact that India is a country with unity in diversity. This diversity – cultural, linguistic, religious- gives us distinctiveness in the rest of the world. The world looks at India as a good example of multiculturalism. The variety of cultures and sub-cultures act as bridges among the people but sometimes they become the cause of concern. The diversity of cultures sometimes creates conflicts and is responsible for political skirmishes. When we look in our society we find diverse differences in individuals and groups of humanity. These differences occur despite the fact that all humans are 99% genetically akin to each other.

Literature is defined as the mirror of society. It reflects society in best possible manner. There are various issues that the modern generation confronts in the Indian society. The writers try their best to portray the issues of contemporary Indian society. Chetan Bhagat is one such writer who has established a chord with the youth of the country. He acts as the commentator of young generation. He portrays contemporary issues with solutions in his writing. As the novel *One Night at the call Centre* explores the inner world of new technocrats in the traditional culture as well as metropolitan culture. Being followers of modern and traditional culture they face a lot of issues in their personal lives as well as in their work places where they come in contact with Western culture people.

In *One Night at the Call Centre* the novelist talks about life of people in metropolitan culture. The main characters of the novel belong to different cultures and backgrounds. The story of the novel mainly revolves around a group of six characters- three males and three females- working in a call centre located in Haryana. The novel mainly highlights their shared pains, ambitions, personal trauma and happiness. The cultural variation among the characters in the novel makes it hard and suffocating for them to adopt in new culture. All of them are caught in between old and new traditions and values. It can be viewed in the case of Esha who belongs to Punjab and her culture is restrictive not allowing her to fulfill her dreams and aspirations. Being a follower of modern culture she does not hesitate to fulfill her dreams. As a result she is victimized in new culture. She has been deceived by a man who promises to recommend her for modeling.

Vroom no doubt follows his life in new culture but there are many transitions that he does not bear to be visible in this new culture. As injustice system and hypocrisy of politicians looks at the peak in the new culture

he is vocal against such lacunas. Being journalist he adopts satirical tone in his writing to expose political dispensation in India and this is reflected in one of his brilliant articles. This is reflected in Shyam's dialogue with his girlfriend:

'Oh yeah. It was called 'Why Don't Politicians Ever Commit Suicide?'

'What? Sounds morbid.'

'Well, the article said all kinds of people- students, housewives, businessmen, employees and even film stars- commit suicide. But politicians never do. That tells you something.'

'What?' she said, still keeping her eyes down.

'Well, Vroom's point was that suicide is a horrible thing and people do it only because they are really hurt, this means they feel something. But politicians don't. So, basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything.' (49)

After his foray into journalism he tries his hand in new culture at the call centre. Working in the call centre culture brings him close to know the role of western call centers in India. The realization gives him shock forcing him to speak against misuse of Indians in the metropolitan culture. As this can be experienced in one of his statements against Americans in the novel: "American's are sick," Vroom said, as he pointed to a US politician who had spoken out in support of the war. 'Look at him. He would nuke the whole world if he could have his way'(199). He castigates how govt. policies in guise of new and powerful India have sucked the blood of youth. The following comment portrays his anger against the wicked role of multi-national companies:

So like, there is so much to do. We should be building roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains in every city like madness. And if the government moves its rear-end and does that, the young people in this country will find jobs there. Hell, I would work days and night for that, as long as I know that what I am doing is helping build something for my country, for its future. But the government does not believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth. Just as this stupid MTV thinks showing a demented chick do a dance in her underwear will make the programme a youth special. Do you think they really care? (201)

Shyam being the main character of the novel acts as the follower of traditional culture unwilling to adopt changes of modern culture. From beginning he is hesitant in his approach of dealings failing most of the time to

change results in his favour. He lacks self confidence in his abilities not being able to convince the mother of Priyanka.

Priyanka being the follower of modern culture breaks out of her moral and social obligations doing things according to her aspirations. In the beginning it is seen she accepts to follow her mother's advice to marry a well settled man even though that was against her will, but as the novel progresses she realizes not to act against her will. Priyanka does not bear to hear insults from others. Priyanka's reply to the old lady displays, "The young girls know how to talk and behave. It is you old ones who need to be taught a lesson. These are your granddaughters, and you are calling them curses"(87). Radhika on the other hand follows traditional culture that is full of obedience and honesty. She works with dedication at the call center for 9 to 10 hours. Besides she pays especial care to her mother-in-law. Apart from work at home, she puts up with mean comments of her mother-in-law, she pays deaf ear thinking that her mother-in-law is very old and of old thought. She follows the rites of India wifehood acting obediently not only as good wife but also as good daughter-in-law. She believes Indian wife is bound to submit to the will of her in-laws.as a result she has not only been ill-treated by her in-laws but she has also been cheated by her husband's infidelity. The husband of Radhika is a modern cultured man who does not feel embarrassed in having extra marital affair. Military Uncle has cultural contradiction with his son's family. He wants to influence his grandson but his daughter-in-law shows resistance against his behavior telling her husband to stop his father from such acts. As a result he is forced to leave his son's home to live lonely.

All the characters face extreme exploitation in Western culture at the hands of Westerners. They work in a call centre in night shifts to sustain their lives in metropolitan culture. Working in such environment becomes painful for them for most of the time they feel embarrassed at the hands of Americans. They have to use western names and are treated as 'Resources' in the call center. The Boss of the call center always disgraces the employees and never heeds to their complaints against the computer systems which always do not function well. He irrationally scolds all his employees without any reason. As a leader of the team he never motivates his team members instead he gets all the credit of the work done by his team. In one of the incidents of the novel when a website has been developed by Shyam and Vroom their boss uses it for his own promotion by hiding it from them. He threatens them to be removed from the job. Thus, the novel portrays the problems, fears, insecurities of the call center employees in new culture.

Chetan Bhagat is born in the state of Punjab with distinct culture and diversity. He did schooling in different states that influenced him to a great extent. India is a multicultural country and this cultural diversity has been in the blood of Chetan Bhagat. He tells the readers about the cultural richness and variety of India. Besides that he brings forth various issues faced by people due to cultural diversity in the country through his novels.

Therefore, overtly and covertly cultural contradictions have fully engulfed the contemporary multicultural Indian society and Chetan Bhagat through his novels exposes that beautifully. Bhagat novels' settings are clear evidences to educate his readers about the cultural richness and variety of India. He has fully realized the value and importance of cultural harmony in a multicultural society. He wishes to create a society that encourages brotherhood and harmony among different cultures. He advocates equality of all without any bias and prejudice. Bhagat breaks all the boundaries to create a global and universal culture and it is apparently visible in his novels.

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