

MULTICULTURALISM IN VS NAIPAUL' S BOOKS

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Abstract: This paper presents the phenomenon of multiculturalism in VS Naipaul's books. Its purpose is the answer to the following questions:

1. What is the phenomenon of multiculturalism?
2. Which is the relation between multiculturalism, culture and literature?
3. Which is the connection between multiculturalism, diversity and identity?

In terms of structure, the parts of the paper are:

The Introduction where are presented the general aspects of the phenomenon of multiculturalism. This introductory part begins with an explanation of the association between two terms: multiculturalism and „melting pot”. It also presents the ramifications of multiculturalism at all the levels of society. The connection between multiculturalism and culture is a significant one, so it will also be detailed here.

The first part of the paper presents the relation between multiculturalism and literature. To better understand this relation, I presented first the definition of multicultural literature. Then I emphasized the relation between multiculturalism, culture, diversity, race, ethnic groups of writers and identity.

Multicultural literature encompasses authors from all over the world. One such author is VS Naipaul, the subject of the second part of the paper. His travel books are the perfect example of multiculturalism due to the diversity of characters found in them. I will also present here the reactions of Naipaul's critics to the subjects and personal opinions presented in his books.

The Conclusions will end the paper followed by the Bibliography.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Multicultural Literature, Diversity, Ethnicity, Identity

INTRODUCTION:

The introductory part of the paper will answer to the first question: What is the phenomenon of multiculturalism?

Unlike other terms and concepts, multiculturalism does not have a single, clear definition but many interpretations. Around this term, numerous debates and arguments took place, the main reason being its recent introduction in our vocabulary. Sociologists, different specialists and regular people tried to understand it and put it into a clear category. The more they tried to place the term in a particular category the more ramifications into others they discovered. One such point of view and possible definition of this term is a simple one: many cultures united into a single one. But, the interpretations of such a simple definition are more complex. How can different cultures unite into a single one? The European continent can help us here. The motto of the European Union is: "United in diversity." The same motto can apply in the case of multiculturalism. There are several aspects taken into consideration: each European country has its individuality and specificity. And this is a good thing. Each culture tolerates and accepts the others. But if they merge in a single one their national identity and individualism will survive or will disappear?

“**Multiculturalism's** view is that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgement of their differences within a dominant political culture.

That acknowledgement can take the forms of recognition of contributions to the cultural life of the political community as a whole, a demand for special protection under the law for certain cultural groups, or autonomous rights of governance for certain cultures. Multiculturalism is both a response to the fact of cultural pluralism in modern democracies and a way of compensating cultural groups for past exclusion, discrimination, and oppression. Most modern democracies comprise members with diverse cultural viewpoints, practices, and contributions. Many minority cultural groups have experienced exclusion or the denigration of their contributions and identities in the past. Multiculturalism seeks the inclusion of the views and contributions of diverse members of society while maintaining respect for their differences and withholding the demand for their assimilation into the dominant culture.

Multiculturalism As A Challenge To Traditional Liberalism

Multiculturalism stands as a challenge to liberal democracy. In liberal democracies, all citizens should be treated equally under the law by abstracting the common identity of “citizen” from the real social, cultural, political, and economic positions and identities of real members of society. That leads to a tendency to homogenize the collective of citizens and assume a common political culture that all participate in. However, that abstract view ignores other politically salient features of the identities of political subjects that exceed the category of citizen, such as race, religion, class, and sex. Although claiming the formal equality of citizens, the liberal democratic view tends to underemphasize ways in which citizens are not in fact equal in society. Rather than embracing the traditional liberal image of the melting pot into which people of different cultures are assimilated into a unified national culture, multiculturalism generally holds the image of a tossed salad to be more appropriate. Although being an integral and recognizable part of the whole, diverse members of society can maintain their particular identities while residing in the collective.

Some more-radical multicultural theorists have claimed that some cultural groups need more than recognition to ensure the integrity and maintenance of their distinct identities and contributions. In addition to individual equal rights, some have advocated for special group rights and autonomous governance for certain cultural groups. Because the continued existence of protected minority cultures ultimately contributes to the good of all and the enrichment of the dominant culture, those theorists have argued that the preserving of cultures that cannot withstand the pressures to assimilate into a dominant culture can be given preference over the usual norm of equal rights for all.”¹

“In common discourse and contemporary written works, multiculturalism has diverse, contested, and changing meanings and implications. Because of the variety of meanings attached to the concept, participants in debates about multiculturalism often speak past each other and do not always address issues and concerns raised by others. In this paper, I hope to contribute to the clarification and classification of some of the multiple meanings of multiculturalism. [...]

One reason for the multiple meanings of multiculturalism is that the concept can refer to population structure, cultural diversity, institutional policy or program, societal practice, ideology, value, ideal, symbol, educational approach, management style, business strategy, or sociological or political concept or theory. Multiculturalism may be praised as a practice or ideal or it may be viewed as misguided and a source of confusion and problem for society. Different nation-states, cultural or ethnic groups, academics and members of the public take different approaches to multiculturalism. Parekh distinguishes multicultural society as “the fact of cultural diversity” from multiculturalism as “a normative response to that fact” (Parekh, p. 6). In the Canadian case, where multiculturalism has an official basis, policy and

¹<https://www.britannica.com/topic/multiculturalism>

program have not always been clearly identified and have been subject to change (Li, p. 148; Isajiw, pp. 247-8). In terms of current research and policy direction, the themes of social justice, civic participation, and identity (SSHRC, 2003) appear to receive greater emphasis than the five themes that emerge from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Appendix A). A further difficulty relates to how multiculturalism is studied. In many studies, multiculturalism is contrasted with assimilation, and the two are presented as opposite approaches. Further, multiculturalism is often taken to mean an emphasis on retention of some original culture by certain ethnic or minority groups. Some even argue that multiculturalism encourages such retention. These approaches may overemphasize the difference between multiculturalism and other approaches to cultural diversity as well as focusing on only some aspects of multiculturalism – and not necessarily the distinguishing features of a multiculturalist approach (Taylor and Lambert, 1996; Hjem).

There are many polemics about and theoretical analyses of multiculturalism, but there are relatively few detailed explorations of attitudes to and interpretations of multiculturalism. In a short paper, reporting on a specific group of responses, the disagreements concerning multiculturalism cannot be resolved. But by exploring the meanings of multiculturalism for a group of undergraduate students, I hope to make a modest contribution to unraveling the multiple meanings and interpretations of multiculturalism. It is my hope that other researchers will continue to explore what multiculturalism involves in practice, and study how people respond to it in their experiences, rather than pontificate about it in the abstract or from a predetermined perspective.”²

MULTICULTURALISM, CULTURE AND LITERATURE

As I presented in the introductory part, the phenomenon of multiculturalism has ramifications in different fields. One such field is the one of literature. Each country has its own literature that reflects individual characteristics of its people. In fact, if someone wants to know more about a particular culture he or she must study its literature. Each country has a long tradition in the field of literature. By studying chronologically its authors, different periods of history unfold in front us and we can see the details of those periods. In the past people did not travel much from one part of the country to another or from one country to another so the writings from those periods preserved all the characteristics of the areas or time.

This situation changed in recent years. The physical and mental boundaries disappeared and people traveled from one country or continent to another. This freedom of movement facilitated the exchange of ideas, knowledge and information. People became more interested in other cultures and more willing to know more of them. One particular subject of interest was literature. Writers found a rich source of inspiration in other countries’ literature and from this *mélange* a new type of literature appeared: *the multicultural literature*.

“Multicultural literature features characters and themes from countries around the world. Writers in this genre express their ideas and values through the characters featured in their work. By examining these works in detail, you can learn how to understand them and broaden your understanding.

Definition of Multicultural Literature

Let us begin by first defining some key terms. **Multicultural literature** describes how people live in different parts of the world. In other words, we can learn about their culture and beliefs. It also presents an accurate representation of the culture it portrays and

²<http://uregina.ca/~gingrich/mm-ces03.pdf>

must be free from **stereotypes**, or beliefs about a particular group that are oversimplified or based upon generalizations. Through these accurate representations, we can build a clear understanding of the culture's heritage as it is portrayed in the text.”³

We may be tempted to limit the multicultural literature to the works of a single race or genre. But this would be a mistake. It is like saying that only British or Romanian literature is the most representative for the entire world. Our world is a diverse one and each continent has its individuality. When we say multicultural literature, the images of the United States and Canada are the most recognizable ones. But there are many other Asian and European countries where the multicultural literature is well represented.

Multicultural literature plays an important role in our society. It opens a gate to the understanding of other cultures. This type of literature gives us:

“Cultural Authenticity

Experts in multicultural education frequently emphasize the importance of using literature to increase cultural awareness (Piper, 1986; Tway, 1989). The literature used should accurately portray the history, customs, values, and language of a particular cultural group (Sims, 1982). Through sharing carefully selected literature, students can learn to understand and to appreciate a literary heritage that comes from many diverse backgrounds (Norton, 1990).

Improves Self-Concept

Students also benefit from reading literature that reflects their own ethnic and cultural background. Such literature can be an important tool in helping all students develop a healthy self-concept - one that is based on a knowledge of and a sense of pride in family background (Hittleman, 1978).

Promotes Understanding Among Cultures

The use of multicultural literature can also extend students' knowledge about parallel cultures by exposing them to the differences and similarities between their culture and that of other groups (Norton, 1983). These observations, documented in research, support the notion that incorporating multicultural literature into the curriculum can expand students' awareness and decrease negative stereotyping of individuals from other cultures (Litchner & Johnson, 1973).

Literature can present students with clear contrasts in perspectives and can help them to understand their own cultural heritages and those of others - within and outside the classroom (Rasinski & Padak, 1990).”⁴

MULTICULTURAL VS NAIPAUL

“V. S. Naipaul is considered to be one of the most prominent expatriate novelists having first hand colonial experience in English literature. His novels deal with cultural crisis in postcolonial societies with an explicit account of the common complexities inherent among the marginalized societies. Naipaul's works are commonly regarded as an implicit biography of his departure from the narrow background of the Caribbean island to the open cosmopolitan culture of the world at large. He carries three conflicting, at a time, interacting components in his personality of being a Trinidadian colonial, an English metropolitan, and a person of Indian ancestry. The worldwide culture, economic and political changes resulted in the emergence of Diaspora writing by the prominent writers such as Derek Wolcott, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje and V. S. Naipaul. These writers represented the generation that had to encounter the struggle that resulted from the withdrawal of imperial order and the resultant cultural confusion. Although all the diasporic writers mentioned above hold a sway

³<https://study.com/academy/lesson/multicultural-literature-definition-books-importance.html>

⁴<https://www.eduplace.com/rdg/res/literacy/multi1.html>

over the perceptive reader, Naipaul seems outstanding among the popular postcolonial novelists because of his exceptional treatment of common diasporic experiences.

Because of his family and Trinidadian circumstances he is an expatriate who has started with no other recourses than his steadfastness and the elegance that he has developed through hard work. For his twenty first year of staying in England, he has never felt at home and still recognizes himself as an outsider.

Naipaul regards himself as a former colonial who has become a homeless cosmopolitan. Owing to his ability to write more about himself and his past, he can be seen as someone who has projected much of his personal experiences of the contemporary world into literature. His unique experience is representative of the major social, psychological, political and cultural change of our time.”⁵

“Naipaul’s literature presents the image of an author who does not experience any sense of belonging anywhere, but the wide array of whose intellect has resulted in many superb books. His literary works present the image of a person who is constantly in search of a cultural mooring. Although he has a vast repertoire of literary output at his disposal, he is not only a natural writer but also a natural novelist. His vision is his own, unaffected by contemporary social cliché or political bonanza. He has not only autonomy to dictate the ‘truth’ but also relevance to subjugate the hideous lies of the societies. He is engaged with the stresses and strains that we recognize vital in our experience now. His writing is a fusion of creeds, cultures and continents in him, with his expatriate career, his being able to practice an art in and of totally dissimilar worlds, all give him peculiar contemporary quality. In this context, Dagmar Barnouw remarks: “A British-educated West Indian, Naipaul has tried to understand and document the difficulties of other cultures through his difficulties at understanding his own multiethnic background”. Critics of international repute, even today, present the foray of criticism on V S Naipaul in a diverse way. His multi-ethnic background, his faculty of mind, his “sophisticated literary strategies” and creative mission have remained relatively unexplored. [...]

Naipaul smartly avoids commenting directly on any subject in his books. He speaks through characters he meets on the way or at any particular place or anywhere else. One clear thing is that he has always been a very stern critic of Muslims and Muslim invaders. Meena Kandasamy appropriately remarks: “Naipaul’s views on Islam are stark enough to show his Hindu prejudice and his limited knowledge.” He has not only criticized Muslim invaders but also their creations, their modus operandi and modus vivendi. Naipaul, a votary of controversy, has been caught the whirling vortex of the religious avalanches, its repercussions and his personal prejudices. The statements which he produced in the very texts have subjugated the religious hierarchy in the hegemonic dispossessions on the global front. He has underscored the Indian civilization in his Indian Trilogy. His criticism of Muslim imperialism in India is perceived as a seminal critique in the back drop of the 9/11 attack on the USA. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001 by the Swedish Academy because of the pressure of the USA that was camouflaged by the secularist press across the world. Especially in the Christianity dominated and anti-Muslim nations of the world.”⁶

“Multiculturalism in British society has been preoccupied with such notions as “ethnicity” and “culture” in the past two decades. This preoccupation, in Tariq Modood’s view, carries with it a burden of “assumed behavioral or normative baggage” that prescribes essentialist notions of minority life experiences. Critical of its effectiveness and validity, Modood suggests a reentering of the debate around multiculturalism to focus instead on “identity” as an analytical category, on the ground that identity captures the role ethnic and

⁵<https://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJELC/PDF/2017/May/Pal.pdf>

⁶http://www.aulibrary.au.edu/multim1/ABAC_Pub/Asian-Journal-of-Literature-Culture-and-Society/v7.2-4-2013.pdf

cultural backgrounds play in individual experiences as significant yet not solely determinant. For one thing, the concept of identity allows the “insider” to speak for itself because it claims to know something by virtue of its bodily experiences and emotions. For another, as a relative concept, identity “is not just in relation to individual self-definition but in relation to the outsider perceptions, treatment and social expectations”. The insider knowledge, therefore, can be communicated to and shared with larger social groups than one minority community. Central to the concept of identity, the difference in question is constituted both from the inside of a minority culture and from outside— social representations and governmental policies. In a way, Modood’s suggestion has been presciently crystalized by Naipaul’s vision of identity in *Enigma* in terms of the epistemic status of cultural identity. In the light of Modood’s suggestion, we might be better able to tease out Naipaul’s literary construct of identity in a multicultural context. One lesson we can learn from this conceptualization, among other things, is perhaps the realization that the way identity is construed is more important than the way it really is. To be specific, the protagonist’s difficult reconciliation with his racial and ethnic backgrounds seems to be suggesting that people, living in a multicultural community and who have a membership in a minority group, should embrace their roots and, more importantly, make sense of the colonial and postcolonial history within which they are formed. Identity as such is more than simply an easy identification with a certain ethnic group. Rather, it involves an act of historicizing, a process of discovery, and a form of education. [...]

The lesson we can learn from the migrant narrator’s self-inspection of his transnational experiences is to face up to difference, live with that difference, and refashion it to facilitate human communication and connection in a multicultural context.”⁷

CONCLUSIONS

“V.S. Naipaul has correctly said that he exploits himself in his writings, specifically in his travel writings. He exploits himself, by experiencing and placing himself among other people, in new lands, new countries. He exploits his thinking by coordinating his thoughts and values, with those of people belonging to other far off lands, by travelling to these places, by interacting with them. He puts himself in a multicultural environment and thus evolves his deeply artistic collection of travelogues. Naipaul’s travelogues is a result of the kind of freedom, that he achieves, a kind of fluidity that he experiences by being in a multicultural environment, where he experiences different set of place, culture, language, associations and beliefs. It has taught him flexibility to adapt to new situation. It has arisen a sense of intermingling with new environment and as well as comparing it with the perceptions that he has about that particular place. It also applies to the perception that he had about his base, his background or ancestral country, and what he actually experienced when he himself had been there in the land. The multicultural situation that we find in the travelogues of V.S. Naipaul, go somewhat with his personal experience in his life. Naipaul’s multicultural implications have a depth of meaning as a man is actually shaped by the geographical, historical, cultural and racial past or exposures in one’s life. This research studies the multiculturalism in the travelogues of V.S. Naipaul. The word multiculturalism may theoretically mean, to relate with several cultural or ethnic groups, but it has many farfetched implications. As already mentioned in previous chapters, the word multiculturalism is a term which is associated with hybridity, mimicry, self-identity, imitation, colonized, third space, cultural translation and displaced exile. The situation of

⁷<http://www.concentric-literature.url.tw/issues/Memories%20on%20the%20Move%20Asian%20Connections/7.pdf>

multiculturalism is only possible when one travels and in doing so, he places himself in new situations among people belonging to other varied cultural races. Naipaul, with a complex, diverse, ethnic and colonial background, needs a special kind of concentration, as he himself faced the multicultural situation and also believes in : “...I don’t think any of us can claim that we came from one single enclosed, tribal world. We are little bombarded cells, aren’t we?... Many things occur to make us, what are we surely live with all the things that make us.”⁸

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⁸http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/99225/13/13_chapter%205.pdf