LITERATURE AND MULTICULTURISM: DIASPORIC CANADIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

 The term 'multiculturalism', has not been used only to describe a culturally diverse society, but also to refer to a kind of policy that aims at protecting cultural diversity and world peace among different societies as well. Although multiculturalism is a phenomenon with a long history and there have been countries historically that did adopt multicultural policies, like the Canadian Society.Ethnic differences within Canada are constructed and maintained through multiculturalism. In Canada, a good deal of attention has been focused on ethnic self identity. Canada presents itself as a multicultural society, open to immigrants from any place in the world, in which those who are of diverse ethnic origins are encouraged to retain their distinctive cultural characteristics as they seek to become successfully integrated into Canadian Society. The study of inter-group relations specially between minority and dominant ethnic cultural groups has long been concerned of the process of integration and assimilation that tend to weaken or reinforce their distinctive cultural characteristics and behavior pattern. Canadians had the opportunities to experiment with multiculturalism as a government policy for over two decades. Canada was the first and the only nation in the world to establish a multiculturalism act in 1988. This policy has brought ethnic minorities recognition as groups within mainstream Canadian society.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Diversity, Ethnic Differences, Distinctive Culture, Mainstream

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The term multiculturalism emerged in 1960s and 1970s in countries like Canada and Australia and to a lesser extent Britain and the USA. In Canada and Australia the set of issues covered by the term originally centred on indigenous people and historic minorities. There are several perspectives to understand Multiculturalism like Multiculturalism in Metropolitan Areas, Empires and multiculture, Multiculturalism & Cultural relativism and Multiculture and Ethnicity. Obviously in one short paper the researcher is unlikely to exhaust all the perspectives but they provide a framework for analysis. Therefore the researcher will take historical and ethnicity aspects to analyse the impact of multiculturalism and literature

The word ethnic is derived from the Greek word 'ethnos', meaning 'People'. Ethnic group refers to a group that is socially defined on the basis of its cultural characteristics. Ethnicity – the sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group – thus implies the existence of a distinct culture or sub-culture in which group members feel themselves bound together by a common history, values, attitudes, and behaviours. Other members of the society also regard them as distinctive. In the essay, *Sociology Experiencing A changing Society,* George Ritzer and C.W. Kammeyer define ethnic groups:

> Ethnic groups may differ in cultural characteristics as diverse as food habits, family patterns, sexual behaviours, modes of dress, standards of beauties, political orientations, economic activities and recreational pattern. (318)

Canada's ethnic composition has changed dramatically over the past two centuries. Beginning with a heterogeneous native population, Canada became primarily French – Indian and then French – English. This demographic structure was disrupted in the late nineteenth century as immigrants from "other" European countries began to come to Canada. From the turn of century, the ethnic distribution began slowly to change, with the French and English decreasing in proportion to "other" ethnic groups as immigrants increased. Almost all these early "other' immigrants were from Europe or the United States. In the late 1960s, further changes in

the ethnic composition occurred as Canada adopted the "point system" for determining the eligibility of immigrants. The number of European and U.S.A. immigrants has declined and the number of Asian, Caribbean and Latin American immigrants has increased during late 70s. These immigrants are known as 'New Visible Immigrants." Visible minority is term first used in the early 1980s to denote groups that are distinctive by virtue of their race, colour, or "Visibility".

The presence of visible minority groups has been felt across Canada. Mainly, changes have been observed in terms of heterogeneous ethnic voices and economic structure of Canadian society. One of the major impacts of this group has had in new ethnic communities today is on the issues of individual versus collective rights. The Canadian charter of Rights and freedoms focuses largely upon individual rights. Yet it spells out the rights of majority groups, it only indirectly recognizes multicultural groups rights. However, minority groups admire their predecessors and attempt to gain collective rights to maintain their culture. Today visible minority groups have developed their own distinct institutional structures according to their value systems.

Recent visible minority immigrants have disproportionate numbers of low and high educational backgrounds. It directly affects the socio-economic structure of Canadian society. This society is pluralistic or multiethnic, consisting of a variety of ethnic groups, each compromising a different proportion of the total population and controlling its own destiny, to differing degrees.

Ethnic differences within Canada are constructed and maintained through multiculturalism. Self-identity in the context of multiculturalism is an interesting and important topic. Individuals living in a diverse society may choose to identify themselves in a variety of ways. In Canada, a good deal of attention has been focused on ethnic self identity. Canada presents itself as a multicultural society, open to immigrants from any place in the world, in which those who are of diverse ethnic origins are encouraged to retain their distinctive cultural characteristics as they seek to become successfully integrated into Canadian Society. The study of inter-group relations specially between minority and dominant ethnic cultural groups has long been concerned of the process of integration and assimilation that tend to weaken or reinforce their distinctive cultural characteristics and behaviour pattern.

Canadians had the opportunities to experiment with multiculturalism as a government policy for over two decades. Canada was the first and the only nation in the world to establish a multiculturalism act in 1988. This policy has brought ethnic minorities recognition as groups within mainstream Canadian society. Based on this experience, Canadians can now address several contemporary issues. The first issue that needs to be addressed is the identification of innovative approaches to encourage people to value the existence of other culture and recognize the fact that they share many common values. Second, the role of information technology to facilitate the linkage between diverse cultural groups must be firmly understood. Third, the socio-cultural relationship between ethno-Canadian communities and their own or ancestral homelands must be explored. Fourth, Canadian government policy is to establish long term goals based upon mutual objectives of the Canadian society.

As a society, immigrants are in the midst of a pervasive and profound crisis in Canada, forcing them to deal with a host of social problems, including ethnic inequality, prejudice, racism, discrimination and ethnic conflict. Anyone who wishes to better understand Canadian society must view ethnicity as one of the most important factors. The changes in Canadian ethnic composition have direct structural effects, and indirect social effects. The demographic attributions of the population affect social behaviour of the people. Therefore, the important issues regarding ethnicity are matters of human behaviour. Almost all the problems currently facing individuals, organizations or societies are the result, more or less, of the way people behave towards one another. Human beings obtain their principal satisfactions and motivations from their relationships with other people. As the twenty first century approaches, the diverse attitudes, opinions, motivations and contextual constructs that underlie social behaviour are only beginning to be understood. Berry and Laponee suggest that "ethnicity is likely to be to the twenty first century what class was to twentieth – a major source of social tensions and political conflicts" (3). On a more positive note, however they also view ethnic as a likely "Source of Creation"(3).

Most Canadians find ethnic issues complex and seemingly without resolution. They continuously ask questions such: as why don't the ethnic groups integrate into Canadian society? How ethnics seem to want to maintain their ancestral ethnic linkage? Why don't immigrants become more like regular Canadian?   Canadians look to social Scientists for answers.

A number of theoretical Models have been put forward to explain ethnic relation, for example, Biological Model, cultural and Macro/Micro Model.

Biological and Cultural model have been rejected because there is no empirical evidence to support such claims.   However, these biological and cultural models have been evident in the literature for many years and seem to have undergone some resurgence of popularity in the recent past.   The model, the researcher has utilized to explain ethnic relations, reflects the sociological imagination, drawing upon the macro and micro sociological factors surround everyone in the society.

In Macro and Micro Models, two perspectives make up the theoretical model to explain human behaviour – macro and micro variables. The former focuses on the structure of society, the later focuses on the individual. The first of these perspectives is usually associated with Karl Marx, the Second, with Sigmund Freud. Macro theorists attempt to explain social behaviour by looking at how the structure of society impinges upon the individual. There are many variations of micro perspectives, some focusing on demographic factors, economic issues, gender, and race and other using a combination of different structural factors like region and ethnic groups to explain human behaviour.

To understand and predict ethnic relations, we need to accept the principles of historical specificity. This principle forces us to understand the conditions under which people have been treated over time and the structural constrains under which these people have to live. One cannot adopt, an ahistorical approach to studying ethnic relations. One must fully appreciate the history of the relations, whether myth or reality, that impinges upon the views, attitudes and behaviour of ethnic group members. Thus, the historical collective consciousness of the ethnic group is an important contextual factor that will give us fertile ground upon which to build a theoretical explanation of today's behaviour.

Historical background or context is an important factor to understand or predict ethnic relations of any group. In *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, Raymond Aron defines, "the term history, in the narrow sense, as the science of the human past. In the wider sense, it studies the development of the earth, of the heavens and of species as well as of civilization" (15).

Historical background is often used to designate the sum total of human activities in the past. A more common usage looks upon history as the record of the events rather than the events themselves. Therefore, History may be regarded as a record of all that has occurred within the realm of human consciousness.

The earliest historical material or inscriptions were devoted chiefly to glorification of the kings, military victories and monarchies achievements. Consequently history was reduced to dynastic lists. However, in recent times, new historians have challenged the traditional concept of history as casual, closed and linear. Theorist like Foucault, Hayden White opines that since history when made up by the historian, is necessarily "a political act, the empirical and objective narration of historical material should be discarded as 'real' life can never be truthfully represented" (IX-X)

Novels, on the other hand, tend to present an intimate view of life while providing a holistic picture of perceived reality. They transport the reader into a particular setting to involve him / her in the lives and thoughts of a set of characters. The development of these fictitious characters however, occurs against a background of their Socio-political environment. The writers in general and the postcolonial writers in particular endeavour to postulate their own version of history of their people and thereby reject the traditional history.

Hence, a novelist shares exploitable strategies with an historian who excludes, emphasizes or subordinates details of historical events. Rohinton Mistry, too, in his novel *Such a Long Journey* rejects many existing narratives about post Independence historical happenings and achieves a fusion between fact and fiction.

Such a Long Journey deals with its protagonist, Gustad Noble's modest dreams and aspirations. The novelist has dovetailed various narratives with the central narrative of Gustad. The novel is set in Mumbai, depicting life style of Parsis in the city. However, it is not about an ordinary man and his family. The novelist is more concerned about narration of some of the major events in the history of post independent India.

In Canada, the emergence of a post-colonial literature kept pace with the Country's emergence into independent nation states and was a reaction against both British Modernism and American postmodernism. In an attempt to shake free of British political imperialism and

American cultural imperialism, Canadian literature fashioned a new idiom for itself and made it possible for a national manifesto to evolve. In the absence of a unifying national culture, the Country had to contend itself with a multicultural identity which synthesized the different voices and which, saw the parts as a whole, albeit a 'fragmented' whole.

Many writers and critics in Canada where fully involved in the process of writing literary histories and it has become an important ingredient in the fostering of an independent national or cultural identity. For diasporic writers, they reveal their national identity by writing their national, political, and historical texts. Their national consciousness emerges in literary texts. They try to decolonize the impact of British influences on Colonised people by emerging national consciousness. Decolonisation helps the writers to disentangle themselves from the forces of the empirical centre.

Such a Long Journey is a novel by one of the most remarkable writers of fiction to have emerged from India in recent years. It is set in Mumbai against the backdrop of the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 and the emergence of Bangladesh as a separate independent nation. Besides this, the frequent reference to the war against neighbouring Countries serves as historical back drop to events that the novel upholds. Indo-China War in 1962 and Indo-Pak Wars during 1965 and 1971 are some of the examples, Rohinton Mistry has included in his novel, *Such a Long Journey*. The consciousness of history makes a person aware of his origin, his place and his existence on this world. Mistry has used the historical events to recreate the past. Rohinton Mistry says: "Especially Jawaharlal Nehru, with his favourite slogan 'Hindi-Chinee bhai-bhai' insisting that, Chou En-lai was a brother, the two nations were great friends. And refusing to believe any talk of war (11).

In *Ice Bangles*, Nazneen Sadiq has used the custom, dress and religious ceremony of Pakistani community in order to have a sense of ethnic and cultural identity in multicultural Society. The writers of South Asian diaspora do not look upon their culture and ethnic identity as a threat. Rather they create a space for the emergence of their ethnic identity in the multicultural society. Nazneen Sadiq's *Ice Bangles* is a story of a woman's struggles to find and asset her identity within and later outside world. In the conversation with Fizza, Naila Siraj's expression of two worlds is revealed here.

What is it like?

"It is wonderful".

"But how do you manage?

"Just like everyone else"

"Do you ever think of home?"

"Home"

"Yes, all of us, the life we have here"

"No, they are two separate worlds". (IB 37)

As a young bride, Naila Siraj arrives in Toronto from Pakistan with four suitcases of Saris. She has left her parent's wealthy home in Karachi for a cramped down town apartment. In this novel, the writer projects the custom and style of Pakistani bride. After her marriage on her journey to Canada for the first time, she has not forgotton to wear the typical Banarasi Sari and Jewellery. This indicates the importance of traditional dress for a newly married woman in Pakistan. Here, the author remarks :

> The Crackling static cling of her orange Banaras silk sari and the brazen clump of her gold bracelets were new signatures Naila wasn't used to. Not, yet any way. Of course it was just going to be this for a short while, until she got to the country. Where her outdated school books had assured her everyone spoke French. (IB 2-3)

In the story, Naila, the narrator, living in Canada, goes home to attend the wedding of her brother. It comes as a surprise to her that her brother's bride, though quite charming is dark skinned. Her mother, who had hoped secretly for a Kashmiri wife for her only son, had been cheated. It shows that colour discrimination is not only in Canada but also in South Asian countries.

There are many ritual ceremonies during the marriage of any community. For example in this novel, the author has mentioned about henna ceremony along with the traditional dance performed by the members of the family. The author has revived dying customs in order to have the cultural as well as ethnic identity.

It is clear that multicultural policing power is an example of power working from below as Foucault claims it does, in families and in communities, as these groups work to maintain themselves. Thus, in *An Introduction: History of Technology*, Foucault has mentioned about the power of multiculturalism as "the multiplicity of force relations" which are "produced from one moment to the next, at a very point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (92-93).

Identity politics in conjunction with multiculturalism function, in part, as a policing process. However, this mosaic is not simply static, but it is also in a process of constant transformation, exceedingly complex as immigration policies and patterns, dominant attitude, even ethnic groups change, becoming more or less ethnic. The unending search for ethnic identity in terms of self identity, cultural identity and national identity has resulted in the emergence of a new trend witnessed in Canadian writing. The work produced by South Asian writers is perhaps the richest and the most rapidly growing into new component of Canadian literature. This new wave of immigrant writers of South Asian diaspora does not look upon their culture as opposed to the main stream Canadian culture or see as a threat. Canadian multicultural mosaic has allowed the writers to maintain their cultural identit

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