



Multicultural Aspects and Conflicts in The Novels of Zadie Smith

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Abstract

This paper attempts to investigate the important topic of multiculturalism as well as the issues faced by immigrants who feel as though they do not belong in their new country, as explored in Zadie Smith's seminal works. It also covers how the British public responds and behaves in response to this growing cultural mingling, or "melting pot." The lives of three families the Iqbal, Jones, and Bowden families are followed. There is cross-cultural mixing among the three families. To reassure the newcomers that they are a part of something great, the characters in this piece are relentlessly pursuing excellence in their hometowns. One of the most well-known critics of Zadie Smith's work, British writer James Wood, initially introduced the term "hysterical realism," which Smith uses in her writing. Her use of style has enabled her to accurately capture the perplexity that faces immigrants in their thoughts. Smith did a great job capturing the diverse racial landscape of London.

Keywords: - Multiculturalism, immigrants, cultural challenges, melting pot, cross-culturalism and hysterical realism.

Introduction: - The entire immigrant characters experience alienation, and as a result, they all respond differently—some stoically, while others, like Shamad's son Millat, react reactively or offensively. Religion, ethnic identity, and immigration difficulties have all always been included by Zadie Smith. The novel's happy ending conveys the notion that, despite the numerous disagreements, things will eventually get better as people begin to accept one another's identities and cultures. "My dream would be a multicultural society, one that is diverse and where every man, woman, and child are treated equally," Nelson Mandela famously remarked. I envision a society in which individuals of all races coexist peacefully.

The primary character, Shamad, is an immigrant who has landed in a melting pot of civilizations where racial and cultural tensions are constantly simmering beneath the surface. Like all the other characters, he is driven by a sense that power could lead to the suppression of his culture. I envision a society in which individuals of all races coexist peacefully. The dissertation's theoretical framework is the main topic of this chapter. Through the presentation of various arguments and statements put up by opponents of multiculturalism, it will attempt to provide a thorough analysis of the concept.

Nonetheless, a lot of theorists favor concentrating their arguments on indigenous people, minority nations, and immigrants who belong to racial and religious minorities. According to Stratford University's encyclopedia, multiculturalism is closely related to "identity politics," "the politics of difference," and "the politics of recognition," all of which are dedicated to revaluing identities that have been mistreated and altering prevailing patterns of communication and representation that exclude particular groups. In addition to being an issue of political and economic power, multiculturalism calls for solutions to the social, political, and economic injustices that people experience due to their minority status.

The term multiculturalism, which was first used by a Canadian Royal Commission in 1965, is widely accepted and supported by its supporters as a progressive political imperative as well as an official article of faith. It is, in essence, a term linked to the values of equality, tolerance, and inclusivity towards migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The multiculturalism of Canada is essential to our sense of equality among all citizens. All citizens are guaranteed the freedom to maintain their identities, to be proud of their heritage, and to have a feeling of belonging via multiculturalism. Following Canada, the Australian government embraced multiculturalism as a way to emphasize the importance of cultural diversity and to honor Aboriginal cultural customs like rituals, attire, and food.

Since the turn of the century, Western democracies have frequently referred to themselves as multicultural societies, even though very few nations have implemented formal



multiculturalism programs. Countries like Japan and Germany, which were previously recognized for their strict efforts to homogenize their cultures, were forced to acknowledge the fact that their cultures were becoming more diverse due to the increasing intensity of worldwide migration. Thus, in public discourse, multicultural is frequently synonymous with multi-ethnic, which is then confused with "multiracial," demonstrating how much the focus of multiculturalism arguments is on the existence of non-white immigrant communities in white, Western cultures.

The terms "race" and "ethnicity" are those that are intrinsically linked to multiculturalism. This also explains why, despite its widespread use today, the idea of "multiculturalism" has remained controversial. The word's exact meaning is never entirely obvious, but generally speaking, it alludes to the problems and challenges of the politics of difference (Kymlicka, 35). What Canadian liberal multiculturalist Kymlicka refers to as "group differentiated rights" is the central tenet of multiculturalism. Minority groups in nation-states ruled by majority groups face complex issues that cannot be resolved by anti-racism laws and tolerance alone.

According to him, historical phenomena have shaped our current state of affairs, knowledge base, and moral code. His writings mostly focus on the study of Western culture and how it came to be in its current state. By doing this, he claims that while the current state has resulted from historical growth, it is not a prerequisite. He expressly addresses "the promotion of change that counters oppression and domination and fosters what he refers to as 'the work of freedom'" through his "ontology of the present" (Taylor, 2). The modern definition of power is now productive, emanating both positive and negative forces that shape every social interaction. In this setting, power is inherent in the social interactions that are central to multiculturalism. It exists in a variety of relationships rather than being owned and possessed by a single person or entity. Based on the problems with culture itself, critics such as Jeremy Waldron contend that culture is not a fixed entity but rather is dynamic and ever-changing due to interactions with other cultures through trade, migration, conflict, imperialism, and other means. In the face of today's highly globalized and culturally hybridized cultures, maintaining an ostensibly purely separate culture means restricting the growth and development of the members of that distinct cultural group: Our globe has been shaped by trade and technology, by political, theological, and economic empire and its children, by mass migration and the diffusion of cultural influences.

In this situation, the subversive authority confines the already marginalized groups together behind another rigid barrier, necessitating the development of new tactics to free the oppressed groups from their imprisonment. According to Kenan Malik, multiculturalism encompasses both the policies required to govern an exceptionally diverse society, typically due to immigration. As a result, it incorporates both a critique of society and a suggested course of action. (Malik, 149). The study of the effects of the legal execution of multiculturalism policies in a multicultural society and the web of social relations can help us understand the intricacies and elements of multiculturalism in literature.

Zadie Smith, a British novelist, draws great inspiration from the socio-cultural shifts she encountered as a child growing up in "the brave new multicultural world of London" (Nichols, 62). She uses this inspiration as the main idea in the majority of her books. The episodes of her novels depict the British government's adoption of specific multiculturalism-related policies. The PTA meeting's discussion of celebrating the pagan harvest festival and the music teacher's insistence on incorporating Bollywood music into orchestra practice are examples of how White Teeth Manor School, where Magid, Millat, and Irie attended when they were younger, adopted a policy of cultural tolerance as part of its curriculum objectives. What is the Harvest Festival all about? What's that? For what reason is that? And why do my kids have to have to celebrate it? "Mr. Iqbal, we covered the topic of religious holidays in the autumn review in great detail.



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As you are undoubtedly aware, the school already observes a wide range of religious and secular holidays, including Hanukkah, Christmas, Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Diwali, Yom Kippur, Haile Selassie's birthday, and the passing of Martin Luther King. Mr. Iqbal, the Harvest Festival is a component of the school's continuous efforts to promote religious diversity." "I understand." And how many pagans attend Manor School, Mrs. Owens? "I'm afraid I don't understand, Pagan." "It is so easy to understand. There are thirty-seven religious events on the Christian calendar.

Then two more hands moved slowly above the crowd, and Samad cast a sharp glance at Archie and Clara who were sitting awkwardly on the other side of the hall. "The thirty-six hands that were left rose into the air. No motion was made." (Smith, pages 142–144) Samad Miah Iqbal's suggestion to include Muslim holidays in the primary school curriculum was rejected by a straightforward vote that was universally approved by the majority. Smith highlights the inherent power dynamics and cultural tensions that exist in multicultural environments while also reflecting the occasionally illogical assertions of minority groups.

A couple of seconds later, additional fingers lifted gently over the throng, and Samad glanced sharply at Archie and Clara, who were sitting uncomfortably across the corridor. "The remaining thirty-six hands raised themselves into the air. There was no motion submitted. (Smith, 142–144) By a clear majority vote, Samad Miah Iqbal's proposal to incorporate Muslim holidays into the curriculum for elementary schools was rejected.

Smith represents the sometimes nonsensical claims made by minority groups while simultaneously highlighting the underlying relationships of power and interpersonal conflicts that arise in societies with multiple cultures. The social and cultural repercussions of diversity are discussed in the narrative of Smith's other two novels, even though his concerns about it are more evident in *White Teeth*. *White Teeth* was published before 2000, which cast doubt on British multiculturalism as violent uprisings and riots spearheaded by the nation's minority communities increased in frequency. The saga of *White Teeth* spans nearly fifty years, from 1857 to the end of the millennium.

Smith sets most of the happenings of the novel in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when the nation was well-known for its exuberant attitude towards multiculturalism. Through this, she explores the structure of social relations, the sensibilities of immigrant communities, and the alterations that British culture underwent historically. By the close of the millennium, British multiculturalism had transitioned from a joyful state to one of distrust towards potential risks to the country's security posed by domestic terrorism.

Events like the unhappy minority groups'-instigated Hansforth riot in Birmingham in 1985 and the Muslim fundamentalist groups' 1989 fatwa against Salman Rushdie for his work *The Satanic Verse*, which they claimed was injurious for Islam, incited the bulk of categories to criticise and label the multiculturalism policy as a failure. Smith provides examples of how attitudes change and is affected by the group of fictional people she creates and those who live outside of it. Though it makes sense, Smith's treatment of the topic of multiculturalism in her other works of fiction has a very different tone. The entire Western world took on a markedly antagonistic stance. The opposition to immigrant multiculturalism stems from a fear and worry about "others" who are from other countries as well as nostalgia for a time when people felt strongly connected.

In her later books, Smith focuses more on the narrative effects of multiculturalism at the individual level. However, what stands out more in the stories is the personal struggle of characters such as Howard Belsey, an immigrant, and Alex-Li Tandem, an immigrant's son, to deal with the politics of difference and recognition and the difficulties of integration. From a paradigmatic perspective, multiculturalism can be analyzed as an ideal or ideology with the power to shape conduct, assess deeds, and give legitimacy to actions (Fleras and Elliott, 35). According to this perspective, diversity plays a crucial role in gaining control over a society's



minority groups as a whole. The shared elements that comprise culture are the groupings of human individuals who adhere to common values, beliefs, and religion.

After having an affair with Poppy Burt Jones, Samad is said to have had an epiphany and realized that Western society was tainting his morals (Smith, 184). He was unable to understand anything that went beyond what he considered to be good just because of his fixation with Islamic moral principles. His choice to transfer Magid to Bangladesh to teach him and his family to adhere to Islamic principles ultimately caused his family to fall apart. To get what he wanted, Samad had to go to tremendous lengths even kidnapping his son which contributes to his unforgivable betrayal of Alsana.

Smith's mocking of Samad's choice distorts the distinction between "home" and "there." Sent to Bangladesh, Magid grew more "English than the English" and became an Anglicised atheist (Smith, 365). Samad was able to use his domineering authority over his children while they were younger, but even from his "home" in Bangladesh, he was unable to instill Muslim principles in Magid. Additionally, Millat, who remained in the "corruptible land" of London, joined the Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation, a Muslim fundamentalist group that ultimately rebelled against the ruling class, symbolized by Magid's mentor Marcus Chalfen's launch of the Future Mouse project. Nevertheless, as a result of one brother's transgression (Smith, 535), the two brothers wound up behind bars. The children's resistance to subjectivity is based on how morally they deviate from the norms set out by their parents and society. Individuals exercise freedom, which is inherently linked to power dynamics, by refusing to conform their behavior to what the larger collectivity expects of them. The ideological contrast between Montague Kipps' conservatism and Howard's liberalism is the most obvious divergence in the book. As the novel goes on, Smith demonstrates that they are more alike than initially believed. As tale 36 develops, the two men are shown as archivists who are blind to anything but their own ideological viewpoints.

The divisions and disputes that occur in the classroom are a reflection of the limits created by binary opposites in a heterogeneous society. If liberal societies are to treat heterogeneous cultures which are composed of a variety of philosophical and moral outlooks seriously, they must recognize that liberalism is but one of many substantive outlooks based on a specific viewpoint of man and society. Instead of being a civilization without any culture, progressivism demonstrates a distinct culture of its own.

Howard Belsey does not acknowledge the views of others who do not share his liberal worldview until the very conclusion of the story. The two women of the families who can comprehend the existence of difference finally become friends to escape the binary paradigm of their husbands' differences. Conversely, the degree to which the dominant ethnicity can "naturalize" their beliefs and customs to their benefit is one way to assess their level of success (Yuval-Davis, 194). In her work, Smith adeptly conveys the power dynamics present in ethnic rhetoric. It should be noticed that Smith almost always uses humor to convey irony when depicting topics about race and ethnicity to convey the dualistic perspective of each subject. Characters like Millat and Kiki Belsey play a crucial role in illustrating how members of minority groups frequently take advantage of their heritage for personal gain.

Categories and ways of knowing are constructed within relations of power and maintained, reproduced, and resisted in specific and sometimes contradictory ways, as Gill Bottomley puts it (Smith, 309). As was previously mentioned, multiculturalism claims equality among all of the citizens who have made up various civilizations while attempting to tolerate variations among distinct cultures. Given the nebulous nature of the concept of culture itself, it is problematic to pursue equality while fostering difference. According to Kenan Malik, equality cannot be interpreted differently by various socioeconomic, cultural, or sexual groups.

In such cases, equality either vanishes completely or takes on the meaning that



racists once gave it equal but different to justify apartheid or segregation. Instead of several interpretations, equality necessitates a single yardstick, or standard of evaluation (Malik, 26). Our identity and way of thinking are effectively determined by the person who decides what can be known. Thus, language and knowledge are inherently political, according to Foucault. Samad has "history in his blood," as Archie Jones puts it, but in the new country he is immigrating to, his history has been lost. Despite Samad's best efforts, his offspring were unable to embrace the purported bravery of their progenitor. Due to the information that has been disseminated to them through education and other forms of authority, individuals have been trained to accept what they hear in their history class at school as the only accurate account of events.

Conclusion: - However, the term "multiculturalism" itself and the novel's usage of its elements are both complicated. In contrast to the rhetoric made by political leaders who attempt to win over every segment of their voter base by implying that all immigrant cultures are welcome, Zadie Smith's book depicts the ground realities of a nation such as Britain. There are moments in the book where the immigrant characters experience conflict in their relationships with members of other ethnic groups. Even though it is stated obliquely, immigrants nevertheless experience discrimination and other insulting remarks, even though the government forbids them.

Most likely, the main reasons people immigrate to other countries are to improve their level of living, safety, stability, and economic strength—all without sacrificing their culture, identity, or respect for themselves. Iqbal, Jones, Bowden, and other immigrant characters in the book live as English people do, but they are not English. As Zadie Smith correctly puts it, they reside in a "nothing space" of a nation. In the book, Smith uses a brilliant and thought-provoking quotation to illustrate the contradictory circumstances faced by the immigrants. This quotation is presented as a question from Norman Tebbit to us, "Which side do they support during the cricket test? Are you still contemplating your past or current circumstances? Smith's work is significant from the perspective that it exposes politicians' hypocrisy in praising cultural diversity and equal opportunity in their nation while, on the ground, immigrants continue to be perceived as distinct in some ways based on their race and culture, even though it is illegal to discuss these issues openly. The character feels compelled to take action on their identity even if state statements are not mentioned explicitly in the story. Zadie Smith tries to avoid having her fiction and non-fiction works categorized according to her gender, race, or ethnicity.

The quasi-Dickensian daily life of British society has been addressed by hyphenated British writers such as Monica Ali, Andrea Levy, Salman Rushdie, and Zadie Smith, among others, who have been accepted into the British literary canons. What separates them, though, is how they approach some everyday issues because of the transformational nature of national and cultural identity. In the process, it also highlights the power dynamics that shape the political contestations. Smith is well aware of the problems with the term "difference" in and of itself, and he understands that there is no deterministic way to define it. As a result, Smith opposes ingrained dualistic notions and attempts to find a medium ground in each of the novels under consideration. Immigrants who must create their meaning from the jumble of modern postmodern existence are the main characters in Smith's works. They possess a sense of disconnection from the cultural environments they live in. Each character experiences reality differently, which influences how they view differences on their terms. Since people who identify with these opposite ends of the spectrum are almost invariably similar to one another, the binary paradigm that highlights cultural differences has been dismantled.

The methods of power are how this individual perception functions. Smith's writing highlights the author's use of irony and humor to highlight the conceit of the characters who value distinction without having a thorough awareness of the other. It also exposes and mocks the characters' inability to grow as a result of their obsession with their origins,



customs, and past. According to Smith, the multicultural landscape of modern society is unavoidable, and any attempt to provide a final answer to the problems resulting from the interaction of various cultural backgrounds would inevitably come up short.

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