
Multiculturalism and Identity Crisis in Salman Rushdie's Midnight Children

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Abstract

The terms multiculturalism and Identity have great strengths in connecting and creating a place where one can not be a unique individual rather than multicultural Identities through placing different cultures and questions regarding family, heritage, the symbolism of names, and the allegorical representation of India's culture variety. Multiculturalism always gives individuals the opportunity to adapt to several cultures without losing their own identities, but there is always the possibility of clashes between people's cultural and civic identities. A person's Identity is always shaped by one's social role, beliefs, and affiliation to the norms of a particular group. The impact of Multiculturalism on individuals is much more significant in terms of socializing themselves in different conditions. The society promotes Multiculturalism in various forms. This process can not be judged as the universal achievement of individuals as it passes through difficult situations. Salman Rushdie's "Midnight Children" bears a significant mark of Multiculturalism. The dispersed condition of the main character, Saleem Sinai, has been shown as the critical condition of an individual to lead a life with a unique Identity. Saleem passes through different stages of his life, and he confronts difficult situations, and such difficulties are solved through his practical mind. Terms such as class, nation, and purity of race may be viewed with criticism through the theme of illegitimacy that characterizes Saleem's family background, born to a Hindu mother and a Christian father and nourished by Muslim parents.

Thus, the protagonist is enclosed by the three ethnic and religious groups: Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. This mixture of culture bestows him with plural Identities and can be regarded as the symbol for post-colonial India; due to the fact that his birth concurs with that of the modern nation, he grows, evolves, and breaks into fragments, actions that mimic the faith of India. The place of Multiculturalism in society has been promoted through individuals' plural identities. This paper is going to present the negative impact of Multiculturalism by showing the critical conditions of the protagonist of "Midnight's Children," Saleem Sinai, whose diversified experiences throughout his whole life can be a great example of the existence of Multiculturalism in society. In this paper, I will try to discuss the disadvantages of Multiculturalism for individuals. If people see themselves as member of ethnic or racial groups rather than as citizens of a common country, then it would be impossible to have a National Identity. Multiculturalism undermines the notion of equal

individual rights. As a result, it weakens the political value of equal treatment. Plural Identity can not bring proper human value. Through the character Saleem Sinai, we realize that living in a multicultural society makes it difficult to preserve an individual's self-identity, which is one kind of threat to the freedom of common men.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Individual Identity, plural Identity, fragments, colonialism

Introduction:

Multiculturalism is also known as cultural diversity. In Indian history, Multiculturalism multiculturalism has gone through different stages. Multiculturalism promotes cultural differences and gives a place to have a unique identity for all various cultures. It creates an atmosphere where people from different cultures can share their own feelings, beliefs, and customs, and it has no barrier to leading such a system in society. The necessity of Multiculturalism in South Asian society is much more relevant to achieving the overall development of the society. By promoting Multiculturalism in society, we can create a better country, and we can easily overcome all the differences prevailing in society. If we have one Identity, we can easily defend ourselves from any kind of difficulties. However, amidst these advantages, we also face a lot of difficulties in implementing Multiculturalism in society. Apparently, it looks easier to achieve, but when we go to the real conditions, there are many things that come as challenges to make society a unique identity. There are a lot of interior problems that should be solved through the government's Government's innovative plans and policies. The process of national integration is done through cultural diversity as it brings the whole society together without strategic plans to place the different cultures in one society. The promotion of Multiculturalism has not been unjustified in this paper; rather, it discusses the vital problems that appear as barriers to forming a multicultural society. The issue of Multiculturalism multiculturalism is troubled by the political perspectives of contemporary society. Although there is a big slogan of uniting the different cultures, the interest of the minorities is suppressed through political manipulation. The major cultural people take advantage of Multiculturalism by leaving the minorities' actual interest. Individual development of minority communities is not fulfilled in a multicultural society. Thus, Multiculturalism can not fulfill the needs of the whole culture of society. In the story of "Midnight's Children," we find Saleem Sinai, who is struggling to preserve his Identity. Saleem is the manager and writer of the pickle factory. He is determined to preserve the story before he dies, a victim of "too much history." He begins to crumble and Crack "like an old jug," a reflection of India's partitioning and division along the lines of religion, language, and class, and it is slowly killing him.

Multiculturalism is the co-existence of different religions, ethnicities, languages, and belief systems. It unites all the differences of the different cultures of the society. It aims to amalgamate the variety of the society. However, it has many problems, such as challenges to individual democracy, national Identity, and national integration. Multiculturalism supports the immigrant system, which challenges national integration. Bangladeshi immigrants have become the biggest problem for the integration of Indian citizens. Multiculturalism takes the opinion of the political leaders, which always deceives the minority cultural people and advances the thoughts of the majority cultural people. People in multicultural societies have different opinions, thoughts, ideas, and emotions, and these differences bring diversity. A society can not be developed without unique thoughts or ideas. Different opinions of different people in the same society can not bring about the utmost development. It would be possible to achieve development if the Government could equalize the power of all classes of people. In reality, we find nothing has been implemented as it focuses on the majority cultural society. Language barrier is one of the vital issues in promoting Multiculturalism as it is not able to bring about smooth communication amongst different cultural people. If language is not understandable, it is impossible to make people understand the importance of Multiculturalism. There is also the problem of decision- in a multicultural society, there are no proper leaders to understand the common people. There is a challenge in motivating culturally diverse teams (due to a lack of understanding).

Canada is the first country to promote Multiculturalism widely. We find that Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka is best known for his work on Multiculturalism and animalism. His work provides a liberal framework for the just treatment of minority groups, which he divides into two categories: polyethnic or immigrant groups and national minorities. Kymlicka argues that national minority groups deserve unique rights from the state by the nature of their unique role and history within the national population. On the other hand, polyethnic groups are less deserving of such rights since they come to the state voluntarily and thus have some degree of responsibility to integrate into the norms of their new nation. This does not mean that they are not entitled to any rights, as Kymlicka argues that all cultures have a right to choose their own lives, but it does not mean that they are not entitled to the same level of group rights that minority nations would be entitled to. Kymlicka makes various exceptions, such as the problems faced by the refugees, whether from conflict or poverty, and by such minority groups such as African Americans (whose heritage clearly did not begin voluntarily), and argues that their needs with regards to cultural group-specific rights should be considered as a special basis. Here, I, one thing, want to add that many immigrants from Bangladesh come to India voluntarily and occupy their residence in India by creating cultural diversity, which is not better for Indian Nationalism. Very few immigrants come involuntarily from Bangladesh. This cultural amalgamation creates a new problem for the society. This process has been approved as a benefit of political polarization. This should be stopped to maintain the ethical norms of Multiculturalism.

Internal restrictions, however, can not be justified from a liberal perspective in so far as they restrict a person's autonomy, though they may be granted in certain cases to national minorities. The standard liberal criticism, which states that group rights are problematic because they often treat individuals as mere carriers of group identities rather than autonomous social agents, is overstated or oversimplified. The actual problems of minorities and how they should be viewed in liberal democracies are much more complex. The book *Zoopolis* by Sue Donaldson and co-authored by Will Kymlicka deals with the rights of animals in the cultural group. This is an adequate response to both the ethical and practical challenges of living fairly and constructively with other animals. Donaldson and Kymlicka suggest that animals should be characterized by serving to determine the nature of the laws and politics that should protect those animals. Domesticated animals should be given a kind of adjusted citizenship in which their best interests and preferences would be taken into account. Donaldson and Kymlicka defend the end of their use, advocating for a vegan position, but they reject extinctionism with regard to those animals that are currently bred by humans. Wild animals should be granted enough sovereignty on their land so that they can sustain their way of living and prosper.

Multiculturalism creates an

identity crisis for individuals due to having several identities. Salman Rushdie's "Midnight Children" bears the mark of identity crisis through several characters. In the novel, everyone is affected by an identity crisis. The fact is that everyone thinks about his own Identity and wants to grow himself with his self-respect only. This novel reveals the questions of Identity, which he shows through the various characters who struggle for their survival. They are the slaves of fate, and they do not know what they are searching for, so their lives are meaningless even after so many struggles. Salman Rushdie becomes the self-victim of an identity crisis. He moved from one place to another. He migrated from India to Pakistan, where he went with his family against his will. For his studies, he moved to England, and at last, he moved to the United States due to Fatwa. As a looker, he grasped the knowledge of various experiences and tried to incorporate them in his writings as he has done in his search for Identity....." exile or emigrants or expatriate by some sense of loss, some argue to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge which gives rise to profound uncertainties that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands India's of the mind"(Rushdie, 1991). The term identity comes from the French word 'identity,' which means 'the same,' and crisis denotes confusion because people can not achieve important life goals. The term crisis refers to a person's feelings of fear, disturbance, disillusion, and pain. The term basically deals with a psychological state of mind. It suggests self. The person who sets his goals and priorities in his lifetime, and if he is not able to achieve them, suffers from frustration. Difficulties are hindrances to a man's progress. Mam, with his intellect,

knows how to protect him against adverse circumstances but is ignorant about himself. Krishna said, "The self is a friend of (transformed) the self but the enemy of the unregenerate self." (Man's Greatest Adventure, 10)

The paper highlights Salman Rushdie's "Midnight Children" from the point of an identity crisis. Rushdie is a diasporic writer. He has experienced the feeling of banishment throughout his life. He grew up on this land, which is mostly affected by British rule. The novel "Midnight's Children" is basically the story of three generations of the Sinai family. He feels delighted to utter the fact that he was born at the exact moment when India gained its independence:

I was born in the city of Bombay....once upon a time. No, I wouldn't do that; there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor in Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. We'll then at night. No, it's important to be more... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact...oh, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. (Midnight's Children. 3)

The word hybridity plays an important role in Rushdie's fiction. Andrew Teverson, in his book, "Salman Rushdie: Contemporary World Writers" writes:

As the first newborn child of free India, his destiny is chained to his country. He himself tells us, "Newspaper celebrated me, politicians endorsed my position. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: 'Dear Baby Saleem, my belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face, which is Aldo, who is eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention. It will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own.'" (Midnight's Children 167)

Saleem is not a fortunate child as he is enclosed with two mothers and several fathers. As he observes: "I have had more mothers than most mothers have children." (Midnight's Children. 337) He is frustrated due to the family circumstances and the adverse condition. Not only Saleem but also Adam loses his own from the very day when he loses his own son, Hanif; he condemns himself and never believes in God. Adam searches for his trust in God in the last few days, but he wants to take revenge for the death of his son, Hanif. He speaks against God and religion because God has taken away his son. He wants to show his vexation against the power of God, and he makes a hole in his chest. Firstly, the hole is invisible, and he can feel it, but sometimes, this hole becomes visible to everyone. Shiva is another example of an identity crisis. Saleem and Shiva are the same in some features, but in most respects, they are fully opposite. Their lives are handled by others, and they are not responsible for their downfall. They are puppets in the hands of Mary Pereira, a nurse who easily transforms the lives of these two. Aziz's identity crisis throughout his life is similar to Kashmiri's own identity issues. After the partition, most of the population of

Kashmir is Muslim, while their leader is Hindu, whose name is Hari Singh. He is neither of the side of Pakistan nor of India. When Pakistan started fighting, he pursued protection from India. Pakistani thought that Muslims of Kashmir would be ruined under Hindu rule and it should belong to Pakistan because it is mainly acclimatized by the Muslims. On the other hand, India stated that the progression of Kashmir was final and complete because it is an important part of India. Lastly, Identity is represented through multiple elements: religion, language, culture, history, nationality, gender, and personality traits, amongst other things.

Multiculturalism also relates to the theory of Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony. Cultural Hegemony refers to the process of accomplishing a collective experience through the development of values and worldview perspectives. Gramsci's analysis explains how societal hegemonies are established by the mainstream and privileged through the belief systems, values, and perceptions so that these become the accepted cultural norm. Through providing opportunities to critically reflect and examine emergent patterns of thought, feeling, and ways of life and through resisting affective hegemonies, a Hegemonic agency is thereby created. One of the major influences of Gramsci's theory was his stance on the relationship between Hegemony and the affected aspects of the subaltern, oppressed, and marginalized. Gramsci believed that the role of affect through attitudes, beliefs, values, and emotions is a vital aspect of the process that challenges normative views on social and political realities. Liberal Multiculturalism or pluralism provides a peripheral overview of cultural diversity and maintains an essentialized and static view of cultural diversity and difference. It does not address the existing imbalances of power and harsh realities where social and racial inequalities do exist. In the practice of multicultural diversity, there are huge gaps between equalities and realities. In the current system of Multiculturalism, we do not find a static condition of cultural diversity. As opposed to Liberal or traditional Multiculturalism, critical Multiculturalism calls for literature that is inclusive of minority cultures with characters and identities presented in a multi-dimensional, dynamic, and well-rounded way. Characters from minority cultures are presented with their own motivations and emotions in the form of multicultural literature, challenging hegemonic perspectives and viewpoints in society and going beyond duplicity and folkloric.

In the debate on Multiculturalism theory, we find two kinds of Multiculturalism: thin Multiculturalism and thick Multiculturalism. However, both these theories are incomplete in theorizing the concept of Multiculturalism. In this multiculturalism theory, there is no conflict in society. It gives value to liberalism and avoids non-liberalism. It considers culture as an autonomous process; it does not create hindrances to an individual's values, such as beliefs, emotions, and other liberal elements. Main thinker Yale Tamir said in her book, "liberal Nationalism"(1993) that loyalty and belonging (illiberal values) are reconcilable with personal autonomy and Nationalism. However, Multiculturalism does not focus on the interest of minority

cultural groups in society. It only emphasizes the majority cultural group and justifies the whole society by undermining the minority groups, which is a major challenge of Multiculturalism. Then we find thick Multiculturalism, which recognizes the deep conflict between liberal and non-liberal groups regarding beliefs and practices. It recommends *modus vivendi*, i.e., pragmatic compromise, in order to achieve peace and stability. Through pragmatic compromise, cultural disagreements are balanced, and conflicts are equalized. They should avoid judging which is right or wrong and should adopt a policy that accommodates both parties. This approach universalizes the liberal and non-relational cultures. However, this thick Multiculturalism also undermines the interests of minority groups and thus underestimates the values of such unprivileged groups. Thus, both these approaches are challenging for flourishing Multiculturalism in society. Although these two approaches also have good features, they still lack the proper modifications to face the challenges of a diverse society.

Conclusion:

After the above study, it is clear that Multiculturalism has many dimensions. It has a lot of advantages and a lot of disadvantages. Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* is the best example of South Asian identity crisis. The whole life of Saleem Sinai bears the hue of an identity crisis. The paper attempts to investigate the drawbacks of Multiculturalism and finally finds its actual shape. It has questions about whether we could protect historical Multiculturalism, which will help to reduce human rights violations, protect religious and ethnic minorities, and promote peace and stability. There are two major challenges in South Asian cultures: the region stands for its traditions of democracy, minority rights, and pluralism. Religious and ethnic diversity is part of South Asian historical narratives. However, this environment has been threatened by cultural climate change through authoritarianism in India. However, the paper aims to achieve liberal values rather than non-liberal values. People of diverse cultures should have the freedom to express their opinions, and everyone should have their religious, ethnic, and national identities. In this way, the approach of Multiculturalism can be fulfilled. Otherwise, the necessity of the existence of Multiculturalism in South Asian society would be worthless and meaningless. Thus, the paper ends with such complex questions, and it has strong suggestions for further research on this relevant topic.

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