
Retaining Self Identity In Cultural Ambivalence On The Example Of Swami And Friends

Abstract

Culture is one of those aspects which are widely discussed by the intellects of various fields. Culture is defined in various ways and they prove to be correct when analyzed through the respective fields. Culture in its general term can be described as the set of instructions regarding the social behavior, habits, religious practices and manners. In the wider meaning culture is a way which makes man different from other animals or culture is a set of rules to make man an eligible social animal. Culture is widely studied as it is often defined as the way of life or it is the identity of human beings like the religion he belongs or his national identity and it is true as we find it in works of many respected authors and it also a proven fact by anthropologists and sociologists. When we study culture we come across the fact that culture is flexible or moldable due to the trends in the society. Culture do implies the changes due to the emergence of the change in the society or for the comfort of the society. We also see that a culture of a particular society or state can get influence of other cultures and adjust some particular practices of that culture in it without disturbing its own self. India is one of those states which have gone through such cultural changes. R. K. Narayan is one of the initial and most famous Indian English writers. He has written the novels in such manner that they created a keen interest in the English audience as well as the native readers. Malgudi Days is the best example of it. We find many cultural elements in his work which depict Indian identity. In one of his work titled 'Swami and Friends' we can see the particular imagery as how the protagonist character has retained his identity though living in the colonized or ambivalent culture. This paper will be lighting on how the retaining of self in the ambivalent or colonized culture has been depicted through the analysis of the major character named Swami.

Introduction

Culture is a set of rules or the practices in the habits, behaviors, manners, and some other aspects which are made do maintain a particular decency. The origin of culture can't be traced easily but it is said that it started with the man being intellect. Man with his intellect stated to follow particular way of leading life. He started to find out the way or we can say the manners through which he can make himself an eligible social animal. We can say that the culture started as the habits and way of behavior which were carried by one generation to other generation. Culture was developed by the hegemony either political or social, like a father in any society is a dominant person and the things he follows, believes, and practices are often followed by the next generation. This also justifies that the culture is something which is cultivated. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another as well as one group to another. The culture of any particular state is not a single element it in fact is an amalgamation of several different cultures within the state. A culture of a particular state is formed collectively of the cultures of the particular groups of the societies. Cultural studies is one of the most respective disciplines in the world as the culture is not just a set of rules transmitted from one generation to another but it also is a identity of a particular person. Culture is often expressed by the factors like arts, music, dance, food, religion and language. One can easily find out the caste, community, religion or

region of a Particular person depending upon the above factors or through the culture depicted by any of those factors. India is a country where we can find thousands of cultures. A culture in India changes from one region to another even if they are inter- related or nearby. India has been colonized by many empires and each empire has left one or the other impact on the cultures in India, but India has impressed almost all the other states of the world by its unique character of adjusting the alien cultures in it but yet retaining its own identity, history, and age old originality. From the day men and the women in the world started to see the culture through their intellectuality or intellectual power we find many questions raised on the cultures of Indian societies. The questions were justifiable as they were about the identity of sex, caste and class in the society. The Indian culture and even the democracy by some modification have tried to resolve these problems. But in today's world we find a threat on almost all the cultures of the various states. The threat of modern culture or what is known as pop culture as it affecting the culture in the name of freedom. The popular culture is being justified as the way to a proper freedom, but as many sociologists say and oblige it is the way bringing back the human to be called as uncultured. The popular culture may though provide the freedom of choice but at the same time it makes a man away from humanity and turns himself to be materialistic. Modernity or change in the culture must take place for the comfort or betterment of societies but it must not disturb the culture completely which is an identity of a person.

Culture v/s modernity in India

It is said as the modernity in India is brought by the Europeans which may stand true in some aspects but when it comes to the culture India has been modeling its culture even before any European entered the state. There were no major changes due to the hegemony of caste system but some major changes took place only after the colonization and mainly with the establishment of educational institutions and education of some mainly known social reformers. English language has proved to be a gift of colonizers to resolve some major cultural conflicts. India adopted the modern views in its culture to justify the classes and the sexes. In today's India we see the misinterpretation in adopting the modernity in the culture. The societies in India are bowing their heads completely to the modernity and are losing their age old identity. The psychology of the minds of Indian societies has changed towards making money or earning fame in the world from maintaining the proper relationship with their neighbors. The knowledge of adjusting with the modernity but yet to maintain the originality has become the essential guidance to be provided, and it is possible only through the education. The Indian authors should create such works which can be helpful in the attainment of such goal instead of exaggerating some fictions.

R. K. Narayan and 'Swami and Friends'

R. K. Narayan is considered as one of leading figures of early Indian English literature. He is the one who made India accessible to the people in foreign countries; he gave unfamiliar people a window to peep into Indian culture and sensibilities. He is remembered for his glorious contribution to the Indian English Literature. Narayan has won accolades for his literary work: Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Bhushan, AC Benson medal and honorary membership of the American Academy of Arts and Literature Padma Vibhuhsan etc. Swami and friends is one of his most considerable works. It depicts the culture of Colonized India or the impact of the colonizers culture on Indian culture. In the story Swami is a major character studying in a missionary school, a youth who is self centered with childish concerns like finishing the

homework on time. Ebenezer is a character who plays the role of one of the school members who teaches the scriptures of the Bible. His insults done to the non Christian students are felt as the threat by Swami on himself and his typical Indian values. In a particular scene Swami's father plays a role of protector of Swami which ironically represents him as the protector of Indian values. The story though revolves Swami and his friends it shows many scenes in which upholding the Indian values and culture has been portrayed .one of those scenes is the scene where after moving out of the missionary school Swami has joined the boarding school and soon he gets into the protest of Indian freedom and burns his cap when someone says that it is made of European material. Here what exactly the writer is trying to portray is the concept of the nationalism as the culture of India. Swami and Friends is not just a story about the friendship but is an indication of the friendly nature of the Indians which is a common factor in almost all the cultures within the state.

When we analyze the particular character with his appearance we can see how skillfully Narayan has portrayed the theme of how to adjust the alien culture in the culture of one's self. We can see the character wearing an Indian shirt on which a Blazer is worn and underneath he is wearing the Dhoti and at the top he is wearing an Indian Made cap. This image itself represents that the other culture or the modernity in suppose to be adjusted somewhere in between where it's needed but at the top you will keep your own culture which is your own identity which comes from the root. Narayan is such a skilled writer who depicts such vast information through sketching a simple youth character in his novel. Narayan's way of thinking should be a guideline to the contemporary writers to maintain their identity instead of being the followers of alien cultures and representing them as the modern Indian Culture.

Conclusion

It is a proven fact that culture is an indivisible part of one's identity. In order to maintain the originality or to retain self identity it is essential to celebrate one's own culture. Changes in the culture are essential for healthy society but at the same time upholding self's culture should be the major concern. With the above explanation it can be clearly seen that how the adjustment of other cultures along with maintaining one's own identity can be possible. Thanks to R. K. Narayan who has ironically put up such a message in the imagery of major character of Swami and Friends.

Bibliography:

Links:

1. <http://harishankar.org/reviews/Fiction/swami-and-friends-by-R-K-Narayan.html>
2. <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/r-k-narayan-5825.php>

Books:

1. Swami and Friends by R. K. Narayan, published by Indian Thoughts Publication
2. Indian Social Problems by C. N. Shankar Rao, published by Vikas Book House, Pune