

Culture and Heritage

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The word “culture” originates from Latin ‘*cultura*’ which means cherish or practice customs, ideals and values etc., of a particular civilization of a social group of a particular civilization of a particular point of time. Culture is not static. Culture changes, develops and degenerates according to the needs and transition of a society. Heritage is something inherited which is a special individual possession of a particular person or nation. The valued objects and qualities such as historic buildings, cultural traditions and literature which have been passed down from past to the present generation. Heritage is mainly intended the qualities from a particular age of a country to hand over with an intention that “posterity will not willingly let to die”. The presenter being a research scholar in the Indian novelist R.K. Narayan, here he wants to present how the culture and heritage of India are reflected in certain novels of the great Indian novelist R.K. Narayan.

Introduction

When a qualitative change takes place in a society, through a major religious or political revolution the existence of the past customs itself might be broken and a new custom with altogether different characteristics might take its place. The transition from old customs to new one is called Culture. A culture is not a condition of static social harmony. It changes, develops and degenerates according to the change in social life. The Pharaonic culture of Egypt, the Zoroastrian culture of Persia, the Aztec culture of Mexico, the pre-English custom of Eire are some of the cultures which were changing in the efflux of time. The Pharaonic Culture of Egypt was displaced at the outset by the Greek culture and the Romans thereby Christianity and finally by Islam.

What is culture?

The word “culture” originates from Latin ‘*cultura*’ which means cherish or practice customs, ideals and values etc., of a particular civilization of a social group of a particular civilization of a particular point of time. Culture is also growing. The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievements regarded collectively. [OED] Sir Walter Scott who is said on his death-bed to his son –in-law, “Be a good man, my son”. Scott said, be a good man, he did not mean simply avoid sin. He meant something positive. Now being good in the positive sense is the essence of culture. Words must after all must be accepted in the sense in which most people have accepted them. That is the law of language. Culture is not only the conduct and behavior of a good man but includes love of the arts.” [Rajaji]

Culture is a Positive conception

Culture is made up of the positive conceptions- “Do’s and not don’ts only- whereas moral codes generally consist don’ts. Don’ts can be uniform for all people. But do’s must differ from place to place, from people to people. [112] Culture contributes to the joy and happiness of the people as a whole, although coming under the direction of law or government.

On the contrary morality is governed by both social opinion and law. But culture is something free and positive. Laws and governments aim at preventing unhappiness. But culture is what contributes positively to joy. Another positive behaviour between the ambit of culture is hospitality, the readiness to receive the guests and callers at any time which marks Hindu and Islamic culture. That is why K.M. Panikkar says “a culture is not a condition of static social harmony.”

Culture is like tissues growing and dying

Culture, like every growing thing, has in its body both dead tissue which it continuously casting off and new tissues which are constantly being added. In every vital culture- the discarding of dead tissues the discarding of ideas, which have lost their validity and have fallen into desuetude. When a qualitative change takes place in a society, through a major religious and political Revolution, the existence of the past culture itself might be broken and a new culture with altogether different characteristic might take its place. But normally except there a culture is totally displaced, there is a continuity of certain characteristics which gives individuality to that culture. [K.M. Panikkar] That is why it is said that “Old order changeth yielding place to new.”

What is heritage?

Heritage is something that inherited either by individual or the customs and civilization belong to a particular nation. The valued objects and qualities such as historic buildings, cultural traditions and literature which have been passed down from past to the present generation.

The literary heritage

The literary heritage explored new ways of exhibiting the literary manuscripts and objects to a wide audience. This physical artifact can connect people to the historical, social and economic importance of literary works and illuminate the conditions in which they were produced. [Ashley Sewell, Academic writer]. If we are to promote our rich heritage, then the most logical thing to do is to preserve both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage in writing .. consequently literature. Literature survives the test of time and is always apprehended which is the main stakeholder in the preservation of culture is the community. English Literary heritage is a term for literature which has been passed down us from the best orders who wrote in English in the past.

Culture and Heritage

The Indian literary tradition is the oldest in the world. It was primarily in verse and essentially oral. Hindu literary traditions dominated a large part of Indian culture where women were considered to be more or less to subordinate to man. She was not entitled to live her own life. She was supposed to have neither will nor soul. Her will has at all times to be subordinated to that of her protector. Woman’s individuality is melted in the dominant current of male chauvinism.

Difference between religion and culture?

Religion is made up of “Don’t’s”. But culture is made up of “Do’s” which is a positive conception. “Don’t” can be uniform in all people, but “Do’s” must differ from people to people, place to place, country to country. The culture of people is what has grown among them to be recognized as contributing to the joy and happiness as a whole, bestowing positive attitude sans governed by any law. But the consummation of culture is the compassion not criticism but its culmination is joy and happiness at both ends as Portia portrays “the quality of mercy is not strain’ ...It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

The intercultural communication

“The intercultural communication offers the ability to deal across culture which is increasingly important, as the world is getting smaller and smaller does not mean the world is becoming identical. It means having more and more contact with people who are culturally different. Being able to deal with its cultural difference peacefully, never mind creatively and innovatively is becoming a survival issue to thrive in a global world as a global leader.” says Dr. Milton Bennett. Inter-culturalism describes in, communities in which grow together. There is a deep understanding and respect or all cultures. It focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationship. In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from others besides change is the law of life.

The unification of culture

Western culture is different from the Eastern culture. Semitic culture differs from Siamese culture. A Persian carpet with its multiple hues and chequered pattern are more beautiful and causes more impression than a single coloured ‘dhurrie’. “A hundred flowers may bloom and all of them are separately beautiful; and the garden in which they bloom is also as a whole beautiful causes more impressive” Mao-Tse Tung. That is why a host of golden daffodils more than ten thousand in numbers impressed Wordsworth to create a poem “The Daffodils.” Things that come into mutual contact do tend to rub off angles and become similar and merge as synthesis is natural.

Views of ancient literature on woman

Ancient Texts including Tolkappiyam in Tamil and ancient texts in other Indian languages offer women a secondary role. Totally woman was humiliated and subjugated by man from the days immemorial. The woman had also willingly accepted this yoke.

The transition of culture in the post-colonial period

Themes like woman’s search for identity, quest for self-hood, relocating the self and awareness to make a balance between tradition and modernity became popular in the works of males as well as female writers of Indian English Fiction writers during post-colonial period. The continuity of Zoroastrian culture is in India among the Parsees and not among the Iranian to any great degree.

Dark Aspects in Indian culture

Caste, untouchability, pre-puberty marriage for girls, enforced widowhood of women, food taboo and the like.

Does Language reflect Culture?

Language is primarily spoken. It has unique system in phonology, morphology and syntax. It shares unique reality and spirit in its expression of a particular group. Curran writes “language is sharing and belonging between persons through the language tasks acquisition of native language the oral modality primary. Culture is viewed as consisting of literature, the history of people who speak the target language, the geography of the country and daily chores they live. It consists of everyday behavior and life style of the target language. It reflects the unique world view inseparable from their language.

The nascent stage in Indian English fiction

The Indian cultural and social panorama has always had an inexhaustible plenitudes of themes to offer. The problems and privations have produced some of the best writing to English fiction. With reference to modern Indian Fiction 1935 was regarded both R.K. Narayan and appeared Mulk Raj Anand portrays heroes though poor and downtrodden have no patience with these traditional evils of caste prejudices and religious superstitions. Kamala Markandaya in her novel attempt to project the image of traditional society under its impact of modernity. Her characters Nathan and Rukmani are representatives of uprooted peasants under the Industrial economy. But in R.K.N. novels deal with various aspects of social reality. Man and woman relationship occupied an important place in Narayan’s fictions where women are helpless and always looked after by male member of the family. Whatever he has found in the society, he has given in literature. R.K. Narayan’s portrayal of women characters are two kinds. Traditional uneducated woman and educated modern woman. He is fully aware of modernity and tradition.

The subservient mentality of Savitri in R.K.Narayan’s novel “The Dark Room” due to lack of education

Savitri, the wife of the protagonist Ramani is a pious homemaker. Ramani is an eccentric and lawless in his taste. She is subjected to eternal slavery of domestic chores and pious and dutiful to his husband. This novel is full of social criticism and the novelist is pious carried away a bit Ibsenite feminism. She is an archetypal victim of Chauvinism, autocracy of her husband. and the callous obduracy of her husband, Ramani. He uses to upbraid her without rhyme and reason. Ramani has an extra marital affair with Santa Bai, a newly appointed woman insurance agent in Engladia Insurance Company. When she questions about his night escapades with Santabai he rebuffs and rebukes her, as a result she leaves her house in the night. Her unsuccessful attempt for suicide in drowning in river Sarayu. Her ephemeral revolt against husband’s tyranny enables her to realize her helplessness and insecurity isn the outer world drives her back hoe for the love she bears for her children Kamala and Babu. Once again the story is repeated and she bears the brunt of her idiotic husband’s humiliations. In a traditional society where mythology is replete with stories of self-sacrificing women, where women are also perceived as sex objects, where women are more or less devoid of education and of economic independence, where the structure is still patriarchal, the women’s liberation movement seems a distant dream. This is the reason the novelist pained by the social reality of man-woman relationship of the contemporary Indian society.

The novelist R. K. Narayan's view on this theme of his novel

He says "I was obsessed with a philosophy of woman as opposed to Man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the women's Lib' movement. Man assigned her secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunningness that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu in the society was ideal victim of such circumstances [My Days-119]

Culture reflects mythology

"Myths are a system of hereditary stories which were once to be believed to be true by particular cultural group and which served to explain.. why the world as it is, and things happen as they do, and to establish rationale for social customs and observances and the sanction for the ruler by which men conduct their lives". (M.H Abrahams, "A Glossary of Literary Terms"). Modern activism has deep roots in Greek mythology, where Gods and heroes constantly challenge authority, fight monsters and strive to restore order in a chaotic world.

Why mythologies are used in R.K. Narayan's Novels

R.K. Narayan was a wizard in using myths in all his creations especially in novels and short stories. He is the author of the books "The Ramayana" and "The Mahabharata" besides "Gods, Demons and others". In an interview with Ved Mehta, R.K. Narayan has admitted "inability to write novel without Krishna, Ganesh, Gajapathy, Hanuman, astrologers, Pandits and devadasis or temple prostitutes and explained the point of view by adding in his characteristic humble way in any case that has turned out myth in India".

Use of Myth in the novel the Financial Expert [1952]

The similarity of Indian culture and Greek culture is seen. The hero's name Margayya, which means 'showing the way'. God shows us way for solving our problems when one pleads before God to give solutions for their ordeals. When Margayya asks the temple priest what is the use of pooja and prayer, the priest enlightens him by saying "it is puja that enabled Markandeya to win over Yama, the God of death. Markandeya, the boy devotee of God Shiva destined to die the moment he attained his sixteenth year. When the emissaries of Yama came to take away his life, they could not do that as he was performing Pooja, and ultimately he was blessed with to live with ever sixteen. In Greek Mythology also, we see one Orpheus, a gifted musician who could move inanimate objects by the charm of his music and enthrall all the animals, birds and man. Once a cobra was under the charm of his music while he played music. When he stopped his music the cobra regained his consciousness bit his wife who was nearby and she died. Orpheus wanted to regain the life of his wife Eurydice. By his power of music he visited Hades, the underworld and met Pluto, the God of Death. Pluto heard the charm of his music and gave the life of his wife with two conditions. When he failed to follow the condition he could not take his wife. That is why we have an English idiom "half regained Eurydice" which reflects the Greek culture transferred to English Language. The Romans also believed that gods controlled peoples' lives. Most Roman gods were borrowed from Greek. Here one can see the amalgamation of culture.

The leading personality of Daisy in R.K. Narayan's novel "The Painter of Signs" due to her empowerment of education

R.K. Narayan wrote "The Dark Room" in 1938 which happened to be the Pre-Independence period. The plight of the traditional Hindu wife is evidently the central theme of the novel. Whenever she is humiliated by her husband she goes to a dark room in her house where she moans and sulks. But "The Painter of Signs" which has been written after nearly four decades i.e. in 1938 highlights the concept of the empowerment of woman through education. She is more prominent when compared to Narayan's other women Savitri, Susila, Rosie and Grace. She is not a traditional woman like Savitri in "The Dark Room". She has studied in a convent School where she has to go to town by bus. She is thoroughly inspired with a missionary school for achieving her aim on the Family Planning front. She says to him "Let us face the fact. She whispered, her breath wafting on his face, married life not for me. I have thought it over. It frightens me. I am not cut out for the life you imagine. I can't live except alone. It won't work". [TPOS 84]

The comparison of characters: Educated Daisy and uneducated Savitri

Education is the superior adjustment to the environment. As an illiterate, Savitri is pious and impractical. But Daisy is shrewd and practical. Savitri is tied up with orthodox beliefs and god-fearing. She uses to mutter all the sacred chants she had learnt from her mother years ago in her Pooja room [TPOS 4] Her after-noon talks are confined with Gangu and Janamma. Family is her world. Only her husband Ramani, her daughter Kamala, and her son is her world. She is always under the control of her husband even for preparing for her cooking menu. These are all the culmination of her illiteracy. Though she leaves the house and decides to drown in the river Sarayu for committing suicide, she returns her home as an unwelcomed guest and melts in the chores and drowns in the domestic river.

But when we return to Daisy's character, She decided to shock the people who come to see her in the traditional marriage market, she cross-examines when the bride-groom's party put questions regarding her education and whether she can sing. Consequently, guests depart offended. When Savitri lives in the domestic cage, Daisy lives in the nest of a high tree, enjoys and breath the air of freedom given by her education. When Savitri lives under the roof of Ramani's humiliations, Daisy lives under the blue sky and takes quick action whenever it is needed. She is practical in her approach. She lives like a karmayogi. Yet Daisy is essentially a woman. She feels the pain of Raman's heart being human. She is apologetic to him for sowing the seed of love in his heart. But finally when Raman asks "May I come with you?" She repeats twice, "No, this is the end". These clear-cut decisions of Daisy are possible only because of her convent education.

Conclusions

Hinduism believes that there are janmas after one's death. Wordsworth in his Ode on intimations to immortality also affirms the undying nature of soul. Since Hindus believe in rebirth, there are not many tales of heroes travelling to visit their ancestors in the land of the dead. But underworld journeys are a recurring theme in Greek mythology. Literature is the central and most important extension of mythology. Every human society possesses a myth which is inherited, transmitted and diversified by literature. If one goes on reading books after books he can find many parallelisms in different mythologies of the world. In The

Mahabharata, Sikhandi is a woman who is trained as a warrior. But unlike Atlanta whose femininity and sexuality are acknowledged in the Greek myths, Shikandi is raised as a man, allowed to enter the battle-field after she acquires male genitals from a yaksha.

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