

Cultural Differences in A New World by Amit Chaudhuri

Vinod Kumar

PhD. Scholar (Gurukul Vishwavidyalaya Kangri, Haridwar) India

Mobile: 8529878872

Email: vinodgyskr801@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper presents the cultural difference and how it works in society. It is very well known that this topic is very complex and complicated; and not a single definition of culture is recognized. The cultural difference creates a lot of hue and cry, makes the cultural context fragmented and disjointed. A feeling of helplessness and longing for belongingness can be traced among masses. The characters of Amit Chaudhuri's novels are presenting this theme and concept very pathetically. , Culture in the simple sense can be defined as the way of life of a particular group of people, race, or nation etc. However, one should not think that the concept of culture is as simple as it has just been presented by this definition; there have been ambiguity and disagreements about the essence of culture. For ethnographers "culture is understood as the speech community: a group sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech". Henry James was a renowned American writer who dedicated his writings to the portrayal of the cultural differences between The New World and The Old Continent and whether the citizens of both realms could live in harmony or die in agony.

As culture has always been a privileged field of research and study, debates have arisen about the essence of such a vast concept. There is not a single definition of culture but rather a considerable number as there are many scholars who define the concept of culture differently and look at it from different angles.

To explore this multifaceted concept, Kenneth Chastain (1976) distinguishes between small "c" culture and big "C" Culture. The former refers to the social life, family institutions, customs, and leisure activities of a given society, whereas the latter is related to the civilization and society's contributions to the world. (p.186). In other words, the former refers to culture as a process while the latter defines culture as a product.

Furthermore, Culture in the simple sense can be defined as the way of life of a particular group of people, race, or nation etc. However, one should not think that the concept of culture is as simple as it has just been presented by this definition; there have been ambiguity and disagreements about the essence of culture. The Oxford Concise Dictionary defines culture as: “The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively” or as: “The customs, civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people”. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, in the same vein defined culture as: “Advanced development of the human powers; development of the mind and spirit by training and experience” (2010)

Hence, one can see that the nomenclature culture is complex and has multiple layers as it is presented in Raymond Williams’ book Culture and society (1966):

The word which more than any other comprises these relations is culture, with all its complexity of idea and reference. Because of its very range of reference, it is necessary however, to set the inquiry from the beginning on a wide basis (p.1)

He further adds that:

Culture as an abstraction and an absolute: an emergence which, in a very complex way, merges two general responses-first, the recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society; second the emphasis of these activities as a court of human appeal, to be set over the processes of practical social judgment and yet to offer itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative (idem).

In the same context, Sonia Nieto (2002) argues that the term “culture” has not one meaning since it can imply different things to different people and in different contexts (p.142). Hence, it is impossible to give a standard definition of it. Emphasizing the complexity of culture, Henry James stated that; ‘culture’ is certainly a complex and problematical value, as it is in those ancient myths, where culture is experience, experience is knowledge, and knowledge is loss of innocence (Ike, 1998).

More specifically, the term ‘culture’ was first used by the anthropologist Edward B. Taylor (1871) who defines it as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society” (p.26) .From this quotation, one can say that culture is related only to

society and norms acquired by man within his social group (small 'c' culture). From that time, studying the sense of culture became a significant concern in anthropology.

In his definition, Taylor emphasizes the fact that culture is a social behavior which is acquired and learned by men in their own society. He also focuses on culture as a shared feature of human group. In other words, culture is a non-instinctive cumulative of human experience which is socially learned.

From a sociological standpoint, culture is "everything that is socially learned and shared by the members of a society; social heritage which the individual receives from the group; a system of behavior shared by members of a society" (Horton & Hunt, 1984, p. 545). Accordingly, Culture is a learned heritage, which is socially transmitted from one generation to another, rather than any biological capacities that human beings are born with. In the same respect, Adler (1997) has synthesized many definitions of culture. She says;

Culture is something that is shared by all or almost all members of some social group. Something that the older members of the group try to pass on to the young members. Something (as in the case of moral, laws and customs) that shapes behavior, or structures one's perception of the world (p. 15).

For ethnographers "culture is understood as the speech community: a group sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech" (Hymes, 1974, p. 51). This view is based on the assumption that culture is the ability to effectively communicate and appropriately use the rules that individuals of a group must know to accomplish and maintain relationships with people of their society.

It can be concluded from what the aforementioned scholars have stated that culture is a concept with a myriad of facets, and no single definition of it has achieved consensus in the literature. So, out of the many possible definitions examined, the following definition guides this study: culture is a set of shared and enduring meaning, values, and beliefs that characterize national, ethnic, or other groups and orient their behavior (Mulholland, 1991.p.3).

As it is determined by human behavior, culture differs according to different factors. Different societies share different cultures; a culture represents the beliefs and practices of a specific group, while society represents the people who share those beliefs and practices. In the words of Mary Jo Hatch (1997) "when speaking of culture as shared meaning, understanding, values, belief systems, or knowledge, keep in mind that a

culture depends upon both community and diversity. It allows for similarity, but also supports and relies upon difference” (p. 219), culture permits the distinct aspects of the human life to co-exist; furthermore, this diversity is the cornerstone of a standalone solid culture.

The communities who share similar culture characteristics do not necessarily belong to the same group with the same thoughts and traditions; rather communities can use similar components according to their own understanding and integrate these elements into their cultural context in a particular way. (Cited in Baltali, 2012, p. 5). One may add that different groups develop their own cultural legacy in the light of their unparalleled historical background.

There is no culture in the society without individuals’ conduct. Each culture has diverse traits that make it unlike other cultures. This has been demonstrated through individual’s particular system of behavior patterns including the lifestyle, sentiments, and attitudes. In this respect, Levo-Henriksson (1994) claims that;

Culture covers the everyday way of life as well as myths and value systems of society. The values which one has are based on their culture. Attitudes express values and get us to act or react in a certain way toward something (p. 24).

This implies that Culture is a structure to one's life. In addition, it influences his values, attitudes and behaviors. Values are the driving force that pushes the individual to endorse or deny a certain behavior or action.

To sum up, cultural differences shape one’s identity and provide the individuals with a sense of belonging. Culture is of a crucial importance to the establishment of the individual’s identity.

There are different languages in every corner of this land with its own techniques and system. Every language has boundaries and limitations according to their geographical locations. The culture diversity offered by Indian society inevitably seeks accommodation, negotiation and understanding of each other. As for plurality of languages here, this gets demonstrated by the way people constantly practice translation creatively and naturally, even in everyday interaction. Here, in India, languages are constantly evolving, developing and changing vibrantly, due to the indispensable give and take between cultures. Masses, In India, are natural translators in this country, adopting and adapting easily.

Many a scholar has commented on how the extraordinarily long period of colonialism and Anglicization had marginalized the study of complex linguistic plurality and cultural diversity in the subcontinent by emphasizing English education on the one hand and on the other, exoticizing some 'Oriental' texts through translations. The enterprise of modernity further diminished the importance of the long vibrant histories of literary cultures in different Indian languages. There is a need to break out of both, modern linearity as well as the domination of important critical approaches suitable merely for the study of monolingual cultures. Such a reorientation would facilitate the task of comprehending the differences as well as similarities within the culturally diverse and multilingual reality of India.

Henry James was a renowned American writer who dedicated his writings to the portrayal of the cultural differences between The New World and The Old Continent and whether the citizens of both realms could live in harmony or die in agony.

As culture has always been a privileged field of research and study, debates have arisen about the essence of such a vast concept. There is not a single definition of culture but rather a considerable number as there are many scholars who define the concept of culture differently and look at it from different angles.

In simple sense, culture is the way of life of a particular group of people, race, nation etc. There have been many ambiguities and disagreements about the essence of culture.

Amit Chaudhuri was born in Calcutta in 1962 and brought up in Bombay. He is a graduate of University College, London, was at Balliol College, Oxford. His first book, *A Strange and Sublime Address*, won first prize in the Betty Trask Awards, the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book (Eurasia) 1992 and was shortlisted for the 1991 *Guardian* Fiction Prize. *Afternoon Raag* won the 1993 Southern Arts Literature Prize and won the Encore Award for Best Second Novel. His most recent novel, *Freedom Song*, was highly acclaimed on publication in 1998. His work has appeared in various publications including the *London Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Granta* and the *New Yorker*. He lives with his wife and daughter in Calcutta.

Amit Chaudhuri explains in his novel cuisine related vocabularies. He describes each and every thing in detail. He presents a comparative vision between western food and eastern

food (particularly Bengali). He states in the 'New World' clash between food habits of westerns and eastern culture. He gives a kind of expounding detail of ways of eating etiquettes and different dishes of Easterns and Westerns. There are lot of aspects which are colliding and those aspect not only consist of food and language. Jayojit, the protagonist of the novel, is unable to make himself adjust in a new life and milieu. He has some memories of past and striking him but it is not possible to become familiar suddenly. The weather of india is very irritating for westerns because and they cannot tolerate the heat – burning heat. Similarly, Jayojit is also a western because he is living in America and has adopted the life style of there and familiar to that climate. He is facing problems in Indian summers. Alongside, Jayojit's father is not behaving in a normal and native fashion. So many things are not in rhythm and seem lacking harmony.

In this paper, many things are left because its not a complete study of cultural difference in Amit Chaudhari's novel 'New World'. Here only surface level discussion is presented. This theme of cultural difference is very ambiguous and scholars and wits are not unanimous how to define it in a single definition.

References

- Adler, N. (1997) International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior. 3rd ed.
Ohio: South-Western College Publishing.
- Chastain, K. (1976). Developing Second Language Skills: Theory to practice. (2nd ed). Boston,Holt: Houghton Mifflin.
- Chaudhuri, Amit(2000). A New World. London: Picador.
- Hatch, Mary Jo (1997). Organization Theory: Modern Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horton, P.B., and Hunt, C.L. (1984). Sociology. New York: McGraw_Hill.
- Hymes, D. H. (1974) Foundations in sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

James, Henry. (1989). The Great Short Novels of Henry James, (with an introductions and comments by Philip Rahv.) Robinson Publishing, London.

Kumar, Sukrita Paul et al. editors (2015). Cultural Diversity, Linguistic Plurality & Literary Traditions in India. Oxford University Press.

Nieto, S. (2002). Language, Culture and Teaching: critical perspectives for a new Century. USA: Routledge.

Williams, Raymond. (1966). Culture and Society, 1780-1950, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.