

## INTERWOVEN LIVES: EXPLORING MULTICULTURALISM IN THRITY UMRIGAR'S BOMBAY TIME

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### **Abstract:**

Culture is the essence of self, core of individual identity. The novel *Bombay Time* taken for analysis is a clear representation of the fragmented childhood of Thrity Umrigar a Parsi writer. The title of the book itself signifies anecdotes of the old time it refers to Bombay as Bombay and not Mumbai as it is referred now by the millennials. This paper deals with different cultures of people they meet in an apartment. It talks about how they were, their ideologies, their dreams, their pasts and everything.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Diaspora, Nostalgia, Prejudice, Relationship.

Multiculturalism can take place on a nationwide scale or within a nation's communities. It may occur either naturally through immigration, or artificially when jurisdictions of different cultures are combined through legislative decree, as in the case of French and English Canada. Proponents of multiculturalism believe that people should retain at least some features of their traditional cultures. Opponents say that multiculturalism threatens the social order by

diminishing the identity and influence of the predominant culture. While acknowledging that it is a sociopolitical issue, this article will focus on the sociological aspects of multiculturalism.

The term "multiculturalism" first appeared when a significant number of people began to migrate to far-off places. Following World War II, there was an increase in migration and settlement, which profoundly altered the host societies. The idea of migration created many chances for a better and more comfortable life in this age of globalization. Furthermore, ethnic groups have been able to migrate temporarily, seasonally, and permanently thanks to the quick expansion of multinational corporations, accommodating immigration laws, media transportation options, and financial support allotted for their situation. The governments and relief organizations in the host countries also realized that they had to quickly gain an understanding of the migrant population's ways of life, kinship patterns, family structure, and moral values due to the practical difficulties of housekeeping them. As a result, the term "multiculturalism" quickly gained popularity.

Rapid migration growth had unfavorable effects as well. The migrants must fight against racism and demand reforms in response, such as the acknowledgment of cultural and religious diversity. Therefore, many of the European nations that support multiculturalism called for corrective action due to the rising level of inequality. Different countries introduced policies to end racial discrimination and promote immigration. Multicultural policies represent one such approach. Rather than assimilation, integration was encouraged for immigrants. As a result, the immigrants were able to preserve aspects of their hometown and ethnic group. Immigration-related benefits and legal rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and equality, were made possible by the multicultural policies. Furthermore, it refuted the idea that one culture can impose its norms on another and promoted the idea that no culture is superior.

The primary theme of national and local policies toward ethnic minorities throughout Europe shifted from multiculturalism to "integration" as the movement gained momentum. It is commonly employed to differentiate assimilation from a strong commitment to national goals and institutions. However, sometimes the term "integration" is used in an assimilationist manner. Today, many nations, including Canada, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, declared their full support for integration, which is seen as a crucial component of multiculturalism. Official recognition of the necessity of helping to build a multicultural society that would allow for the total abolition of racial discrimination was achieved on a global scale. Certain countries have implemented tangible policy measures that ensure immigrants receive a variety of cultural rights and benefits.

### Multiculturalism Theories

The two primary theories or models of multiculturalism as the manner in which different cultures are integrated into a single society are best defined by the metaphors commonly used to describe them—the “melting pot” and the “salad bowl” theories.

**The Melting Pot Theory:** The melting pot theory of multiculturalism assumes that various immigrant groups will tend to “melt together,” abandoning their individual cultures and eventually becoming fully assimilated into the predominant society. Typically used to describe the assimilation of immigrants into the United States, the melting pot theory is often illustrated by the metaphor of a foundry’s smelting pots in which the elements iron and carbon are melted together to create a single, stronger metal—steel. In 1782, French-American immigrant J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur wrote that in America, “individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world”

(Crevecoeur, 4).The melting pot model has been criticized for reducing diversity, causing people to lose their traditions, and for having to be enforced through governmental policy. For example, the U.S. Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 forced the assimilation of nearly 350,000 Indigenous peoples into American society without any regard for the diversity of their heritages and lifestyles.

The Salad Bowl Theory: A more liberal theory of multiculturalism than the melting pot, the salad bowl theory describes a heterogeneous society in which people coexist but retain at least some of the unique characteristics of their traditional culture. Like a salad's ingredients, different cultures are brought together, but rather than coalescing into a single homogeneous culture, retain their own distinct flavors. In the United States, New York City, with its many unique ethnic communities like "Little India," "Little Odessa," and "Chinatown" is considered an example of a salad bowl society. The salad bowl theory asserts that it is not necessary for people to give up their cultural heritage in order to be considered members of the dominant society. For example, African Americans do not need to stop observing Kwanzaa rather than Christmas in order to be considered "Americans."

Multicultural societies are characterized by people of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities living together in the same community. In multicultural communities, people retain, pass down, celebrate, and share their unique cultural ways of life, languages, art, traditions, and behaviors. In the novel *Bombay Time*, Thrity Umrigar depicts how Parsi people uprooted from their native land and settled in migrated countries. She is an Indian-American journalist, critic, and novelist. She was born in India and immigrated to United States in her 21. Umrigar is an accomplished, natural storyteller who remains an optimistic narrator despite all her grim plot twists, though she never softens the impact of the various tragedies on her characters.

The parsi settlers are the representation of multiculturalism. Persia (modern Iran) was conquered by Muslims during the 8<sup>th</sup> Century and this resulted in the mass migration of the Parsis to the West Coast of India. True, they were allowed by the king of Sanjan, Jadi Rana to settle in Sanjan, on certain conditions like they have to explain their religion to the king; they have to give up their native Persian language, and take on the languages of India; their women should wear traditional dress of India; the men should lay down their weapons, and they should hold their wedding processions only in the dark (Kulke 28)

The Parsis accepted these conditions and gradually settled down in India and later moved to other multicultural cities like Lahore and Bombay which is now called as Mumbai. They inhabited themselves into multiculturalism for survival. As Thrity Umrigar from a Parsi family she expressed her own experiences in her debut novel *Bombay Time*. The residents of Wadia Baug, a middle-class apartment building inhabited by Parsis, gather for a wedding. The journeys to and from the wedding form short narrative bookends for the wedding itself, the principal present action. The narrator, however, is more interested in past than present, and so the paragraphs devoted to the wedding are often just weak excuses to explore bygone times. The result is a thin present with little drama, but a rich past with detailed accounts, sometimes amusing, sometimes lyrical, and sometimes sad, of the characters' individual histories and their eventual intersecting, the whole sometimes reading like summaries. Dosa Popat, an embittered widow and Wadia Baug's resident gossip, observes the guests' departures for the wedding and reflects on their stories while lamenting her own unrealized life—a promising academic career cut off before its beginning by a drunken promise of marriage made by her father. Jimmy Kanga, father of the groom, oversees the reception while considering the huge trajectory of his life from orphaned adolescence to law degree at Oxford, return to Bombay and life in the fast lane as a

high-profile attorney, then a rejection of the high life for a return to his simpler, safer, and more satisfying Wadia Baug roots. Rusi and Coomi Bilimoria bitterly and sadly recall the failure of their marriage, ultimately achieving a tentative reconciliation on the bus ride home. At the close, all these individuals recede into the fabric of the city.

Umrigar's debut unfolds raga-like; the histories of its people forming sustained riffs that spring from and return to the same source. The minimal plotting is at times contrived and sentimental, but the portrait of the city and its citizens is authoritative, richly textured, and engaging.

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