

Multiculturalism in Paulo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes*

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Abstract

Respect for a culture means respect for a community's right to its culture and for the content and character of that culture. Since every culture gives stability and meaning to human life, holds its members together as a community, displays creative energy and so on, it deserves respect. Multiculturalism as a social theory brings together different themes such as cultural diversity, recognition, mutual concern, and peaceful co-existence of many cultures and sub-cultures. Multiculturalism is best understood neither as a political doctrine with a programmatic content nor as a philosophical school with a distinct theory of man's place in the world but as a perspective on or a way of viewing human life. In this novel multicultural aspect such as identity, recognition, freedom, liberty and equal position in the society of women is discussed in a broad way.

Key Words: Identity, Recognition, Freedom, Liberty and Equal Position

Introduction

Multiculturalism as a social theory brings together different themes such as cultural diversity, recognition, mutual concern, and peaceful co-existence of many cultures and sub-cultures. The term '**multicultural**' refers to the fact of cultural diversity and the term '**multiculturalism**' to a normative response to that fact. Multiculturalism is not a single principle of policy, **but an umbrella** of highly group-differentiated approaches and each of these approaches is multi-dimensional, incorporating economic, political and cultural elements in a variety of ways. Multiculturalism is best understood neither as a political doctrine with a programmatic content nor as a philosophical

school with a distinct theory of man's place in the world but as a perspective on or a way of viewing human life. A culture's relation to itself shapes and is in turn shaped by its relation to others and their internal and external pluralities presuppose and reinforce each other. A culture cannot appreciate the value of others unless it appreciates the plurality within it: the converse is just as true. Closed cultures cannot and do not wish or need to talk to each other. Since each defines its identity in terms of its difference from others or what it is not, it feels threatened by them and seeks to safeguard its integrity by resisting their influence and even avoiding all contacts with them. A culture cannot be at ease with differences

outside it unless it is at ease with its own internal differences. A dialogue between cultures requires that each should be willing to open itself up to the influence of and learn from others, and this presupposes that it is self-critical and willing and able to engage in a dialogue with itself. A multiculturalist perspective is composed of the creative interplay of these three important and complementary insights-namely the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural plurality and the plural and multicultural constitution of each culture. Respect for a culture therefore means respect for a community's right to its culture and for the content and character of that culture. Since every culture gives stability and meaning to human life, hold its members together as a community, displays, creative energy and so on, it deserve respect. **As Charles Taylor** correctly observes, **social recognition** is central to the individual's identity and self-worth and misrecognition can gravely damage both. This raises the question as to how the demeaned minorities can secure recognition and here Taylor's analysis falters. He seems to take the rather naïve liberal view that the dominant group can be rationally persuaded to change its view of them by intellectual arguments and moral appeals. Misrecognition has both a cultural and a material basis. It therefore, can only be countered by undertaking a rigorous critique of the dominant culture and radically restricting the prevailing inequalities of economic and political power. **Multiculturalism tries to restore a sense of wholeness in a postmodern era that fragments human life and thought. Tariq**

Modood argues that in the early years of the 21st century, multiculturalism “**is most timely and necessary**, and ...we need more not less”, since it is “**the form of integration**” that (1) best fits the ideal of egalitarianism (2) has “the best chance of succeeding” in the “post -9/11, post 7/7” world, and (3) has remained “moderate and pragmatic”.

Eleven Minutes departs somewhat from the Coelho formula. He apologizes to his devoted readers in a chatty foreword. This is a novel, we are warned, and that will deal with "a subject that is harsh, difficult, shocking": the international crime of "people trafficking". The heroine, Maria, is a surpassingly beautiful virgin from the Brazilian back-country. She runs off to Rio where she is tricked into going as a "dancer" to Geneva. There she descends into prostitution. Thus outlined, *Eleven Minutes* might seem to promise an exposé of **white slavery**. It doesn't. Maria's experience with the dour punters of Switzerland is as much a voyage of wonderful discovery as Santiago's treasure hunt in *The Alchemist*. Through the sex industry, Maria uncovers the core truths of the human condition. In the process, she saves her "soul"; she also saves a useful bank balance. Her rate for 11 minutes (life is not the only thing that moves very fast) is 1,000 Swiss francs. After a year she is able to retire, healthy, wealthy and wise (don't all foreign prostitutes?). Here Maria traveling one place to another for a search of pleasure, adventure and fulfilling her dream. In this story she faces more problems but she overcome on it and found her own identity. She recognized herself while struggling and meeting various kinds of people of different

behaviour. Her struggle for getting the pleasure is shown in this novel. People misrecognize her from her profession. When she entered in the profession of prostitute she met various kinds of people who belong to different culture. When she was meeting the customer they also belong from different culture, religion and language which indicate the notion of multiculturalism in the novel.

Maria was a protagonist of the novel. She belongs to very poor family. Her father was a travelling salesman, her mother a seamstress and her hometown in the interior of Brazil, had only one cinema, one nightclub and one bank. She fell in love for the first time when she was eleven, en route from her house to school. Three year passed, she learned geography and mathematics, she began following the soaps on TV, at school, she read her first erotic magazines and she began writing a diary describing her humdrum life and her desire to experience first-hand the things they told her about in class-the ocean, snow, men in turbans, elegant women covered in jewels. She fell in love with boy twice and thrice. She met so many boys in her life in search of love by sharing their habits, behaviours and culture and observed it very minutely. This is the impact of multiculturalism she wrote in her diary-

'Life moves very fast. It rushes us from heaven to hell in a matter of seconds'. (09)

Maria met the man who couldn't speak Portuguese language but he offered her drink, she drank and smiled at him. Sometime, they kept up this comfortable, meaningless conversation. But she

understood the language of humanity and understood him. She spoke her language by using the small red dictionary which indicates the part of **multiculturalism**. She met various customers of different language, race, culture and religion. She shared the culture at the same time. She travelled from Brazil to Switzerland for sake of pleasure. She met a lots of foreigner some are trustworthy some are not. The interpreter told her that her that he would not be accompanying. Don't worry about the language, what matter is whether or not he feels comfortable with you. It is indication of multiculturalism. **Mailson**-the name of the interpreter-cum-security officer-assured her that in Rio de Janeiro and the rest of the world things were different. **Maria** realized that all **European** are same: they come over here and imagine that all Brazilian women are really sensual and know how to samba. **Swiss men** obviously had too much money and not enough women back home. He is ready to pay three hundred dollar a night. Mailson, the interpreter-cum-security officer discussed with Swiss man and Maria accepted the Swiss man's offer and ready to work in his country. She needed a piece of paper proving that no one there could do the job she was proposing to do. She had a documents provided by the Swiss consulate. Security officer-cum-interpreter-cum-agent demanded a cash advance as soon as the contract was signed, thirty per cent of the five hundred dollars she received. Through this it shows that she faced a lot of problem to settle her life. This is the struggle for recognition sometime she become misrecognize because of her profession in the eyes of the people. Here the term

'identity of recognition' work which done by *Bhikhu Parekh*.

She travelled and the idea of going far away had just been a dream and dreaming is very pleasant as long as you are not forced to put your dream into practice. That way, we avoid all the risks, frustration and difficulties and when we are old, we can always blame other people-preferably our parents, our spouses (wife) or our children-for our failure to realize our dreams. Maria consoled herself with the thought that she could change her mind at any moments; it was all just a silly game. She lived more than a thousand kilometers from there and she now had three hundred and fifty dollars in her purse. She decided to pack her bags and run away, there was no way they would ever be able to track her down again. She decided to go for a walk on her own by the sea, where she looked at the children, the volleyball players, the beggars, the drunks, the seller of traditional Brazilian artifacts (made in china), the people jogging and exercising as a way of fending off old age, the foreign tourists, the mother with their children and the pensioners playing cards at the far end of the promenade. By looking this she learnt the behaviour, habits and culture of human being and ready to fight with situation which is created by interpreter/agent. She had come to Rio de Janeiro, she had been to a five-star restaurant and to a consulate, she had met a foreigner, she had an agent, she had been given a present of a dress and a pair of shoes that no one absolutely no one, back home could ever have afforded. She headed in a slightly more northerly direction; she would end up in the enchanted kingdom

known as Europe with its Eiffel Tower, Euro Disney and Learning Tower of Pizza. Forty-eight-hour journey back home in a bus with no air conditioning and as long as the Swiss man didn't change his mind. Maria realized with a mixture of fear of relief that he was serious about what he said. Maria explained that she couldn't take a decision without first consulting her family. The Swiss man was furious and showed her a copy of the signed contract and for the first time she felt afraid. Maria used full freedom of life and took her own decision about life and faced lots of problem at the same time fight for creating his own identity in the unknown place in Europe. This approach explained the issue of multiculturalism in this novel where character fight for freedom, liberty and equality to get her right position in the society.

Maria's mother told her that "my dear, it's better to be unhappy with a rich man than happy with a poor man". She enrolled in a French course that was run in the morning, and there she met people of all creeds, belief and ages, men wearing brightly coloured clothes and lots of gold bracelets, women who always wore a headscarf, children who learned more quickly than the grown-ups, when it should have been the other way round, since grownups have more experience. Maria might be young but she was no fool, especially once her Arab lover had told her that Swiss employment laws were very strict and since the nightclub kept back a large part of her salary, she could easily allege that **she was being used for slave labour**. She felt with a few insult and five thousand dollars in compensation-a sum of money beyond her wildest dream- and all

because of that magic word 'lawyer'. She was working in the brothel and they were using her as a slave but Maria realized it and stated to rebel against it to get freedom and liberty at the same time equal position in the women of brothel. In Brazil Maria had read a book about a shepherd who, in searching for his treasure, encounters various difficulties and these difficulties help him to get what he wants; she was in exactly the same position. Maria became a regular visitor to the library, where she would chat to the woman, who seemed as lonely as she was, ask her to suggest more books and discuss life and authors-until her money had nearly run out. She had come in search of adventure, money and possibly a husband. She had always been preoccupied with what other people were thinking, her mother, her school friend, her father, the people at the model agencies, the French teacher, the waiter, the librarian, complete stranger in the street. Maria was meeting the various kind of Asiatic-looking women and discussing with them the life of bar with the alluringly Brazilian name of 'Copacabana'. There was Colombians, Thais, Peruvians, Brazilians all loved the money. This is also a symbol of cultural diversity in the brothel where different racial, cultural and social issues were handled. She began asking for books about marital problems, psychology and politics; the librarian was delighted to see that the young woman of whom she had grown so fond had stopped thinking about sex and was now concentrating on more important matters. Maria met various kind of customer these are so powerful and arrogant at work, constantly having to deal with employees, customers, suppliers,

prejudices, secrets, posturing, hypocrisy, fear and oppression, ended their day in a nightclub. She was beginning to realize that after long months of self-control, the pressure, the earthquake, the volcano of her soul was showing signs that it was about to erupt and the moment that is happened. Pain was no longer a cause of suffering but a source of pleasure because they were redeeming humanity from its sins. Pain became joy, the meaning of life, pleasure. Maria is playing the role of teacher, friend, philosopher, mother and guide in this novel. She was no longer the teacher, the one who instructs, consoles, listens to confessions and the one who excites; before the awesome power of this man, she was just a girl from the interior of Brazil. Maria realized that someone only know herself when she go beyond your limits. It was an adventure like the Ulysses and she could decide later on if she wanted to continue, but at that moment, she had ceased to be the girl with just three aims in life, who earned her living with her body who had met a man who had an open fire and interesting stories to tell. She connected with various customers in the club who belong to different region, custom and tradition and language which signify the term multiculturalism in this novel. Terence was a Ulysses who had travelled from London, a Theseus come down from the heavens, a kidnapper invading the safest city in the world and who had the coldest heart of earth. One of her exhibition took her to Japan just when she was immersed in what she called 'Pain, suffering and pleasure. The Greek historian, Herodotus wrote of Babylobia: they have a strange custom here

by which every woman born in Sumeria is obliged at least once in her lifetime, to go to temple of the goddess Ishtar and give her body to a stranger as a symbol of hospitality and for a symbolic price. It indicates that how bad traditions were presets in the society and women victimized because of this and these traditions continue in the light of brothel. So the Maria is a true representative of these backward women who did not get their rights. The influence of the goddess Ishtar spread throughout the Middle East, as far as Sardinia, Sicily and the Mediterranean ports. Maria had had only four adventures-beings a dancer in a cabaret, learning French, working as a prostitute and

falling hopelessly in love. The true story of a Brazilian Prostitute, her marriage, her problems with the law and her various adventures.

In this novel Maria play with so many customs, tradition, culture, religion through the customers in Copacabana Bar. She learnt various languages to deal with customers. She also shared their culture and thought to get them peace and satisfaction. She struggled at lot and overcome all obstacles in her life and fights for the recognition and the identity. The aspect of recognition, identity, freedom, liberty and equal position in the society works in this novel which indicates the part of multiculturalism.

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