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## MULTICULTURAL STUDY OF ABDULLA HUSSAIN'S NOVEL 'INTERLOK'

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### ABSTRACT:

This is an era of globalization; all the countries have come so close to one another as if they were shrunk into a big village. For the better living people migrate from one country to another and mingle with the native people adopting new culture and identity. A country to which people migrate becomes multicultural. While living in such multicultural societies, the migrants have to face some problems related to culture, identity, race, gender and so on. When different cultures mix up to form a totally new culture it leads to evolve multiculture. This paper aims to examine Abdulla Hussain's Novel *Interlok* from the view of multiculturalism.

**Keywords:** *Culture, Multiculturalism, Identity, Isolation, Unity.*

### INTRODUCTION:

Abdulla Hussain born in 1920 is Malaysian writer. His novel *Interlok* was published in 1971 in Malay language. In the initial days of its publication, it became controversial on the issue that it contains derogatory remarks against Malaysian Indians. A large number of political personalities and some non-governmental organizations in India protested and raised their voice against this novel. They declared that *Interlok* was contemptuous to Indian people as it used the word 'Paria' in association of the Indian character of Maniam in the novel, who comes to Malaya in 1910. The Malaysian Indian Congress, a political party in Malaysia demanded this novel to be removed from the school syllabus. Abdulla Hussain clarified that he did not intend to hurt somebody's feelings,

rather he wanted to show unity among the three ethnic groups living in Malaysia i. e. Malays, Indian and Chinese. The story of the novel was set in Penang state in Malaysia and Malaysia was under the colonial rule of Britain during that time. The novel revolves around the lives of three families, which are representatives of the three principal societies the Malays, the Chinese and the Tamil Indians.

### WHAT IS MULTICULTURALISM?

There are many reasons for the migration of people from one country to another. People tend to emigrate in search of livelihood or better prospect in business. One of the reasons of migration is also the craze of acquiring education in foreign universities, such students gradually mingle with the local people, find job and decide to settle in that country permanently. War and political upheavals are also the reasons for the migration. John Clayton defines multiculturalism as, “multiculturalism refers to the existence of difference and uneven power relations among populations in terms of racial, ethnic, religious, geographical distinctions and other cultural markers that deviate from dominant, often racialized, norms”.

In short, a society in which there is an existence of different cultures is called as multicultural society. Multiculturalism is opposite to monoculturalism, a country having the existence of many ethnic groups has to maintain equilibrium in the social affairs, in such societies, multiculturalism facilitates the admiration of diversity enabling social harmony and tolerance among the people of different ethnic background. “Multiculturalism is something that integrates thoughts, attitudes or citizens from several diverse states and cultural background. While citizens of dissimilar cultures come jointly to celebrate and contribute their diverse customs it is an illustration of multiculturalism”. Multiculture society also has to deal with the problems like racism, inequality and intolerance. It may be stated that, there is presence of disagreements among the inhabitants in terms of race, nationality, religion, and culture. Grounded upon this acknowledgement of societal and cultural diversity, multiculturalism is also a form of political integration where the rights and necessities of minority

groups are taken into consideration. According to S. M. Zakir, “Multiculturalism refers to the concept of living in a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious condition in which each respects the other. Multiculturalism involves procedures and planning of the demographic structure in a specific space or region”.

### **MULTICULTURALISM IN INTERLOK:**

This novel tells the story of characters of three generations and their grim battle to find a place living in the Malayan state during the critical and unstable periods in the history of Malaya. The first part deals with the Malay family, the head of the family Pak Musa, his wife Mak Limah and their son Seman, the second part deals with the Chinese family of Kim Lock, who under the guidance of his uncle goes to Singapore and then to Malaya. The third part of the novel deals with the family of a migrant from South Indian Malayali worker, who, knew and was sure about the fact that whoever has migrated from his village became affluent after having worked in Malaya for quite a few years, emigrated to then British colony of Malaya. These three parts in the novel are separate but none of the stories is complete in their respective part, All the stories get completed in the fourth part of the novel. The final part is important as it develops the interlock theme. In this part the characters interact and become reconcile with each other, become aware of the fact that Malaya, to be flourishing as a nation, must acknowledge the contribution of multi culture and adopt a multi-racial identity.

Noraini, Ruzy and Ahmad in their research article say;

We assert that the novel is an attempt made by the writer to re-map the nation’s citizenship and nationhood through its depiction of race and ethnic adaptation, and conflict in Malaya during the period of 1900 to 1957. It is during this time that the whole idea of Malaysian nationalism took shape and came into realisation. This period, which sets the background for the novel, sees the intellectual contact between Malays and the Chinese and Indian immigrants brought in by the British.

Various foremost events have been revealed in the concluding part of the novel, the greatest occurrence that happened as an outcome of the Japanese invasion, that a new generation of the youth of Malaya became immensely sensible of the racial and cultural unity and developed an humanitarian sensitivity that these three major communities namely Malays, Indian and Chinese should fight against British rule collectively. They also formed the Malayan Anti-Japanese Army, to liberate Malaya from the shackles of British. In the end, forgetting all the differences they decide to put all their efforts towards independence of Malaya. They reject the proposal of the British for a Malayan Union. The key element in all this is the realisation among the characters that all three communities have to work together to get independence, and to build a nation. As S. M. Zakir states in his article,

*Interlok* shows such a situation, where the rigid attitude of Ching Huat to maintain a true Mainland Chinese identity gradually changes as he experiences the ups and downs of life together with the Malays and Indians in Malaya. In fact, this change in identity is shown as being the result of the birth of new generations.

By the end of the novel this goal of an independent Malaya is achieved. Abdulla Hussain successfully proved that assimilation of varied culture and establishment of a unified nation is possible with the right attitude of the different groups.

### CONCLUSION:

*Interlok* is a social novel written in multicultural atmosphere. This novel depicts the true picture of the formation of Malaysia as an independent nation. It provides an honest view of the mingling of the two foreign cultures i.e. Indian and Chinese with the local Malays and their united endeavours to form a new nation Malaysia. In this way *Interlok* proves to be a multicultural novel as all the different ethnic groups desire to establish a new Malaya state based on unity in diversity.

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