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UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic Studies is basically a study of differences which can be of various types but the variants which are chiefly taken into account are race, ethnicity and nation. Along with these stated differences, differences like sensuality, gender and other such spheres which are expressed by various agencies like State, civil society and differences as or by individual is taken into account.

Ethnic Studies emerged as an academic field in the later half of twentieth century. It was a response against the popular disciplines which had been into fashion before Ethnic Studies such as anthropology, history, literature, sociology, political science, cultural studies etc. The main problem with these is, these all are Eurocentric and always have an essence of Eurocentric thinking in them.

It was the era of civil rights movement during 1960's when ethnic studies was introduced to re-frame the picture that hold specific discipline told stories, histories, struggle and victory of people of certain groups. These were the victories they wanted to see in their own terms. The horizon of Ethnic Studies is still emerging and it has inculcated questions regarding representation, racialization, and formation theory and more determinately approached in multi-disciplinary topics and approaches in it.

Courses in ethnic studies raises the points such as undervaluing and ignoring the role of Asian Americans, Blacks, Mexicans, Latinos and native Americans in American history because of Euro-centric biases and factors like hegemonic racial and ethnic prejudices of looking down upon these classes is not a new thing but has been carried out since ages. Contribution of these groups has been overlooked in American history.

Along with racial issues, ethnic studies also talks about issues regarding internationality and along with these issues like gender class and sexuality also comes into play

Keywords: Ethnic, Culture, Races, Individual, Identity

Introduction

Earlier ethnic studies was based on the information provided by the representation of these groups in history and the identities of various races, taking only United States into context. So it can be said that earlier ethnic study was actually dependent on the already prejudiced sources but now a days it has widens it's horizons to fields like

Transnationalism, comparative race studies and port-structuralism/post-modernist critique.

The recent developments in the field for studding the racial building blocks of a community based on color is the introduction of "whiteness". It is comparatively a popular fashion in a traditionally well-established format of inquiring such differences.

Traditionally the Ethnic study approach is considered as an approach that is mainly focused upon relations within the society. It encompasses cross relational and inter sectional study of various groups contained with a given community. Ethnic studies can be carried out in various discourses and time to time its tension with various related fields and disciplines.

Ethnic study critically and interdisciplinary examines races, ethnicity and indigenosity of people. It takes into account the experiences and various prospective of people of colour within United States and beyond the boundaries of United States. As Ethnic studies gained its place in academic circles in 1960's, scholars of ethnic studies are focusing on the ways in which race and racism imposes its power and continue to be powerful socially, culturally and politically. They are studying its connections to other angles of stratification, including gender, class, sensuality and legal status.

Right from 1960, when ethnic study was originated and was still in its infancy it has been an interdisciplinary indigent and comparative study of various disciplines such as race and ethnicity etc. in U.S. Its scholars are studying issues of social justice, identity and resistance. They are showing their keen interest in people of color. Ethnic study scholars are continuously and restlessly dissecting historical and contemporary implications of white supremacy. It weighs social, political, economic and cultural struggles along with intellectual struggles over racial hegemonies through interdisciplinary looking glass.

Everyone among us is a part of one or another ethnic group. A group to which we can relate ourselves and which has an ethnic background of its own. Though everyone from that group feels a strong affiliation to that group but individually member of that group may have very little in common.

Ethnicities which were formed by breeding patterns of a group over time results in producing similarity that are external and temporary or in short we can say that these traits are physical. These traits could disappear if certain practices, communities or migratory patterns of that community changes. These external traits such as colour of skin, hairs etc. are generally associated with marker of a particular

race. These traits are personal to an individual but these are connected to biological grounds of that individual and through these traits, that connection to an individual to a certain ethnic group is exposed.

It is also assumed that if patterns of breeding in an ethnic group changes, the ethnic group or "race" would also lose its uniqueness. As crossbreeding is quite common in present world it is confusing to provide a specific ethnicity to a person because we cannot easily differentiate a Eurasian from an Asian, An Afro American from an African and a European to an American or European American.

One can mistake ethnicity with truth, purity and superiority. It can also be falsely inferred that traits of outer appearances are associated with truth, purity and superiority. These meaningless markers of chromatic differences are not signs of natural differences. But there are actual differences in the ethnicity of an individual or a group. Thus ethnicity remains one of the most powerful cause for either coming together or falling apart.

While comparing history with science in ethnic studies we find that the language of history is somewhat different from that of science about race and ethnicity. It is also a well-established fact that history cannot be overlooked or erased completely.

When we read Toni Morison's 'Bluest Eyes' or 'Beloved' we realize that blackness cannot be denied. Actually it is one of the most compelling determinant which depicts cultural differences and specificity of literature. These also serves as a theme of literary discussion.

Ethnic differences encompasses economic difference as well since races were often seen with their past glories and economy too plays an important role in that. This past can also be of suppression or exploitation imposed by dominant group over the invaded or oppressed group. Slavery is one of the most significant example.

History explains it quite well that different ethnic difference are present in the world right from ancient times to modern times. There are records of quite distinct ethnic cultures, societies and physiologies of different ethnic groups all round the world.

The evolution of ethnic literature and its study made it clear that white dialect is not the last truth.

Toni Morrison in her 'Playing in the dark' argues that the white literature of America often portrays African Americans and experiences of African Americans as they are trying to achieve an identity which will provide them a space in the white society or they are on a realizing quest. Whereas white freedom poses itself as an exact opposite of the black servitude, Blacks are long associated with slavery that shows that Blacks think themselves as only tools instead of individuals, whose sole purpose is to assist whites in various ways.

Another example of overlooking racism in American literature studies can be attributed to the case of William Faulkner. Faulkner is considered as a writer who portrayed blacks as idiots who are kin to children. They are characterized in his novels as people to be laughed upon or representatives of naivety to an extent that can be called foolishness or they are associated with violent depravity. The whites in his novel faces life as tragedy which is their destiny that cannot be changed or challenged whereas the blacks are burdens of that tragic legacy that whites must live with. This complaint sense of literary values given by Faulkner earned him a name in sure a way that he is still taught as an example of racist literature. One important impact of ethnic studies is that, that it forced the scholars to look those things in literary spectrum that are not considered literary.

By raising questions of the ideology of "the literary" in this manner, ethnic studies has helped to push literary studies towards cultural studies. It is the main reason behind the difficulty of categorizing texts in their social contents or ripping out universal themes from a particular act of ethnically inflected character in literature.

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