

UNIT SIX: CROSSCULTURAL BRIDGES

Marriage is a Private Affair

Chinua Achebe, Nigeria (1930-2013)

The story “Marriage is a Private Affair” is written by the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe. The story is about the Nigerian cultural belief on marriage that is based on arranged marriage. The story focuses on that marriage is a private affair so there should not be any kind of obstacles by the parents on the name of tribe, caste, culture, religion, economic status, regional variation.

In the story, there are three main characters i.e. Okeke, the father of Nnaemeka who spent whole life in the Ibo tribe who believes on modern progressive ideas and Nene, a Christian girl and a teacher who is in love with Nnaemeka. Nnaemeka is in Lagos city, a young man, who is originally from a remote Ibo village and is engaged to marry with Nene, a non-Ibo teacher. In the Ibo culture, marriage is usually arranged within the tribal group by a family elder. But Nnaemeka’s decision to get married with Nene from the different tribe is unheard of, shocking and distressing. Okeke forbids a love marriage to an outsider and requested Nnaemeka to get married with a local girl. But he got married with Nene challenging the culture and his father that made Okeke angry and their relationship was totally detached for years. Many years later, Nene wrote a letter to Okeke that his two grandsons wished to see him. At last, the heart of Okeke melted and he thought that he shouldn’t be such a rude person for his grandsons. So he requested them to come to the house as soon as they can.

Hence, the story is about the contradiction between modern thought and traditional superstitions belief and the victory of rationality over the tradition. The conflict of the story is caused due to generation gap that caused misunderstanding between Okeke and Nnaemeka in the story though the conflict is resolved.

Then and Now: Finding My Voice

Elaine H. Kim, Korea (1961-)

The essay “Then and Now: Finding My Voice” is written by a Korean writer, Elaine H. Kim. This is an autobiographical essay in which the writer has expressed her personal feelings, faith, hope, and experiences while bringing up in USA. The essay shows the problems to be faced in bio-cultural situation, in which one has to face lingual, cultural, religious and regional problems along with an existential crisis. The essay is about the problems, sufferings and difficulties to be experienced while spending the life in the foreign country being an outsider.

The writer, in the essay, expresses her views on the difficulties she faces in USA. While bringing up in USA, she had to speak Korean inside the house and English outside. It means she faced cultural and lingual problems. In the school, her American friends called her ‘Chink’ or ‘Jap’ thinking that Korea was the province of China or Japan. It means she felt as if she lost her national identity. She wanted to be a real citizen of USA and sustain her life as a real American citizen. So once she participated on the cheerleader competition in school to prove that she was the real citizen of USA.

In the essay, she is talking about 1950’s Korean War which was the real cause to be migrated to USA. It was destructive. Many Koreans were killed and compelled to leave their homeland and go to America. She used to believe on her Saju (birth horoscope) to hope of her success and used to visit fortune-teller and once she was told that her goal and achievement of future had been shaped in between twelve to seventeen years. She studied US false belief on race and determined to educate people against racism and sexism.

Hence, the essay is about the problems faced by the writer in USA and the American false belief on so-called white superiority that let the people from other countries feel prejudiced and discriminated losing their identity.