

# Never Have I Ever: A Critical Analysis on The Role of Netflix in Promoting Multiculturalism

Prerna Guha

M.A. English, Department of KIIT School of Languages and Literature, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar, India

## Abstract

Netflix, a pioneering streaming platform in the era of the rise of OTT platforms' popularity, has established itself as an advocate of multiculturalism unlike any other contemporary in its time. It thrives by producing and featuring a diversity of content that includes stories, cast and characters from various cultural backgrounds.

Through its method of narrating stories, Netflix represents the cultural inclusivity, appreciation and mutual understanding of cultures in the United States of America, representing it as a salad bowl. This research essay critically examines the web series *Never Have I Ever* that on one hand, underscores the role of Netflix in promoting multiculturalism and on the other hand, it highlights the United States of America as a multicultural society. By close examination of the cast, storytelling and themes of the web series, this article identifies the United States of America as a salad bowl wherein every culture is allowed to retain its individualistic identity while being a part of the community instead of a melting pot wherein all the cultures get dissolved into the American culture. With the showcasing of a cast from various backgrounds who face complex issues such as identity crisis and cultural assimilation, *Never Have I Ever* efficiently challenges the stereotypes and elicits empathy from the audience along with building an all-embracing society with unique identities.

**Keywords:** *Never Have I Ever*, Netflix, multiculturalism, salad bowl, melting pot, immigrants, cultural ambivalence, cultural assimilation

## 1. Introduction to Multiculturalism

A social and political philosophy known as multiculturalism encourages the coexistence of various cultural groups within a single community. It acknowledges and values the diversity of people from different linguistic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds and works to promote respect, equality, and rights for everyone, notwithstanding any cultural differences. It is a strategy that acknowledges that societies are made up of various cultures and aims to build a welcoming atmosphere in which diverse cultures can coexist peacefully. Multiculturalism's fundamental tenet is the conviction that cultural variety benefits society rather than endangers social cohesion. It acknowledges that various cultural groups provide distinctive viewpoints, traditions, and contributions to the overall character of a country. Multiculturalism strives to build a more inclusive and equitable society by embracing and celebrating these differences. C. James Trotman, the author of *Multiculturalism: Roots and Realities* strongly believes in the cause of multiculturalism. He asserts:

Most often a multicultural approach uses several disciplines to highlight neglected aspects of our social history, particularly the histories of women and minorities. Concepts of race, class, culture, gender, and ethnicity are the driving themes of a multicultural approach, which also promotes respect for the dignity of the lives and voices of the forgotten. By closing gaps, by raising consciousness about the past, multiculturalism tries to restore a sense of wholeness in a postmodern era that fragments human life and thought. Whether community is always attained or not is difficult to say because multiculturalism is still evolving. (Trotman)

The recognition, obedience, and respect for cultural and minority rights is what multiculturalism stands for. This emphasizes that individuals and members of various communities are entitled to the freedom to practice and maintain their local or native languages, self-identities as well as traditional practices without having to face any discrimination or prejudice by others. Cultural rights bestowed on the people grant them to practice their religion, preserve their cultural heritage and get engaged in activities that are unique to their communities, regions or cultures. Furthermore, it encompasses the vital significance of equality and inclusivity by underscoring the need to access the numerous opportunities, resources and services that should be available for everyone regardless of their origins. Multiculturalism is steadfast in its commitment to eradicating any prejudices or obstacles that hinder marginalised groups by implementing anti-discrimination policies as and awareness-raising educational programs. It encourages a harmonious society by giving impetus to the intermingling of people from cross-cultural borders, engaging in cultural festivals and initiating thought-provoking interactions between people from different ethnicities. It acknowledges the necessity of the above-mentioned measures in order to maintain a smooth-functioning welfare for the world as a whole free of misconceptions and stereotypes.

One such criticism of multiculturalism surfaces that it may lead to an inevitable division and loss of community identity while making efforts to gain self-identity. The critics believe that multicultural policies may weaken unity and encourage isolation. However, the advocates put forward their argument by stating that once multiculturalism is implemented aptly, the intrinsic worth and dignity of all communities that promote societal integration and cross-cultural harmony will increase two-fold. It is their strong opinion that diversity only serves the purpose of rendering as an advantage for creating a space an innovation where creativity is transactional between countries. It is vital to remember though, that the implementation of multiculturalism may vary across continents and situations. To tackle the challenges and opportunities presented by diversity some nations have enacted laws and regulations supporting multiculturalism. Additionally, some individuals adopt an approach that emphasizes a shared identity while allowing for specific cultural practices.

In essence, multiculturalism is a philosophy that values and embraces the cultures within a society. It encourages coexistence, equality, and respect, among groups, with the aim of creating an inclusive environment where people can maintain their cultural identities while actively participating in society. The goal of multiculturalism is to build cohesive societies that celebrate the contributions of all cultures through promoting dialogue, equality, and integration.

## **2. Multiculturalism Practiced in the United States of America**

The idea of a multicultural society in the United States of America has been up for debate since time immemorial. The United States is profoundly famous for being a country whose foundations lie on a rich history of immigration making it a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures pouring in from all across the globe. The basic tenet of multiculturalism asserts that in order to foster the existence of a culture that

recognizes and esteems individualistic differences among its members, the cultural backgrounds these individuals trace back to should be honoured and accepted. Nevertheless, there has been speculative claims made that multiculturalism might, under some extreme circumstance, result in societal splits and cultural fragmentation. At its fundamental core principles, multiculturalism advocates that a peaceful society is an outcome of the inclusion of both the dominant and marginalized without prejudice. The pioneering supporters believe that the acceptance of cultural plurality leads to an improved condition and effectivity of societal cohesiveness as it is directly related to inculcating tolerance and appreciation towards the value system, beliefs, and traditional customs practiced by adversarial cultures. Multiculturalism argues that an equal opportunity must be presented to all cultural communities as each of these groups has a unique contribution to make towards a global village.

The detractors of multicultural policy claim that the model erroneously emphasises on the differences between ethnic pockets instead of majorly focusing on the common ideals that may result in social rifts and cause obstruction in integration. According to Samuel P. Huntington, as mentioned in the book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, multiculturalism had “attacked the identification of the United States with Western civilization, denied the existence of a common American culture, and promoted racial, ethnic, and other subnational cultural identities and groupings.” (Huntington 305) Communities that are organised along racial or ethnic lines may isolate people and impede social interactions, undermining the concept of a unified nation. They think that because of diversity, people may prioritise their ethnic or cultural identities over their national identities, causing society to become split. They argue that placing too much focus on cultural differences might weaken a country’s social fabric and prevent the development of a strong sense of national identity. Furthermore, the politicisation of multiculturalism can result in identity politics, in which various groups compete with one another for resources and attention, intensifying societal tensions. Striking a balance between fostering a feeling of a shared national identity and appreciating cultural differences is challenging. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. in his book *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, states that a new attitude, one that celebrates difference and abandons assimilation, may replace the classic image of the melting pot in which differences are submerged in democracy. He argues that ethnic awareness has had many positive consequences in uniting a nation with a “history of prejudice.” However, he warns that if the “cult of ethnicity” is pushed too far, it may endanger the unity of society. (Schlesinger) Moreover, it is of fundamental importance that people are well-educated about multiethnicities to channelize the ideals of social inclusivity among the population. It is crucial for the United States to preserve its heritage while actively striving toward building a cohesive and inclusive society.

### **3. The United States of America as a Salad Bowl: Embracing Cultural Diversity**

The history of the United States of America finds its roots deeply intertwined with mass immigration as people in large numbers poured in from various countries to seek opportunities and have a chance at a better life. Throughout history, diverse waves of immigrants have brought in their traditions, languages, and customs, enriching the American cultural fabric. From the early European settlers to the Asian, African, and Latin American immigrants, each group has contributed to the diverse population of American society. Ben Railton observantly remarks in his article “The Roots of Multicultural Diversity in Revolutionary America”, “a look back across U.S. history reveals that ethnic diversity and multiculturalism are hardly modern innovations.” (Railton) Indeed, the Immigration Act of 1965 is considered as a watershed moment that attempted to debunk de facto discrimination against the “non-

whites” such as Asians as well as Southern and Eastern Europeans. Simultaneously, this reformation resulted in the immediate abolishment of the National Origins Formula or the 1920s Quota Acts that set sights on accelerated immigration from Western and Northern Europe to ensure the perseverance of American homogeneity. With the advent of progression on the face of racial tolerance, a flare of displeasure sparked amongst the nativist right who feared a “fraying national community.” (Railton)

The United States of America, often hailed as a melting pot, is a nation that encapsulates multiculturalism to an extraordinary degree. This classic expression was envisioned by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1876 as an alternative proposition against white nativism. With a rich tapestry of diverse ethnicities, religions, languages, and traditions, the United States has fostered a unique environment where individuals from all corners of the world are given the liberty to explore and find a sense of belonging. It symbolizes the assimilation of diverse cultures into a single American identity. However, in a collective belief held by the multicultural left, this concept fails to acknowledge the richness and vitality that cultural diversity brings to society in many instances so far. Contrary to its original purpose, the multicultural left argued that the melting pot was rather an amalgamation of “previously distinct groups into a new community.” (Lind) The salad bowl metaphor, on the other hand, suggests that cultural differences should be appreciated and preserved, creating a mosaic of unique identities. Nevertheless, Michael Lind in his article “How to Fix America’s Identity”, published in the magazine *Politico* believes that presently, the United States of America upholds an image of a melting pot instead of a salad bowl and embraces the religious beliefs and customs of their citizens whose roots come from all across the globe. (Lind)

The cultural diversity that has long since existed and is cherished by many at the core of American history is well captured by the salad bowl metaphor. The salad bowl approach has several beneficial traits, one of which is that it allows and teaches individuals the importance of self-acceptance of their cultural identities. The salad bowl, as opposed to the melting pot approach that encourages assimilation, prioritizes multicultural society and appreciation for various traditions. This strategy acknowledges that while one can preserve their cultural heritage on one hand, on the other, they can identify themselves as an active participant in the cross-border society. Thus, the United States of America builds a safe space for individuals to embrace these cultures where they help each other flourish and fulfil community targets instead of individualistic goals. Most immigrants settle in the United States of America to fulfil their American Dream of attaining a better life for their families, be it advanced medical assistance or education with broader exposure and an inflow of economic opportunities. Thus, the process of assimilation is evident in the cross-cultural fusions across the country from Little Italys, Chinatowns, and Hispanic neighbourhoods. These cultural enclaves vibrantly take part in preserving their language, culture, cuisine, and traditions. Furthermore, the celebration of cultural festivals such as Chinese New Year, Chuseok, Diwali, and St. Patrick’s Day stand as evidence of the nation’s multiculturalism policy.

Though the fact that the model of the salad bowl poses numerous challenges rings with truth, the pouring opportunities of the same outweigh the drawbacks of the approach. The harmonization between different cultures requires active contribution in order to foster a sense of interconnectedness and belonging to a community despite the differences. Education plays a key role in laying the foundation for an awareness among young brains to register in their minds that there are other cultures in the world that exist. As a result, they grow a sense of intercultural competence and foster empathy towards each other. In addition to that, needless to mention, the need for public policies to safeguard and promote the ideals of inclusivity, such as anti-discrimination laws, especially against the targeted minority cultures and social welfare programs is crucial for building, maintaining and operating an equitable society. Should these

fundamental measures be neglected, traces of cultural isolation may make sudden appearances every now and then. “On the negative side,” as Robert Longley stated in his article “What Is Multiculturalism? Definition, Theories, and Examples”, “the cultural differences encouraged by the salad bowl model can divide a society resulting in prejudice and discrimination.” (Longley) True to the fears of the right nativists, maintaining a balance between advocating a mutual emotion toward national identity as well as sustaining cultural diversity became a complex task to carry out.

Therefore, the notion of the United States of America as a salad bowl aims to challenge the traditional perception of the melting pot, highlighting the significance of cultural diversity. Not only does this model implore the people to cultivate an empathetic understanding and thoughtful appreciation of various cultures but also sanctions the preservation of unique cultural identities. Even though the hurdles to an inclusive society exist, such as the amendment of effective policies and educational awareness of multiethnicity, the advantages of the salad bowl model does not remain underestimated. Thus, if the United States of America stands firm to its resolution, it can enrich the lives of its citizens from different cultural roots by embracing and celebrating cultural diversity and showcasing itself as a global salad bowl.

#### 4. Netflix and Multiculturalism

The global streaming colossal, Netflix has earned its rightful position at the top of the industry by revolutionizing the very technique of consumption of visual entertainment by people by transcending national boundaries and breaking free from cultural barriers. In addition to its fame as the flagship bearer of entertainment platforms, it established itself as a potent proponent of multiculturalism with a philosophy that advocates for cross-cultural harmony, global collaboration, and shared understanding. It has encouraged the spread of multiculturalism by portraying a culturally diverse cast, vividly voicing their opinions through their inclusive storytelling and by challenging stereotypical media norms. Netflix’s wide-ranging collection of international content acts as a bridge among various communities. It has successfully helped the audience to access these multi-language films, documentaries, and web series to not only kill their leisurely time but effectively enhance their foundational knowledge on the lives and experiences of people all across the globe and gain insights on different cultural perspectives. Initially, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings and Erin Meyer discussed various challenges that Netflix faces in terms of the expansion of business internationally in their book *No Rules Rules: Netflix and the Culture of Reinvention*. However, Hastings opened doors to candidates from different ethnicities who could contribute to the culture of autonomy that was dedicatedly maintained in the office. Furthermore, Hastings walked the extra mile to ensure a smooth cross-cultural adaption by strategizing the expansion of the company by putting theory to practice when he operated this project on the foundation of the culture charts developed by Erin Meyer in her book, *The Culture Map*: “By comparing the charts of different cultures, Hastings could quickly and easily see how two cultures were similar as well as different, and that insight could help him develop ways to bridge those differences.” (Aster)

Netflix has enthusiastically engaged itself in various collaborations where it co-produces content with international partners that foster and strengthen worldwide diplomatic ties and cooperation in the entertainment industry. By amicably partnering with various production companies along with directors and actors from different lands, Netflix has facilitated the production of cross-border films and web series that blend cultural experiences, influences, traditions, and resources. For example, the cast of Jenny Han’s *XO, Kitty* is an ensemble of actors from different countries such as the USA, Australia as well as South Korea. With critically commended productions like Alfonso Cuarón’s *Roma* and Hwang Dong-hyuk’s

*Squid Game*, Netflix has played a pivotal role in amplifying the underrepresented voices and their stories that often go unheard and unnoticed by non-conventional media outlets. These narratives that find their roots in adversarial cultures foster an urge to empathize with characters from multi-ethnic backgrounds and implore a sense of global interconnectedness. Through authorization and distribution of content from marginalized filmmakers and creators on a streaming platform, Netflix has opened avenues that flicker the initial thoughts of an adversarial narrative that challenges the dominant narrative. For instance, the cutting-edge series *Narcos* and *Narcos: Mexico* provides insights into the history and deadly impact of drug cartels in Latin America, thus, shedding light upon the ongoing complexities in the socio-political dynamics of the region. In a similar manner, *Sense8* celebrates diversity by engaging a diverse blend of cast that not only belong to various cultural backgrounds but represent different sexual orientations. Therefore, Netflix represents these ethnicities in their rawest form along with the most celebrated as well as deplorable practices, beliefs, and values.

Based on all the above-stated instances, it is fair to claim that Netflix has been successful in transcending geographical barriers and building a praise-worthy, revolutionary streaming platform that suits the tastes of all. It has established itself as a promoter of multiculturalism by evidently committing itself to cross-cultural dialogue, global accessibility, amplification of marginalized voices as well as breaking the worldview portrayed by dominant forces. Staying dedicated to its principles, it continues to break down barriers and stereotypical norms held by media outlets by fostering a bridge between culturally backed mindsets. As the era of OTT platforms continues to evolve, it is crucial for viewers to recognize and appreciate the potential of platforms like Netflix in promoting and celebrating ethnicities. Therefore, the significance of Netflix does not only lie in its functionality in the entertainment industry but also in its pioneering ideals of an all-encompassing global village.

## 5. *Never Have I Ever*

### 5.1. Introduction

In the recent years, web series on OTT platforms have significantly gained mass popularity. It is considerably a medium that connects with audiences far and near, enabling the creators to explore as well as narrate diverse fiction and non-fiction. One such web series, *Never Have I Ever*, created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher, features a cast that is multiethnic and explores intercultural themes through its characters and storytelling methods

*Never Have I Ever* is a Netflix comedy-drama web series that circles around the life of a first-generation Indian-American teenager named Devi Vishwakumar who was born in the USA with ancestral roots in India, played by Maitreyi Ramakrishnan. This series navigates through the challenges that are faced by Devi where she is torn between her dual ethnic identities along with the upheavals she has to deal with at high school as well as in her personal life. Though the show majorly revolves around the dealings of Devi as an Indian-American teenager, it also emphasizes on multiculturalism by featuring characters from diverse multi-ethnicities and various cultural backgrounds. In order to spread the message of acceptance, tolerance, and accepting diversity, the series shows how characters from various cultural backgrounds connect and form relationships with one another. The ensemble cast of *Never Have I Ever* is made up of people from different racial and ethnic origins. While Devi Vishwakumar, an Indian-American teen, is the main character of the show, it also features people from different cultures like Kamala, Eleanor Wong, Dr. Nalini Vishwakumar, Paxton Hall-Yoshida and Dr. Ryan. The show disproves the idea of a single cultural norm by featuring characters from many racial and ethnic backgrounds, and it gives

underrepresented groups of people representation. This portrayal enables viewers from many backgrounds to relate themselves with the people on the screen, encouraging a sense of empowerment and belonging.

## 5.2. Cultural Ambivalence

One of the strengths of the series is its ability to address cultural differences in a relatable and humorous way. It delves into the challenges of balancing traditions and expectations from Devi's Indian heritage with the desires and experiences of being a typical American teenager. The show also addresses the stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding different cultures, challenging them through its characters and their experiences.

However, simultaneously, the show also addresses the never-ending identity crisis that the first-generation-born teenage citizens of immigrant parents, primarily and all the other immigrants, overall, face. Often they find themselves at crossroads when towering perplexity takes over in prioritising between peer pressure, familial traditional norms, and age-old cultural values perpetuated generation after generation as well as communities. The web series goes beyond surface-level representations of diversity by delving into the complexities of cultural assimilation and identity formation. Devi's struggles with balancing her Indian heritage and American upbringing, her conflicts with her authoritarian mother Nalini, and her experiences as a person of color in a predominantly white school, highlight the challenges faced by many multicultural individuals. In the opening scene of the web series, Devi was seen starting her day how typically every Indian is expected to in a brown family regardless of the country they are residing in: in front of the Gods, praying to the idols. However, contrary to what is expected from an Indian teenage student to pray for, or practically, beg for, that is, good grades, she was seen kneeling on the ground, with her hands brought together in prayer for the fulfilment of the American dream of every average school going teen, that is, the most happening sophomore year experience in the high school. As remarked by Eleanor Ty in her book, *Asianfail: Narratives of Disenchantment and the Model Minority*, "Asian North American youthful subjectivity—not of a sense of a mortifying failure to belong, but of a vacillation between embarrassment and pride in not conforming to or belonging to anything imagined as "Asian." (Ty)

"One: I'd like to be invited to a party with alcohol and hard drugs. I'm not gonna do them. I'd just like the opportunity to say: "No cocaine for me, thanks, I'm good." Two: I'd love for my arm hair to thin out. I know it's an Indian thing but my forearms look like the frigging floor of a barber shop. And lastly, most importantly, I'd really, really like a boyfriend, but not some nerd from one of my AP classes. Like a guy from sports team. He can be dumb. I don't care. I just want him to be a stone-cold hottie, who could rock me all night long." ("Pilot" 00:03 - 01:04)

The above-mentioned lines that were delivered are soaked in desperation of a teen of un-American descent in a foreign land who is raring to settle in unidentifiably with their peers. Her desperation to fit in knew no bounds and could carry her to any degree where she even confronted Paxton Hall- Yoshida, her high school crush and "the hottest guy at Sherman Oaks High" ("Pilot" 03:44 – 03:45) to have sexual intercourse with her instead of trying to bridge more of an emotional or intellectual compatibility right after she confessed to him that she is, indeed, into him. A supposedly non-controversial act of sexual intercourse among teenagers in the West, or the United States to be specific, wherein parents often have the 'talk' with their children to educate them on physical intimacy, the precautions that need to be taken physically, mentally, emotional, is still considered a taboo among Indians in the nation and abroad. For

instance, in *Sex Education*, yet another British teen sex comedy and drama on Netflix, Otis Milburn's (the protagonist) mother, Jean, is a sex therapist and holds firm beliefs that sex education is a vital addition to the school curriculum. Furthermore, she is even seen to be quite vocal and open-minded about having conversations regarding sexual problems faced by her son. Similarly, in a teen romantic Netflix original titled *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, Lara Jean's (the female protagonist) father, a doctor by profession was seen educating her on prioritising safe sex instead of barring her from engaging herself in intercourse. However, Devi's mother scorns the absolute possibility of her teenage daughter having sex by vehemently subjecting her to a "no sex" rule. The age-old taboo of sexual intercourse is attributed to these generationally perpetuated ideologies: In India, sexual intercourse is a topic that is often demurred as it is considered humiliating and immoral to converse about, especially with the elders in the society. Talking and even expressing about one's own sexuality and sexual orientation is tagged as vulgar and shameful. This petrification often compels young adults to suppress their needs and desires and does not permit women to freely express their troubles related to their menstrual cycles and are thus rendered helpless in their struggle to maintain proper intimate hygiene. (Krishna)

### 5.3. Ambivalence towards Cultural Heritage

Devi is a reluctant Indian in terms of her cultural identification. Even while she indulges in actual stereotypes like playing an instrument, pursuing an Ivy League education, doing well in school, and getting labelled as a boring nerd, she eventually avoids overt shows of Indianness.

In the fourth episode of season one, the Vishwakumar family visits Devi's high school to celebrate Ganesh Puja, and Devi is obviously uncomfortable in the traditional attire that she fusses about constantly. She tries to mock the spectacle happening in front of her when she meets old pals, but is met with hesitation while another says that college has helped him overcome his own self-hatred by teaching him that "thinking it's weird to be Indian is an identity, [but it's] a shitty one." ("Felt Super Indian" 08:20 – 08:22)

Devi is alone in feeling embarrassed by her culture onscreen, but it is a sentiment shared by many offscreen. The recent push for diversity and acceptance is incredible, but negative attitudes towards immigrant families still exist and can erode cultural image. There is an inherent need to fit in, and often it comes at the expense of one's own heritage. (Menon)

The old family friend that she stumbled across is Harish, who had just left for college while she seems to be grumbling nonstop about how a day full of Indian rituals at a location where Devi could possibly be seen by non-Indians is not exactly her cup of tea. Harish, like Devi, was an insecure Indian before going to college. Nonetheless, now that college had demonstrated to him that there is no reason to hide his identity, he was at much ease while processing and accepting his own cultural heritage. Harish had, seemingly, reached a level of maturity where he realized that descent was hardly of any concern in a world where talent, hard work, and growth were at race. Nonetheless, Devi was still a teenager in school living a comparatively less fierce life of academics and more pressurized in socializing with her peers.

### 5.4. Differences in Cultural Norms

Logically, the population from the global East and West cannot easily be demarcated into categories in terms of color, physiology, and intellectual or social capabilities as the world thinks it to be. However, their geographical locations put them in cultural spaces that they identify with and manage to differ from other cultures while harbouring co-existing cultural affinities. Though, a lot of immigrants move to the United States (in this case) or any other developed country in order to open doors to a myriad of



opportunities, they often leave with a string of attachment with their roots that does not let them entirely break ties with their heritage. This string of attachment is often disguised in the shape of values, norms, rules, regulations, ways of living, and habits. These habits are culturally borne, and are, hence, alien to some other. Therefore, these lifestyles that are considered as day-to-day occurrences in a household, are seen as anomalies in distinct cultural communities.

For example, the concept of slapping, spanking, or any other punishment that entails physical contact that results in a certain degree of pain is considered offensive in most Western countries. However, in India, a major chunk of the Indian populace practices the same in order to discipline their ward and raise a well-behaved child. Precisely, that is what Nalini set an example for by yelling at Devi in front of her white neighbour, “Yeah, you better go to your room before I give you a smack! Smacking is still an acceptable punishment in many minority cultures.” (“Had Sex with Paxton Hall-Yoshida” 11:50 - 12:02). Whatsoever led to this outburst of Nalini, too was anger fuelled by cultural defiance of her teenage daughter when she cursed at her, calling her a bitch. Cussing is considered an offensive act in all cultures but the severity of it, the ways and means of handling it, and the consequences of it varies from one society to another.

The notion of dating, in general, is not very welcoming in conservative traditional households. However, even in a modern, broad-thinking family, it is acceptable only after the child comes to an age of maturity. On the contrary, underage dating is seen in a bad light. On one hand, Fabiola’s mother, Elise Torres, was excited that Fabiola is living a high school experience by having a boyfriend, “I’m so happy. I’ve been dying for you to have a boyfriend. Boyfriends are what high school is all about.” (“Gotten Drunk with the Popular Kids” 09:28 - 09:34). On the other, Devi’s mother Nalini, is strict about her ‘no dating’ rule. When Eleanor’s mother told Nalini and Elise that she was delighted to learn about their daughters’ love lives, Nalini’s reaction was intense and disconfirming, “Love lives? No, no, no. They’re too young for love, and frankly, to have a life.” (“Been a Big, Fat Liar” 14:31 - 14:35) Nalini’s belief system was deeply rooted by what has been passed to her from generations of values strengthened by culture. Unfortunately, she failed to make room for opinions and general beliefs held by people from other corners of the world. This caused her to turn a blind eye towards the mindset of her teenage daughter who was born and raised in a completely different environment as compared to hers.

### **5.5. The Alien Concept of Arranged Marriages**

Marriages are considered to be an intimate affair wherein two people develop a commitment towards each other. However, in India, marriage is a gala affair wherein a lot of stages of trial, error, and assessment need to be cleared off before even reaching the wedding altar. What may come as an unanticipated shock to most of the Western culture, marriages in India are two kinds: arranged marriage and love marriage. Though, there is a vast majority of the population in India in today’s era that fearlessly supports and unhesitantly engages themselves in love marriages, many ages back, love marriage was a rarity and often a luxury for a handful. Nevertheless, modernity even in the twenty-first century, does not entail complete freedom in the matter of marriage.

Along with Nalini and Devi, stayed Devi’s cousin Kamala, a Ph.D. student as a biologist at CalTech. She is fashioned as the epitome of a young Indian maiden who is portrayed as a role model for Devi. Kamala is an ambitious student who is trying to navigate her life between her academic aspirations and her duty as a doting daughter to her parents. The reason why Kamala wanted to be a praise-worthy role model is that the women in her family, such as Nalini (her aunt), Vimala (her grandmother), and her

unnamed mother, were the ones from whom she learned about the sophistication in features, the elegant way of dressing up and the soft as well as polite mannerisms befitting an Indian bachelorette. Though she tries her best to set herself as an exemplary role model for her younger cousin to look up to, she is after all, a young girl with her whims and fantasies. She ends up finding a non-Indian boyfriend at CalTech named Steve with whom she had a lot of fun. However, reality knocked her out of her daydream when she had to meet Prashant, a suitor arranged by her family and his parents. As a result, Kamala had to call off her steady relationship with her boyfriend Steve whom she often sneaked into the house after everyone fell asleep, “Steve, wait, we can longer date. It’s complicated but my parents want me to be with someone else... I have a duty to my family. I’m sorry.” (“Had Sex with Paxton Hall-Yoshida” 24:11- 24:50)

Nevertheless, Kamala did not seem very frustrated or dejected about her parents’ decision because her brain had been wired in such a way that she saw it as an act of obedience as a daughter instead of a forceful communion of two strangers. Identifying it as a forceful attempt at marriage, Steve asked Kamala to protest against her family, but she refuted saying, “they’re not forcing me. I have a choice between my family and a life of shame that will disgrace me and my descendants for generations.” (“Gotten Drunk with the Popular Kids” 05:49 - 06:00) Hence, what should deem as an independent decision of oneself, is made by those who are not directly at the receiving end of consequences.

Interestingly enough, in an ardent traditional manner, it is the parents in the Indian household who first get to meet and judge the man or woman they see as a promising suitor for their child. After which, the man and the woman are allowed to meet. This meeting with the parents is considered no less than a personal interview for a highly contested job at a top-notch company. Hence, it is essential to score high throughout the scorecard. Therefore, when Kamala wore an attire in which she was comfortable instead of a ‘sari’, Nalini reacted:

That? That jeans and blazer? Are you crazy? You look like a careerist Western woman, which you obviously are, but they don’t need to know that, yet. Kamala, his family wants to see that you can cook, clean and cater to their son’s needs. They basically want him to marry his own mother... after you get married, you move to the United States, you can do whatever you want. (“Had Sex with Paxton Hall-Yoshida” 05:13- 05:50)

Thus, tradition finds itself at the top of the priority list in stark comparison with emotions, bonding, understanding, or compatibility.

## 5.6. Challenging Stereotypes

Through its diverse cast and well-developed characters, *Never Have I Ever* actively challenges stereotypes associated with different ethnicities. For instance, Devi is not solely defined by her Indian heritage but is portrayed as a multidimensional character with her own dreams, aspirations, and flaws. Similarly, other characters, such as Fabiola and Eleanor, defy conventional stereotypes related to race and gender, further contributing to the dismantling of preconceived notions. By defying stereotypes, the series encourages viewers to question and challenge their own biases, fostering a more inclusive and multicultural mindset.

Nalini, who was recently widowed after her husband’s untimely and shocking demise, was already under a lot of pressure as all the responsibilities that she co-handled with her spouse, were all her burden to carry now. At times of such despair, she is expected to have the support of her family and community in a foreign land. Nevertheless, she does not find one. When she visited the Ganesh puja organized by the Hindu association along with her daughter and niece, she was criticized by the Indian aunties for colouring

her hair black instead of leaving it uncoloured and untaken care of. This is a centuries-old taboo that was practiced by widows, however, times have changed. Thus, Nalini gave a befitting reply to the “aunties”, “What idea? That I love my husband less because my roots aren’t showing?” (“Felt Super Indian” 11:41 – 11:44)

*Never Have I Ever* recognizes the intersectionality of identities and incorporates diverse perspectives on issues such as gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status. Devi’s friends, Fabiola and Eleanor, each have their own unique experiences and challenges, adding layers of diversity to the series. This intersectionality not only highlights the significance of being inclusive but also reminds us that multiculturalism encompasses more, than just race or ethnicity including various aspects of identity. The web series tackles matters and sparks discussions about cultural assimilation differences, between generations and the difficulties experienced by immigrant families. By centering the show on these themes and motifs, *Never Have I Ever* provides its viewers with a platform that opens doors for discussion on cultural diversity along with promoting thoughtful acceptance of a plethora of cultural practices.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, the web series *Never Have I Ever* lives up to its role as a vital contributor towards the endorsement of multiculturalism by engaging a diverse cast, questioning and defying stereotypes, investigating the complexity of self-identities, and portraying issues related to cultural ambivalence. The series encourages its audience to cultivate empathy towards each other, embrace diversity through its all-encompassing storytelling, nuanced character development, and by presenting unembellished, factual and relatable multicultural experiences. Even as the web series came to an end as it aired its last season, its popularity and influence see no end of the tunnel as its humongous impact on multiculturalism continues to be untamed and cannot be overexaggerated. *Never Have I Ever* persists to implore the viewers and stir within them to question and identify their stance on multiculturalism.

On the whole, *Never Have I Ever* portrays multiculturalism in a way that aims to promote inclusivity and inspire viewers to embrace and honor cultures. The show showcases the vibrant aspects of cultural backgrounds while also emphasizing the universal human experiences and emotions that surpass cultural borders. Ultimately it aims to foster a sense of unity and empathy among its audience.

## 1. Works Cited

2. Ali, Lorraine. “‘Never Have I Ever’ Is the L.A. Immigrant Tale I Never Thought I’d See on TV: My Own.” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 2020, [www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2020-05-06/netflix-never-have-i-ever-mindy-kaling-immigrant-los-angeles](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2020-05-06/netflix-never-have-i-ever-mindy-kaling-immigrant-los-angeles).
3. Amoskala. “The Melting Pot vs. The Salad Bowl.” *Black Green Atlantic*, 1 May 2020, [sites.nd.edu/blackandgreenatlantic/2020/02/21/the-melting-pot-vs-the-salad-bowl/](http://sites.nd.edu/blackandgreenatlantic/2020/02/21/the-melting-pot-vs-the-salad-bowl/).
4. Aster, Hannah. “Cultural Diversity in the Workplace: Netflix’s Story.” *Shortform Books*, 18 Jan. 2022, [www.shortform.com/blog/cultural-diversity-in-the-workplace/](http://www.shortform.com/blog/cultural-diversity-in-the-workplace/).
5. Butaney, Kaavya. “Never Have I Ever Seen An Indian-American Teen Sitcom Like This!” *India Currents*, 6 May 2022, [indiacurrents.com/never-have-i-ever-seen-a-sitcom-like-mindy-kalings-new-teen-show/](http://indiacurrents.com/never-have-i-ever-seen-a-sitcom-like-mindy-kalings-new-teen-show/).
6. Elias, Megan. “Never Have I Ever... Seen Representation like This: Review of Mindy Kaling’s Never Have I Ever.” Edited by Alexandra Hidalgo, *Agnès Films*, 21 May 2020,

- agnesfilms.com/reviews/never-have-i-ever-seen-representation-like-this-review-of-mindy-kalings-never-have-i-ever/.
7. “FROM MELTING POT TO SALAD BOWL.” *Understanding American Culture - from Melting Pot to Salad Bowl*, [www.culturalsavvy.com/understanding\\_american\\_culture.htm](http://www.culturalsavvy.com/understanding_american_culture.htm). Accessed 15 June 2023.
  8. Grewal, Kairvy. “With Netflix’s Never Have I Ever, Indian American Has Shed the Desi Identity Baggage.” *ThePrint*, 30 Apr. 2020, [theprint.in/opinion/pov/netflix-never-have-i-ever-indian-american-shed-desi-identity-baggage/411711/](http://theprint.in/opinion/pov/netflix-never-have-i-ever-indian-american-shed-desi-identity-baggage/411711/).
  9. Gross, Terry. “Mindy Kaling Brings A New Nerd To TV, And Finds She ‘Was Not Alone’ As A Teen.” *NPR*, 27 Apr. 2020, [www.npr.org/2020/04/27/845440741/mindy-kaling-brings-a-new-nerd-to-tv-and-finds-she-was-not-alone-as-a-teen](http://www.npr.org/2020/04/27/845440741/mindy-kaling-brings-a-new-nerd-to-tv-and-finds-she-was-not-alone-as-a-teen).
  10. Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster, 1996.
  11. Kaling, Mindy, and Lang Fisher. *Never Have I Ever*, created by Mindy Kaling, and Lang Fisher, performance by Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, et al., season 1, Netflix, 27 Apr. 2020.
  12. Kaling, Mindy, and Lang Fisher. “Pilot.” *Never Have I Ever*, season 1, episode 1, Netflix, 27 Apr. 2020.
  13. Kaling, Mindy. “‘... Felt Super Indian’ .” *Never Have I Ever*, season 1, episode 4, Netflix, 27 Apr. 2020.
  14. Krishna, Dhruv. “Sex Education: Still a Taboo in India?” *Times of India Blog*, 15 July 2020, [timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/dhruvslexicon/sex-education-still-a-taboo-in-india-2-23171/](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/dhruvslexicon/sex-education-still-a-taboo-in-india-2-23171/).
  15. Lind, Michael, et al. “How to Fix America’s Identity Crisis.” *POLITICO Magazine*, 4 July 2016, [www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/07/a-new-american-melting-pot-214011/](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/07/a-new-american-melting-pot-214011/).
  16. Longley, Robert. “What Is Multiculturalism? Definition, Theories, and Examples.” *ThoughtCo*, ThoughtCo, 15 Oct. 2020, [www.thoughtco.com/what-is-multiculturalism-4689285](http://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-multiculturalism-4689285).
  17. “Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?” *Cglearn.It*, [www.cglearn.it/mysite/civilization/american-culture/a-story-of-immigration/melting-pot-or-salad-bowl/](http://www.cglearn.it/mysite/civilization/american-culture/a-story-of-immigration/melting-pot-or-salad-bowl/). Accessed 15 June 2023.
  18. “Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?” *Civic Issues*, 21 Jan. 2019, [sites.psu.edu/ajwcivicissues/2019/01/21/melting-pot-or-salad-bowl/](http://sites.psu.edu/ajwcivicissues/2019/01/21/melting-pot-or-salad-bowl/).
  19. Menon, Radhika. “‘Never Have I Ever’ Doesn’t Mirror My Experience Growing Up As An Indian-American ... But That’s What Makes It Great.” *Decider*, 5 May 2020, [decider.com/2020/05/05/never-have-i-ever-radhika-menon/](http://decider.com/2020/05/05/never-have-i-ever-radhika-menon/).
  20. Munir, Amina. “‘... Gotten Drunk with the Popular Kids.’” *Never Have I Ever*, season 1, episode 3, Netflix, 27 Apr. 2020.
  21. Noble, Justin. “‘... Had Sex with Paxton Hall-Yoshida.’” *Never Have I Ever*, season 1, episode 2, Netflix, 27 Apr. 2020.
  22. Oyama, Erica. “‘... Been a Big, Fat Liar.’” *Never Have I Ever*, season 1, episode 7, Netflix, 27 Apr. 2020.
  23. Pandit, Khevna. “Never Have I Ever, Episode 9: Good Girl Gone Bad.” *The Bridge Chronicle*, 21 May 2020, [www.thebridgechronicle.com/lifestyle/never-have-i-ever-episode-9-good-girl-gone-bad-50385](http://www.thebridgechronicle.com/lifestyle/never-have-i-ever-episode-9-good-girl-gone-bad-50385).

24. Railton, Ben. “The Roots of Multicultural Diversity in Revolutionary America.” *Scholars Strategy Network*, 19 Aug. 2014, [scholars.org/brief/roots-multicultural-diversity-revolutionary-america](https://scholars.org/brief/roots-multicultural-diversity-revolutionary-america).
25. Rodrigues, Luís Cordeiro. “Multiculturalism.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [iep.utm.edu/multicul/](http://iep.utm.edu/multicul/). Accessed 15 June 2023.
26. Schlesinger, Arthur M. *Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.
27. Shivaram, Deepa. “‘Never Have I Ever’ Complicates Its Asian American Characters. That’s The Whole Point.” *NPR*, 16 July 2021, [www.npr.org/2021/07/16/1016968651/never-have-i-ever-complicates-its-asian-american-characters-thats-the-whole-poin](http://www.npr.org/2021/07/16/1016968651/never-have-i-ever-complicates-its-asian-american-characters-thats-the-whole-poin).
28. Trotman, C. James. *Multiculturalism: Roots and Realities*. Indiana University, 2002.
29. Ty, Eleanor. *Asianfail: Narratives of Disenchantment and the Model Minority*. University of Illinois Press, 2017.
30. Upadhyaya, Kayla Kumari. “Never Have I Ever Recap: Mother-Daughter Dance.” *Vulture*, 1 May 2020, [www.vulture.com/2020/05/never-have-i-ever-episode-9-recap-be-on-my-best-behavior.html](http://www.vulture.com/2020/05/never-have-i-ever-episode-9-recap-be-on-my-best-behavior.html).