



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

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Abstract

As a renowned streaming platform with a vast user base, Netflix seems to have taken on the responsibility of diversifying narratives and celebrating multiculturalism. By producing and featuring a wide range of content representing various ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds, Netflix actively contributes to the creation of a societal “salad bowl” where diverse elements come together while maintaining their unique identities. Netflix entails an inclusive storytelling approach that fosters cultural appreciation, understanding, and unity in the United States of America, paving the way for a more harmonious and inclusive society. This research essay critically examines the popular web series *Never Have I Ever* and its role in promoting multiculturalism. Through an analysis of its diverse characters, storytelling techniques, and themes, this article sheds light upon how the series contributes to fostering multicultural understanding and inclusivity. By portraying a multi-ethnic cast and addressing complex issues related to identity, race, and cultural assimilation, *Never Have I Ever* serves as a catalyst for promoting multiculturalism in contemporary media. This material argues that the series effectively challenges stereotypes and encourages empathy, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and culturally diverse society.

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

I. 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 of cultural rights is one of multiculturalism’s fundamental principles. This implies that people and groups are free to preserve and express their cultural identities, languages, customs, and practices without fear of bias or discrimination. The freedom to practice one’s religion, protect one’s cultural heritage, and participate in cultural activities all fall under the category of cultural rights. Additionally, it emphasises the significance of equality and inclusivity. It supports equal access to opportunities, resources, and services for all people regardless of their cultural background and works to remove structural barriers and prejudices that marginalize specific cultural groups. Affirmative action policies, anti-discrimination laws, and inclusive education initiatives fall under this category. It promotes mutual understanding,



respect, and cooperation by encouraging people from various cultural backgrounds to engage in meaningful interactions. Social contacts, educational programmes, neighbourhood gatherings, and cultural festivals can all facilitate this. Multiculturalism aids in dismantling preconceptions, challenging stereotypes, and creating bridges between various populations by encouraging discourse and engagement. It acknowledges the value of social cohesion and cultural integration and promotes people to actively participate in the social, economic, and political life of the society to which they belong while also recognizing variety. Learning the local language, comprehending the political and judicial system, and upholding the shared ideals and values that support social harmony are all part of this. With respect for and appreciation for the distinctive cultural identities of individuals and communities, the aim is to foster a sense of unity and belonging.

Multiculturalism's detractors claim it might result in cultural fragmentation and the deterioration of a sense of national identity. They contend that multicultural policies could weaken social cohesiveness and promote cultural isolation. However, proponents contend that by recognizing the equality of worth and dignity of all cultural groups, multiculturalism, when correctly applied, fosters integration and societal harmony. They contend that diversity may benefit society by encouraging innovation, creativity, and a more comprehensive view of the world. It is not a universal notion and may be implemented differently in many circumstances and nations. To address the difficulties and opportunities posed by cultural diversity, certain countries have enacted multicultural laws and regulations. Some people have adopted a more assimilationist stance, emphasising a shared national identity but allowing for specific cultural practises.

Therefore, multiculturalism is a philosophy that values and acknowledges the diversity of cultures present in a society. It encourages cohabitation, equality, and respect amongst many cultural groups with the goal of fostering a welcoming environment where people can preserve their cultural identities while actively participating in society. Multiculturalism aims to create peaceful and cohesive societies that celebrate the diversity and contributions of all cultures by promoting intercultural conversation, equality, and integration.

1. Multiculturalism Practiced in the United States of America

Multiculturalism in the USA has long been up for dispute. The United States has always taken pleasure in being a melting pot of cultures and ethnicities as a country founded on waves of immigration. The idea of multiculturalism contends that cultural variety should be embraced and honored in order to promote a culture that accepts and cherishes individual differences among its members. However, some claim that multiculturalism can result in societal splits and cultural fragmentation. At its fundamental essence, multiculturalism supports the notion that various cultures may coexist peacefully within a society. Advocates contend that accepting cultural plurality improves societal cohesiveness by fostering respect, tolerance, and appreciation for other beliefs, traditions, and practices. Multiculturalism encourages a sense of tolerance and equal opportunity by valuing the cultural contributions of other communities.

However, critics claim that multicultural policy may unintentionally cause social rifts. They contend that multiculturalism might impede integration by focusing on ethnic pockets and highlighting differences rather than common ideals. 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 grouped together along ethnic lines may isolate people and hinder social relations, undermining the idea of a united country. They believe that multiculturalism might cause society to become divided, with people prioritizing their ethnic or cultural identities over their national identities. They contend that a nation's social fabric can be damaged by an overemphasis on cultural distinctions, which can impede the growth of a shared American identity. Additionally, the politicisation of multiculturalism can lead to identity politics, in which different groups vie for resources and attention, thereby escalating societal conflicts. It continues to be difficult to strike a balance between promoting a sense of a shared national identity and recognising cultural distinctions. It is important to negotiate multiculturalism carefully, recognising the contributions of other cultures but also putting an



emphasis on shared values and experiences. 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, the “cult of ethnicity,” if pushed too far, may endanger the unity of society. (Schlesinger) In order to influence attitudes and promote social integration, education is crucial. Promoting cultural understanding, correcting systematic injustices, and encouraging a sense of belonging that embraces both unique cultural identities and a greater sense of national unity should be the main objectives of a complete multiculturalism strategy. By doing this, the United States can maintain its multiracial legacy while working towards a united and inclusive society.

2. The United States of America as a Salad Bowl: Embracing Cultural Diversity

The history of the United States is deeply intertwined with immigration, as millions of people from various countries sought opportunities and a better life. Throughout history, fresh and diverse waves of immigrants have brought 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 salad bowl metaphor captures the notion that cultural diversity has always been present and celebrated throughout American history, and it continues to shape the nation’s identity. One of the main advantages of the salad bowl model is that it promotes inclusivity by allowing individuals to retain their cultural identities. Unlike the melting pot, where assimilation is prioritized, the salad bowl encourages multiculturalism and respect for different traditions. This approach recognizes that individuals can maintain their cultural heritage while also participating in the broader society. By embracing cultural diversity, the United States creates an environment where individuals from different backgrounds can coexist and thrive. This model fosters cultural exchange, promotes tolerance, and encourages a deeper understanding of other cultures, leading to a more harmonious and inclusive society. The United States has a history of assimilating diverse cultures while allowing them to maintain their unique identities. Immigrants have often embraced the American Dream, seeking economic opportunities and a better life for their families. This process of assimilation has resulted



in the creation of distinct cultural communities that coexist within the broader American society. Chinatowns, Little Italys, and Hispanic neighborhoods are examples of vibrant cultural enclaves where traditions, languages, and cuisines are preserved. Despite cultural enclaves, the United States promotes social integration, encouraging individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate fully in society. This integration is evident in educational institutions, workplaces, and public spaces, where people from different cultures interact, collaborate, and share experiences. Schools and universities serve as melting pots, fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding. The celebration of cultural festivals, such as Diwali, Chinese New Year, and St. Patrick's Day, demonstrates the nation's commitment to inclusivity and multiculturalism.

While the salad bowl model offers numerous opportunities, it also presents certain challenges. The coexistence of diverse cultures requires active efforts to promote understanding and respect. Education plays a vital role in fostering intercultural competence, teaching students about different cultures, and promoting empathy. Additionally, public policies that promote inclusivity, such as anti-discrimination laws and social welfare programs, are crucial for creating a fair and equitable society. However, challenges such as cultural isolation and fragmentation may arise if efforts to promote integration and inclusivity are not properly implemented. "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) Striking a balance between preserving cultural diversity and promoting a shared sense of national identity remains a complex task just as right nativists in the USA had feared.

Recognizing the salad bowl model has important policy implications. Immigration policies should emphasize the value of cultural diversity while ensuring fair and humane treatment of newcomers. Encouraging the preservation of cultural heritage through language programs, cultural celebrations, and community initiatives can strengthen the fabric of society. Additionally, promoting diverse representation in media, politics, and leadership positions can empower marginalized communities and provide a platform for their voices to be heard. Such policies can foster a sense

of belonging, social cohesion, and national pride among individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The concept of the United States as a salad bowl challenges the traditional notion of the melting pot and highlights the importance of cultural diversity. Embracing this model allows for the preservation of unique cultural identities, fosters inclusivity, and promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures. While challenges exist, such as the need for intercultural education and effective policies, the benefits of the salad bowl approach outweigh the potential drawbacks. By recognizing and valuing cultural diversity, the United States can continue to thrive as a nation of multiculturalism, enriching the lives of its citizens and embracing its status as a global melting pot.

3. Netflix and Multiculturalism

Netflix, the global streaming giant, has revolutionized the way people consume entertainment, transcending national boundaries and cultural barriers. Beyond its role as a mere entertainment platform, Netflix has emerged as a powerful promoter of multiculturalism—a philosophy that advocates for international cooperation, collaboration, and mutual understanding. Netflix has fostered multiculturalism, both directly and indirectly, by promoting cross-cultural dialogue, highlighting diverse narratives, and challenging traditional media norms. Netflix's extensive library of international content serves as a bridge between cultures, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and promoting understanding among diverse communities. By providing access to a wide range of foreign-language films, documentaries, and TV shows, Netflix enables viewers to explore different cultural perspectives and gain insights into the lives and experiences of people from around the world. 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)

Through critically acclaimed productions like *Roma*, *Parasite*, and *The Crown*, Netflix has showcased diverse narratives that highlight the complexities and nuances of different cultures. These stories allow viewers to empathize with characters from different backgrounds, fostering a sense of global interconnectedness and breaking down stereotypes. Netflix has played a pivotal role in amplifying underrepresented voices and stories that often go unnoticed by traditional media outlets. By commissioning and distributing content from marginalized creators and filmmakers, the streaming platform has given a platform to diverse perspectives that challenge the dominant narrative. For instance, the ground-breaking series *Narcos* and *Narcos: Mexico* shed light on the history and impact of drug cartels in Latin America, providing a nuanced portrayal of the region and its complex socio-political dynamics. Similarly, *Sense8* celebrated diversity by featuring a diverse ensemble cast representing different ethnicities, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds, thereby challenging conventional norms and promoting inclusivity.

Netflix’s global reach has transcended geographic barriers, allowing people from different parts of the world to access and enjoy content from diverse cultures. By leveraging technology and expanding its presence to over one hundred and ninety countries, Netflix has facilitated the global exchange of ideas, stories, and perspectives. The accessibility of Netflix’s platform has provided a level playing field for creators and filmmakers, regardless of their geographic location. This democratization of access has empowered storytellers from underrepresented regions to share their narratives with a global audience, promoting cultural diversity and challenging the dominance of Western-centric media.

Netflix has actively engaged in collaborations and co-productions with international partners, fostering multilateral cooperation in the entertainment industry. By partnering with production companies, directors, and actors from different countries, Netflix has facilitated the creation of cross-border content that blends cultural influences, expertise, and resources. For instance, the collaboration between Netflix and South Korean director Bong Joon-ho resulted in the

critically acclaimed film *Okja*. This partnership allowed the film to reach a global audience while showcasing the talent and creativity of South Korean filmmakers on an international platform. Such collaborations not only promote cultural exchange but also strengthen diplomatic ties and encourage global cooperation.

Netflix’s role as a promoter of multiculturalism is evident through its commitment to cross-cultural dialogue, amplification of underrepresented voices, global accessibility, and collaborations. By breaking down barriers, challenging stereotypes, and fostering understanding, Netflix has emerged as a catalyst for international cooperation and mutual respect. As the streaming landscape continues to evolve, it is crucial to recognize and celebrate the potential of platforms like Netflix in promoting multilateralism. By embracing diverse narratives and fostering global connections, Netflix not only enriches our entertainment experiences but also plays a vital role in building a more inclusive and interconnected world.

4. *Never Have I Ever*

4.1. Introduction

In recent years, web series have gained significant popularity as a medium for storytelling, allowing creators to explore diverse narratives and reach a wide audience. One such web series, *Never Have I Ever*, created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher, stands out for its portrayal of a multi-ethnic cast and its exploration of multicultural themes through its characters and storytelling techniques.

Never Have I Ever is a Netflix comedy-drama web series that revolves around the life of a first-generation Indian-American teenager named Devi Vishwakumar, played by Maitreyi Ramakrishnan. The show explores Devi’s experiences navigating her dual cultural identity while dealing with the challenges of high school. While *Never Have I Ever* primarily focuses on Devi’s Indian-American background, it also emphasizes multiculturalism by featuring characters from various cultural backgrounds and highlighting the diversity within Devi’s school and community. The series showcases the interactions and relationships between characters from different cultural backgrounds, promoting a message of acceptance, understanding, and embracing diversity. *Never Have I Ever* features a diverse ensemble cast, representing various racial and ethnic backgrounds. The series centers around Devi Vishwakumar, an Indian-American teenager, but



also includes characters from other cultural backgrounds, such as Kamala, Nalini, and Dr. Ryan. By showcasing characters from different ethnicities, the series challenges the notion of a single cultural norm and provides representation to underrepresented communities. This representation allows viewers from diverse backgrounds to see themselves reflected on screen, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.

4.2. 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, on the same plain, 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 down 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 non-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, especially with the elders of the society.



Talking and even expressing about one's own sexuality and sexual orientation is given the tag of vulgarity and shamefulness. 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)

4.3. 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)

She stumbles across an old family friend, Harish, who has 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 has demonstrated to him that there is no reason to hide his identity, he is 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.

4.4. 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 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 up 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 swore at her, calling her a bitch. Swearing is considered as 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 the 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.

4.5. 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 unhesitatingly 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 with. 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.

4.6. 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 aunts that 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 reinforces the importance of inclusivity but also serves as a reminder that multiculturalism encompasses various aspects of identity beyond race or ethnicity.

The web series addresses cultural issues and initiates conversations about cultural assimilation, generational gaps, and the challenges faced by immigrant families. The conflict between Devi and her mother Nalini, for instance, highlights the tension between preserving cultural traditions and embracing a new cultural environment. By exploring these themes, *Never Have I Ever* provides a platform for discussions on cultural diversity, promoting understanding and acceptance of different cultural practices.

II. Conclusion

In conclusion, the web series *Never Have I Ever* contributes to the promotion of multiculturalism by portraying a diverse cast, challenging stereotypes, exploring complex identities, and addressing cultural issues. Through its inclusive storytelling and nuanced character development, the series encourages viewers to embrace diversity, fostering empathy and understanding. By presenting multicultural experiences in an authentic and relatable manner, *Never Have I Ever* paves the way for a more inclusive society, where people from diverse backgrounds can feel seen, heard, and represented. As the web series continues to gain popularity and influence, its impact on promoting multiculturalism in contemporary media cannot be overstated. By presenting these nuanced portrayals, *Never Have I Ever* prompts viewers to confront their own biases and assumptions, fostering empathy and understanding.

Overall, by representing multiculturalism in a positive light, *Never Have I Ever* promotes inclusivity and encourages viewers to appreciate and celebrate different cultures. The series highlights the complexities and richness of diverse cultural backgrounds while also highlighting the shared human experiences and emotions that transcend cultural boundaries, ultimately fostering a sense of unity and understanding among its audience.

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