

## Research Article

Received: 31/05/2021; Accepted: 08/06/2021; Published: 04/08/2021

# Biculturalism and Xenocentrism in TV Series *Never Have I Ever* Season 1

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## Abstract

*Never Have I Ever* is an American Television Series, scripted by Mindi Kaling, which relies both American and Indian life. The main character of the series, Devi Vishwakumar, have the desire to live as Americans in where she lives. On the other hand, her family tends to live in both cultures. The phenomena of biculturalism and xenocentrism may leads to some conflicts if they are not responded in a fine way. The aim of this paper is to discuss further about the indication of bicultural family in the Devi family, and to analyze the indication of xenocentrist behavior in Devi Vishwakumar. Library research method is used by the writer in order to collect the necessary data, sociological approach in literature are used to analyze the data. The result of this study are the biculturalism in Devi's family is found on their clothing, food, and film and the xenocentrist behavior shown by Devi when she decides to eat beef, taunts her cousin who is too Indian, and tells her friend that Ganesh Puja is old and weird Indian festival.

**Keywords:** biculturalism; xenocentrism; indian; american culture

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## 1. Introduction

Culture is an essential part of human life. Koentjaraningrat states that culture is a whole system of ideas, participation, and human social activity for learning and passing on across generations [1]. The concept of culture allows multicultural backgrounds and experiences to arise in society. One of the occasions of cultural experience may come from the interaction between two people that leads to the two cultural backgrounds of each individual. It is called as biculturalism. Padilla states that these phenomena introduce the culture of indigenous peoples and are often experienced by immigrants consistent with the culture in which they live [2].

Benet Marti'nez and Haritatos states that the existence of the biculturalism is likely an individual confrontation. Individuals from both cultures may have complex emotions, whether in a positive or negative way [3]. It is linked to how an individual integrates the orientations of two different cultures. A number of issues can be specific to this kind of conflicts, including ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, and xenocentrism.

The reflection of biculturalism and cultural perspectives can be viewed through literary works such as "Never Have I ever" Season 1 Television Series. In this case, Devi's family can be said as a bicultural family where there are two cultures at once: India and America. Devi's parents are Indians who moved and have been living in America. Anderson says that there are potential conflicts as well as the context of cultural differences [4]. Meanwhile, Devi as an Indian-American can be defined as a xenocentrist who seek to emphasize other cultures rather than their own culture, such as wearing jeans and blazers as a part of American culture.

Hence, the television series "Never Have I Ever" Season 1 is chosen as an object of study. The writer intends to analyze some potential conflicts in the bicultural family in hoping this brings some insights and awareness of the possible consequences that may happen in the bicultural family.

## **2. Theory and Methods**

### *2.1 Theory*

#### **2.1.1 Biculturalism**

Dennis defines biculturalism as "the individuals who live in two cultural worlds and believe themselves to be culturally and socially enriched by differing institutions, customs, and social networks made available by this opportunity". Marriage, birth, adoption, and migration are considered to cause biculturalism [5].

##### **2.1.1.1 American Culture**

America is known as a country that upholds American freedom. Foner says that "the glorification of freedom as the essential characteristic of American life in a struggle for global dominance opened the door for others to seize on the language of freedom for their own purposes." [6]. By the statement of Foner, we may understand that American freedom is an important way of living in America, therefore the other people may use the "freedom" for their own goals. With the rights that each person has, Foner asserts that now freedom has become the American lifestyle [6].

Previously, both jeans and jackets are very popular in the United States. This type of clothing can be worn by both women and men and become the American lifestyle. Besides that, Blazer is a fashionable garment for business women and has been developed into a variety of accessories. Hill also states that today, a jacket is a permanent piece of clothing for women complete with color, texture, palette, and jewelry [7].

As well as the trend of jeans and jackets, fast food is the same as it is now in America. Eric Schlosser notes that Americans mostly spend their money on fast food rather than laptop, car, and education [8]. Pells also mentions several other examples of American products such as American movies, musics, magazines, shopping malls, fast food, and television programs [9].

#### 2.1.1.2 Indian Culture

India is known for its diverse cultural forms such as dance and religious music. It also lives in harmony with many religions such as Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Hinduism. However, India's dominant religion is Hinduism, which has its own religious value. Cows, for example, are considered sacred. Simoons and Lodrick state that the cow products such as milk and butter are used in various religious ceremonies and are considered as offerings to God [10]. Therefore, Hinduism prohibits eating beef. In addition, Hinduism is prohibited from causing addiction such as alcohol, tobacco, and narcotics. Many young people are trapped in this. There are several influential factors, including peer pressure, unsupported family conditions and stress. This is the issue currently being resolved by India [11].

According to Yatanoor, American Indian Association held some Hindu festivals and other religious and cultural events. Ganesh Puja is an example of a festival held by Hindus in the United States. This festival is usually held in August or September according to the Hindu lunar calendar [12].

There are Indian cultural products. Sari is still one of the most frequently weared products of Indian culture today. Khaire that sari or Salvar-kamezz is weared by many Indians as a traditional Indian dress. He describes sari as a long cloth that covers the body [13].

Besides Sari, India has a famous film industry called Bollywood. Noori mentions that Bollywood is known as India's gateway to Mumbai, where many Hindi films are made [11].

#### 2.1.2 Xenocentrism

The term "xenocentrism was first used by Kent and Burnight in a paper titled "Complex Social Group Centrism". They correspond to William Graham Sumner's term "ethnocentrism. Kent and Burnight define xenocentrism as" a view of things in which group other than one's own is the center of everything, and all others, including one's own group, are scaled and rated with reference to it." (1951:256) [12].

Some individuals may be contacted by society and can have a "xenocentric" feeling. A possible trigger for this emotion is someone who is classified as a foreigner who strongly dislikes his culture. That means they are in contact with other societies. Society is made up of families with political, economic, religious, ethical, moral norms, traditions and more [12].

The other trigger is someone who comes from the small minority of second and third-generation Americans. This condition is often felt by young people who come into contact with different cultures at school and college [12].

The last is antipathy for social status. It mainly happens to those who keep their enthusiasts in his society from weak interests. This condition may be felt by left-wing groups and other minority groups in society where a person's frustration, rejection, and inferior social status can be felt [12].

## 2.2 Methods

### 2.2.1 Methods of the Research

Library research method is used by the writer to get the data. George defines library research as a method used by obtaining the data through film, looking for the related theory to the research, and obtaining the information through related books, journals, and articles [13].

### 2.2.2 Methods of the Approach

The sociological approach in literature will also help the writer to analyze which are using the theory of biculturalism by Rutledge M. Dennis and xenocentrism by Kent and Burnight. Swingewood describes sociological approach in literature as:

“a fairly late arrival, for although there are today well-developed sociologies of religion, education, politics, social change, even of such an imprecise area as ideology, there is virtually no established corpus of knowledge called the sociology of literature” (1972:13) [14].

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1 Biculturalism

In the TV series "Never Have I Ever" Season 1, the writer found that biculturalism in Devi's family is triggered by the migration from India to the United States carried out by Devi's parents, Mohan and Nalini in September 2001. Besides them, Kamala as Devi's cousin decides to migrate from India and stay at Devi's house because she attends to Caltech. As you can see, Devi's family must have a hard time adapting to the dominant culture of the environment in which they live, namely American culture.

There are several cultural products found in this series in connection with the biculturalism phenomenon in which Devi's family lives. The first is how to get dressed. On the first day of school, Devi is depressed when a friend ridicules her as a "Lame Indian girl" and "UN" in a sudden paralysis while her father died during an orchestra concert and was swimming. Meanwhile, Devi strives to adapt to the school environment, which is mostly American, so Devi and her best friends Fabiolla and Eleanor do their best to change their wishing looks that she looks cooler than before as in the dialog below.

Fabiola : Woah, Devi, you look like an Indian Kardashian.

Devi : Thanks, Fab, but I thought we were dressing hot today.

Fabiola : This is my boys medium polo instead of my usual large. The janitor said..

Devi : No. Just, no.  
(*Never Have I Ever* Season 1, Eps. 1, 17.43-17.53)

Based on the content of the conversation, Devi decides to look sexy based on a plan with her friend. With reference to Hill's theory, Devi's jeans suggest that Devi is wearing one of the fashionable outfits in the United States along with a T-shirt. Therefore, the jeans skirts above contain products of American culture that were later adopted by Devi. Devi's dressing method has at least managed to make Devi looks cooler, as suggested by Fabiola, who called her "Indian Kadarshian."

The way of dressing when Devi goes to Ganesh Puja with Narini and Kamala compared with the way Devi dresses in the school is different. At school, Devi looks American. Meanwhile, Devi is wearing a traditional Indian cloth, sari to go to Ganesh Puja. She feels uncomfortable and itchy with Sari that she was wearing at the time. This condition can be demonstrated in the following conversation between Devi and Nalini.

Devi : Mom, this Sari is so uncomfortable. Why does it itch so much?  
Nalini : Itchiness of saris is a rite of passage for Indian women. Deal with it.  
Devi : Why can't I just wear kursta and jeans like I normally do? Then I don't have to get half naked every time I need to go to the bathroom.  
(*Never Have I Ever* Season 1, Eps. 4, 2.47-2.53)

The dialogue above shows Devi's participation in Ganesh Puja by wearing Sari, and she remembers her displeasure with her appearance. She wonders to her mother why Sari is so itchy, and why she cannot wear jeans like her usual day. Nalini says that this itchiness shows an Indian woman that has become accustomed to wearing these traditional clothes, which Devi is unacceptable to. From the above, we can see that Devi is wearing saris at some moment, even if they live in the America and do not wear it every day.

Besides Devi, Kamala also learns to dress in American style. At that time, Kamala parents from India are trying to match Kamala with the other Indian, Prashant, who lives in the United States. Her parents call Nalini to have meeting with Prashant's parents so there is an encounter between his parents in the form of the first introduction. This matchmaking marriage culture was often practiced and it becomes culture in India. To prepare for the encounter, Kamala is wearing proper clothing, as we can see in the next dialog.

Kamala : *Nalini Maami?* No need to find me a sari to wear. I've selected a killer outfit for my video call with Prashant's family.  
Nalini : Okay, what is it?  
Kamala : I'm in it.  
Nalini : That? That Jeans and blazer? Are you crazy?  
Kamala : A fashion segment on a TV Show said it was a fun way to mix professional and casual.

Nalini : Yes, you look like a careerist western woman which you obviously are, but they don't need to know that yet.  
(*Never Have I Ever* Season 1, Eps. 2, 5.16-5.33)

The conversation above is explained when Kamala tells Nalini not to wear the Indian cloth, sari used to meet Prashant's parents. She decides to wear jeans and a blazer. On the theory, it has been explained that the blazer has become a professional, businesswoman and casual outfit in the United States. Therefore, jeans and blazers worn by Kamala are examples of American cultural products. When Nalini does not like Kamala's outfit, which she thinks it is for a career woman, then she refuses Kamala's request. Kamala decides to continue wearing the sari for the meeting

Aside from the dress, food is another example of a cultural product. Here, Devi's family is buying American fast food. As Eric noted, Americans tend to spend their money on fast food more than anything else. Like Devi's family, they use the money to buy fast food snacks to help Devi and her friends to study. They are accustomed to eat bagel bites as part of US fast food products. Based on [bagelbites.com](http://bagelbites.com), Bagel Bites processes frozen foods in the form of mini pizzas. Bagel Bites is produced by a US company owned by Kraft Heinz, which owns markets around the world.

Devi : Sorry, we don't have Bagel Bites tonight. My mom's super pissed at me, and now she won't make us any snacks despite the fact that Bagel Bites, like, help us study!

Nalini : You should've thought about your Bagel Bites before you called me a bitch!

(*Never Have I Ever* Season 1, Eps. 2, 12.04-12.16)

The dialogue shows that Devi's family habits, especially Devi, when they eat Bagel Bites. This happens when Devi, Fabiola and Eleanor work in groups. Nalini who does not want to cook bagel bites makes Devi gets angry when she calls her mother "bitch." It can be said that Nalini does not want to cook bagel bites, but Nalini does not forbid Devi to eat bagel bites as an American product. This shows that American cultural product have become part of the Devi family.

Nalini never forgets Indian culture as her original culture. Then Devi is asking her mother for permission to go to the Trent's house for group work. Nalini gives the Trent family a box of See's Candies with her permission. Nalini's behavior of giving when visiting other places is part of Indian culture. Nevertheless, Devi does not give Trent a box of See's Candies. For Devi, this is generally not done in the United States. This can be seen in the following dialog box.

Devi : Is your rant over, or can I go to Trent's?

Nalini : Yeah, it's fine. Take him a box of See's Candies. Not the clusters. Those are for my work associates.

Devi : No one in America does that, Mom.

(*Never Have I Ever* Season 1, Eps. 3, 17.31-17.41)

Aside from the way they dress and food, the film shows a transformation of a new habit to this family. The American drama is another example of American products. In this case, Kamala and Devi are going to see a movie at night. Then, Kamala decides to watch a Bollywood movie that tells the story of a princess who loves a poor street sweeper, but Devi rejects Kamala's idea.

- Kamala : What would you like to watch, Devi? I found a Bollywood movie about a princess who falls for a lowly street sweeper.  
Devi : No, man. We're watching Riverdale. Buckle up for some steamy teen romance.  
Kamala : They are high schoolers? And their parents are okay with them taking showers together in their homes?  
Devi : Yeah, Kamala. Welcome to American teen soaps.  
(*Never Have I Ever* Season 1, Eps. 3, 09.47-10.00)

The conversation above shows that there are two different cultures. Devi wants to see Riverdale and Kamala actually wants to see her habit of Bollywood. Based on imdb.com, Riverdale is an American series that tells a romantic mystery. Bollywood, on the other hand, can be recognized as Indian films. Kamala who is unfamiliar with American culture, decides to look at River Dale instead of Bollywood. This is proving that dominant cultures can be a challenge for minorities.

### 3.2 Xenocentrism

Based on Kent and Burnlight theory, the triggers of Xenocentrism in Devi character is because she is the second generation of Indians born and lived in the America. In addition, she also gets serious mock from her friends at school as a minority in her school. Devi's father died at school and suddenly Devi gets paralyzed until Devi called "Indian Girl Lame" by her friend. On the other hand, Devi is very friendly with Fabiola and Eleanor, both come from minority groups. Therefore, the American environment denies the existence of Devi, which causes Devi to choose American culture. The signs of Devi's Xenocentrist attitude can be seen when Devi's family attends the barbecue party of their neighbor. She and her parents will participate in the party. Then, Devi decides to drink beef and eat it. In contrast to parents, the beef, provided by their neighbors is neglected by her parents.

- Narrator : "And while he and her mother stayed true to their Indian roots"  
Mohan : No, no, no, thank you. We are vegetarians.  
Narrator : "Devi was all-American"  
(*Never Have I Ever* Season 1, Eps. 1, 2.00-2.20)

The statement above by the narrator that Devi has become fully American proves that Devi is xenocentrism because she is actually Indian descent. Devi's parents are both Indian immigrants. Devi's parents choose to refuse beef, saying they are vegetarian. In fact, they just want to support their Hindu beliefs. Because cows are considered sacred animals, Hindus forbid eating beef. However, Devi's opposition to his parents shows that Devi does not consider these Indian values. She does not care what she should do as an Indian. This makes her parents angry with Devi's actions.

Devi continues to hate Kamala. She tells her mother about Kamala when she goes to school. Devi cannot stand spending time with Kamala anymore, so she shares her feelings with her mom.

- Devi : How long we will gonna stay with Kamala?  
Nalini : As long as it takes for her to finish her study. Why?  
Devi : She's just so... Indian. Like the other day, she said she was gonna open the TV instead of turn on the TV.

(*Never Have I Ever Season 1*, Eps. 1, 4.51-4.59)

Based on the conversation above, Devi's dislike of Kamala begins with Kamala acting like an Indian at Devi's house. Kamala, who recently emigrated from India to the United States, has adapted and is still bringing Indian culture home. Devi's statement that Kamala is very humane shows that Devi is inconvenient and considers India to be inferior to the culture of California, USA, where she currently lives. In addition, Devi notices Kamala's mistake in describing the use of the term "open the TV" that it must be pronounced "Turn on TV." Kamala's mistake in writing English phrases that are commonly used in California indicates that Devi thinks that pronunciation in accurate way is everything because Kamala now lives in the United States. In the new semester, Devi is hoping to heal all the bad luck which she experiences in the previous semester. She is known as a Hindu as her parents share the same beliefs. However, Devi may ask God in a language other than the common people prayers, which is a unique way of praying. This is shown in the following monolog.

- Devi : Hey Gods. It's Devi Vishkumar, your favorite Hindu girl in the San Fernando Valley. What's a-poppin'? I think that we can all agree that last year sucked for a number of reasons. So i thought of a few ways you guys can make it up to me.  
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 cocain 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 on of AP classes. Like a guy from sports team.

(*Never Have I Ever Season 1*, Eps. 1, 00.26-01.05)



The monolog above shows that Devi asks God for three wishes which are having a sports team boyfriend, attending a liquor and drug party, and shaving her armpit. Based on the above theory, Hinduism bans alcohol and drug parties. They believe that alcohol and drug overeating have a negative effect. In American environment where Devi lives, people have the freedom to drink. Besides that, this monolog also means that Devi wants to be like a friend in a school environment. She does not want to be a minority, so she asks God to allow her to do what is forbidden.

After Devi decides to come and join to the Ganesh Puja celebration. She wants to see Indian dance performances performed by groups of Indian women there. However, Devi is not satisfied with the dance, and is commenting on Preethi's sister.

- Devi : They seem cool right, but can you imagine how dorky they would look doing this anywhere else?
- Preethi's sister : That's my sister, Preethi. Her Bollywood dance group was in the Macy's Day Parade on afloat sponsored by Ziploc. So who looks dorky now?

*(Never Have I Ever Season 1, Eps. 4, 06.43-06.53)*

The conversation above describes how Devi considered Indian culture sticky, such as the dance performed by Preethi. For Devi, this dance is inappropriate and also derogatory when performed from outside the Indian association that is around the American environment. Devi's point of view of Indian dance shows Devi's xenocentric attitude as India by interacting with Indian groups. Devi tries to introduce herself as an American rather than demeaning herself to attend the Ganesh Puja celebration happily.

Suddenly Devi meets Harish, an old friend. She is surprised when she sees Harish, who is currently studying at Stanford but also attending the Ganesh Puja event.

- Devi : Ouch, burn. So why are you at this lame-fest? Shouldn't you beat Stanford, like playing frisbee with a computer?
- Harish : I actually really wanted to come.
- Devi : To Ganesh Puja? At a public high school in the Valley? Are you insane? Tell me the truth. Did they and you home on medical leave?
- Harish : No. Look, I know I used to clown on this every year, but the truth is, I kinda miss puja.
- Devi : Are you kidding? When I get into Princeton. I'm never coming back. I'm gonna be an atheist who eats cheeseburgers everyday with my white boyfriend.

*(Never Have I Ever Season 1, Eps. 4, 07.27-07.47)*

Devi shows her xenocentric attitude to Harish, her Indian friend. Devi thinks that Ganesh Puja is an old party. She will not come to Puja if she is accepted as a student at Princeton University. Devi also thinks that American culture is more important. She also

tells Harish that she is no longer participating in Ganesh Puja. She will also eat a cheeseburger with her white boyfriend and become an atheist. Cheeseburgers are one of the most popular fast-food products in the United States. Also, in the United States, there is a freedom to live without religion. By all of these, Devi chooses to apply American culture rather than living with Indian culture.

#### 4. Conclusion

From the analysis, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of Biculturalism is happening in the house of Devi, who lives in two cultures - India and America. One existing trigger of Devi's family's biculturalism is the fact that they are Indian immigrants. The form of the bicultural phenomenon discovered by the writer are the way of wearing clothes, food, and films. It happens when Devi and Kamala are American made and are wearing jackets and jeans. Meanwhile, they still use sari as a product of Indian culture. Beside that, they also eat fast food from the United States such as bagel bite. Despite that, they still serve food to the families Devi visits which means that they do not forget Indian culture. Also, Devi and Kamala's movie preferences show that there are two different cultures where Devi likes the Netflix TV series from American culture and Kamala likes Bollywood movies from Indian culture.

Devi forms a new habit of thinking that American culture is cooler than Indian culture. The xenocentrism that Devi's feel is because she is the second generation of Indian in America. Devi also experiences rejection by forming social relationships with school friends. Some attitudes that Devi is classified as a xenocentric are that Devi ridicules Kamala for the difference between "turn on the TV" and "open the TV", tells Harish that puja is an old festival. Moreover, she underestimates Indian dance and ask for participation in God to drink Alcohol and drug.

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