

Dances with Wolves Movie Review

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Summary

“Dances with Wolves” is a movie which can be characterized as an effective visual effort which addresses the aspects of the different cultures of the Lakota Indians. Kevin Costner directed this particular movie in 1990. It is the story of a soldier who successfully builds an association with the tribe of Lakota Indians. “Dances with Wolves” successfully highlights the different cultural features of the Lakota tribe, which were observed by a Civil War soldier.

Here the focus is to discuss the cultural paradigm highlighted in the film “Dances with Wolves” by considering different crucial elements of cultural anthropology. The approach of participant-observation will be used to discuss the characters of the movie as an anthropologist. Further, the major aspects of anthropology, such as acculturation, enculturation, ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, concerning the particular movie “Dances with Wolves.”

Participant-Observation

The main character of “Dances with Wolves” is John J. Dunbar, who approaches the new culture of Lakota Indians. He interacts with the strange tribe due to the element of the Civil War. Dunbar was the Civil War First Lieutenant who became deeply influenced by the culture of the Sioux people. He was immensely attracted to the simplicity of the lifestyle of that particular tribe. Ultimately he merges himself with them by leaving his former life. It is viable to discuss the particular approach of Dunbar in the film concerning the crucial aspect of participant-observation. It is known as the effective paradigm for discussing the features of cultural anthropology. It is characterized as the specific research method which is used to observe the cultural perspective of any society or a particular group of people (Nanda & Warms, 2013). It is observed that the character of Dunbar never uses the systematic and scientific method of observing the culture of the Sioux people. The approach of observing culture in different in film from the particular approach of anthropologists because there was not the adaptability of the specific research methods of observations used by the character. The approach adopted by the character was the observation of the particular tribe which happened due to the Dunbar’s journey towards the tribe of Sioux.

Acculturation, Enculturation, Assimilation

Acculturation, Enculturation, and Assimilation are known as the three major forms when it comes to understanding the features of different cultures and formulating the aspect of connectivity with the

culture of the other group of people or the society. These particular concepts of anthropology can also be witnessed in the case of the particular movie of “Dances with Wolves.” The feature of interacting with a different culture can be observed in both the cases of the Dunbar and the Sioux people, who seem unfamiliar with the particular practice of culture. Dunbar verily accepts the exception form of culture in the case of Indians as he accepts and applies their culture in his life. The feature of enculturation can be identified in the case of Indians who remain connected to their traditional cultural values by considering it as a natural way of life. They come with the assumption that their approach towards cultural paradigm is natural, and they keenly accept it.

There is the existence of the feature of the enculturation in the case of “Dances with Wolves.” This particular feature describes the factor of diversity, referring to the paradigm of culture. There was clear evidence of the acceptance and adoption of the cultural values in the movie. The character of the Dunbar depicts the element of diversity in the form of enculturation. The diversity of culture in the case of Indians immensely impacts him as he readily blends himself with the cultural paradigm of that particular tribe. The decisions of Dunbar regarding the element of socialization are immensely related to the concept of assimilation. He introduces his approach of compassion to the tribe of Indians and adopts the specific cultural practices of the tribes in his life. He changes his cultural pattern with the bend of the simple and natural culture presented by an Indian tribe. The feature of the assimilation provides the necessary insights that surroundings and the observation play a major role in the adoption of the features of the different cultures. It happens in the case of Dunbar, who closely observes the cultural practices of the Indian tribe and is influenced by their way of life.

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

Ethnocentrism is one of the effective concepts for understanding the aspect of cultural anthropology. It is the explanation of the judgment or perception of someone regarding the cultural solely based on the values and standards set by the individual. It explains the different cultural concerns mostly based on the aspects of language, behaviour, norms, and religion. Ethnocentrism is the paradigm which allows people to make inferences about other cultures by their own practising culture (Gudykunst, 2003). This particular concept can be characterized as the comparison of one’s own culture with the other form of culture observed in the case of different groups or communities.

Although there is evidence of the warm acceptance of the different cultures in the case of Dunbar and the Sioux tribe, there was an element of ethnocentrism in “Dancing with Wolves.” Dunbar happily aligns himself with the cultural approach of the Sioux tribe, and the tribe also welcomes him and gives him honour. The [people of the tribe](#) are inspired by him when they see him play with the wolf and give Dunbar the name Dances with Wolves. This particular cultural bond was not understandable for the army as the existence of the Dunbar in the tribe became a threat to them. It is an example of ethnocentrism as they judge the cultural practices of the Indian tribe differently without the consideration of diversity or cultural acceptance.

Cultural Relativism is the counter concept of the ethnocentrism. It is the idea of open-heartedly accepting the features of the culture which might not related to an individual's own culture. Cultural relativism encourages the idea that the concepts of beliefs, values, and particular norms should be understood and respected without judging and accepting the different cultures just the way they exist in different people's lives. It is the approach of accepting and respecting different cultures without the relevance of the own culture (Tilley, 2000). The particular paradigm of cultural relativism ultimately enhances the approach to diversity in societies. It makes it possible for individuals to live with diversity without any clash of cultural norms, values, and practices. There is significant evidence of cultural relativism in the case of "Dances with Wolves." The main character of the movie, Dunbar, is a prime example of the concept of cultural relativism. He rationally observes the cultural paradigm and the lifestyle of the Sioux people. He considers the lifestyle of Sioux people natural and amazing, and he verily accepts their cultural practices without making judgments concerning his own American culture.

Undoubtedly, the movie "Dancing with Wolves" is an effective example of understanding the features of diversity. The main characters of the movie rationally observe the features of different cultures and accept the facets of diverse cultures. Dunbar and the Sioux people live peacefully with each other, although they originally belong to different cultures. The movie successfully apprehends the idea that acceptance of other cultures can help people to live peacefully and develop diversity in society.

References

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