

INDIAN CULTURE: A MELTING POT OF FAITHS

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ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism is an umbrella term that accommodates different races, nationalities, languages, religions, classes, gender, etc. It denotes that people from different cultures have equal rights. It is a premise that focuses on ordinary political culture in which everybody can participate. It supports cultural harmony. Multiculturalism is a doctrine that inherits different cultures under the same dominion. India is a country of diversity. It accommodates multi-religious and ethnic groups. Each state not only has its language but different food habits, dress, religion, culture, etc. The cultural diversity of India has been saved by its prolonged history, geography, and diverse demographics. India has historically been a multicultural society. The Northeast is one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. It is home to about 200 tribes. The term unity in diversity fits exquisitely in this context. Therefore every linguistic community, in the northeast regardless of its size and population, nurtures its peculiarities of cultures. Multiculturalism is closely affiliated with culture. By culture, we mean the mutual ways of life, beliefs, thinking, and perception of the society around us in which we determine ourselves and other people on different grounds. Culture is one of the distinctive components of human society. Every society has its own culture. The existence of diverse cultures in society led to the rise of multiculturalism. It tries to restore a sense of integrity in a post-modern era that fragments human life and thought. It inspires minority communities to participate fully in society by enhancing their level of economic, social, and cultural homogenization into the host culture. This paper is an attempt to examine multiculturalism in Indian society, the factors which hinder shaping the attitude and participation of various ethnic groups in the public sphere in India, and its current challenges.

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ARTICLE INFO

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:
10 October, 2022
Accepted:
05 February, 2023
Published:
25 April, 2023
Available online:
25 April, 2023

KEYWORDS

Multiculturalism,
Cultural Identity,
Indian Society,
Diversity, Values



Introduction

Cultural variations are the natural circumstances and reality of the modern world. We all live in societies that have different traditions and mechanisms of living. The main motive of democracy is to assist all diversities while protecting and nurturing the creativity of the diverse cultures present within. One of the important epitomes of a democratic nation is the notion of cultural diversity. It is postulated that no discourse on the delineation of appraising democracy today can be satisfactory if it is not extensively grounded and placid in appreciation of the inevitable reality of cultural pluralism.

The idea of prescribed equality is merely intended for solitary equality. It doesn't take into account the cultural variations that are present in society. The variations between diverse cultures, social statuses, religions, languages, and mechanisms of life are neglected. Treating others unequally, "marginalized" groups are pushed aside by the dominant group. It nurtures the assimilation of marginalized groups into the dominant group's culture. Such treatment of minority groups' marginalized communities has pushed them further into a state of deprivation and discrimination. The disposition of the concerns discrimination, deprivation, and socio-economic inequality in minority communities, multiculturalism has been adopted as a policy by modern democratic nation-states to ameliorate the circumstances. It addresses diverse provisions associated with cultural identity, pluralism, minority rights in the public domain, specific and group rights, and recognition. It is a stance in which diverse cultures are represented fairly in the public domain.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is associated with a community that pivots on multiple cultures within one society. It also denotes ethnic and cultural diversity while nurturing tolerance and acceptance. It seeks to vanquish racism, sexism, and other dispositions of discrimination. Multicultural literature is disposed of exotic social and cultural landscapes, different themes, and linguistic differences.

Like other "isms" multiculturalism has various intimations and inferences, both pragmatic and gloomy. Multiculturalism is not a set of consanguine ideas. Rather, it is a collection of discrete thoughts and opinions. Multicultural societies diverge in

their disposition and as a result, there are disparate versions of multiculturalism. According to Turner Terence "Multiculturalism is the manifestation of postmodernist reaction to the de-legitimization of the state of disruption and the hegemony of the dominant culture in advanced capitalist countries". Postmodernism commemorates the virtues of all classes and castes. Thus, it endorses the rights of women, African Americans, Dalits, homosexuals, etc. It also employs the culture, religion, knowledge, and beliefs of the non-West to define human rights. (1994:419) As Ziauddin Sarkar remark: "Postmodernism articulates all cultures, decentering the 'center' while making the 'periphery' the center of all cultural activities and gives 'voice' to the 'voiceless'. Projected as a new and great force of liberation." (Sarkar ,2005, 236)

Multiculturalism also draws intentions from postcolonial theory, which advocates the rights of marginalized sections of society. As Leela Gandhi states: "Post-colonialism found itself in the institution of disciplines such as women's studies, cultural studies, and gay or lesbian studies." His purpose is to ambush the center while it is on the periphery (Leela Gandhi ,1998, 42). Andrew Milner spoke about the relationship between post-colonialism and multiculturalism. He asserts that both premises have invoked a discourse of difference. Edward Said, one of the earliest post-colonial theorists, criticized the European attitude of superiority and European prejudices against non-European cultures, especially African and Indian. They classify Eastern cultures as Oriental or "other". European history projected the inhabitants of the East as culturally backward, sensual, and passive. According to Said, Western history only projected Oriental culture as something inferior and worthless. Said's idea of Orientalism underscores the basic point that Western ideas about the East were supposed to create discrimination and impose power structures. The ideas often reinforced the hegemony of the West. Edward Said explained the term 'hegemony' in Gramscian style: "Thus, in any society that is not totalitarian, then, certain cultural expression predominate over others, just as certain concepts are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci called hegemony, a fundamental concept of empathy for cultural life in the industrial West. It is hegemony, or the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism its endurance and solidity" (Said,1985,7).

Multiculturalism does not exclusively reside as a field of debate and discussion. It has been adopted in policy determination and fabricated in countries such as Canada, Australia, and Great Britain.

As a formal policy, multiculturalism flourished in constructing socio-cultural harmony, mutual tolerance, and respect between disparate cultures. It not only concedes the considerations of cultural diversity but also grasps the landscape of such differences that should be respected and pledged publicly. It is a process of esteeming

cultural diversity and facilitating panoptic minorities to achieve equality and social justice. It also encourages diverse ethnic groups to preserve their ethnocultural existence and retain their religious and cultural beliefs, rituals, customs, traditions, and lifestyles including dietary customs, dress codes, and various socio-cultural practices.

Multiculturalism recognizes the presence of many cultures and legitimizes their importance in the geopolitical realm as a value. It recognizes cultural pluralism based on race, ethnicity, and language. Alex Thio argues: "The coexistence of numerous subcultures can develop into multiculturalism, a state in which all subcultures are equal to each other in the same society." The harmonious coexistence of different cultures is a sign of a healthy society. Such a society is characterized by cooperation, tolerance, respect, and understanding of each cultural group. Multiculturalism establishes cultural contacts, exchanges cultural ideologies and promotes the values of "harmonious coexistence of many cultures dominant, superior, subordinate, minority, weak, marginal, patriarchal, etc. As an "-ism," it promotes the idea of difference and heterogeneity, which is illustrated in the concept of diversity. It not only points to the presence of many cultures within a nation-state but admits the "distinctiveness" and "uniqueness" of each culture, which makes human life more diverse and consequential. Cultures present in society have unique and heterogeneous existence. So the "distinctiveness" and "uniqueness" of each culture must be recognized and considered separately. (Thio,1997,44)

Tolerance is a contemporary political provision used in social, cultural, and religious debates. It strongly opposes discrimination. The affirmative appraisal of multiculturalism fortifies the strength of a multicultural society. A conventionally embraced perspective adverts that contemporary multicultural involves tolerance towards racial, cultural, and religious differences. In a multicultural society, race, culture, and religion promote their own set of values and principles. If we tolerate ethnic division, cultural plurality, and religious diversity, it serves to diminish the doom of strife and antipathy in society. As Ramakant Sinari says: "From a utilitarian point of view, tolerance is imperative for the unity, stability, and progress of society, it ought to be the standard of human actions despite his essence, and the destinies into which one transpires to determine himself."

Tolerance is a positive drive that facilitates solid relations in society. In a vibrant multicultural society, we must tolerate and respect differences, be they cultural, religious, or racial. However, differences should not be seen as a lack of specific cultures or groups. Therefore, tolerance should be considered a positive value of

multiculturalism, which strives for social harmony, peace, and coexistence. (Sinari, 2002, 20)

Multiculturalism assures impartial devotion and valuation for all cultures. In a sense, every culture encompasses a commodity that is lavish and meritorious. Therefore, every culture deserves equal appraisal and enthusiasm. In this regard, Sarah Joseph states: "Multiculturalism is used to denote the desired end state, a corridor of demonstrating the society in which diverse cultures are respected and the replication of a culturally circumscribed group is safeguarded and social diversity is celebrated". Every culture gives stability, strength, and meaning to human life and holds its members together as a community. Respect for culture means respect for the right of the community. Culture offers us the overall worth and standard of real life. Respecting culture means respecting the community, principles, beliefs, ideas, practices, and lifestyle. Diverse cultures represent varied spirits and fantasies of a sensible life. Multiculturalism, therefore, retaliates to the consequences of cultural discrimination by prioritizing the intention of respecting minority cultures. (Joseph, 2002, 159).

Multiculturalism in India

Multiculturalism in India is an outlook on human existence. There are three central views in India: First, people are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up, live in a culturally structured world, and organize their lives and social relationships. Second, diverse cultures imitate disparate entities of perception and connotation of a satisfactory life. Therefore everyone comprehends the finite dimension of human abilities and conscience and grasps only a segment of the totality of human existence, he needs other cultures for his intimate consideration, to expand his moral and intellectual horizons, his imagination, and so on. Third, every culture is intrinsically pluralistic and reflects an ongoing conversation between its diverse traditional fibers of thought. This does not mean that it is the inadequacy of identity and integrity, but that its identity is plural, fluid, and open. Cultures grow out of conscious and unconscious interactions with each other and define their identity.

India, the most socially and culturally diverse country in the world, has imbibed the philosophy of multiculturalism by flourishing its policy of "peaceful coexistence" based on the ancient Indian tradition of "live and let live" and "unity in diversity". In addition, values of multiculturalism can be traced to Tagore's idea of "true freedom" in which he argued that true freedom seeks to simplify the complexities associated with understanding, sorting, and harmoniously adjusting old and new ideas and

subjects leading to the progressive development of human civilization. True freedom seeks to create favorable conditions for developed nations as the "supreme person".

Moreover, Mahatma Gandhi's views on composite religion and culture profoundly accord equal place and mutual respect to all cultures. He claimed that we are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken from its roots deep in the bowels of the earth. In *Hind Swaraj*, he stated that a different faith represents a different path to truth. Mahatma Gandhi argued that the state must create only favorable conditions for the development of individuality without regard to any particular aptitude including culture. It is noteworthy that in his idea of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi admits two aspects of non-violence: the negative aspect is to refrain from causing harm and destruction to a living being, and the positive aspect promotes the well-being of people and even love for dissidents, i.e. he claims to express love and affection instead of hatred as well to a person of a different culture. Although Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar insisted on various forms of reservation for the vulnerable classes in the legislature, both undoubtedly believed that they would ensure adequate representation through reservation as multiculturalism strives.

Swami Vivekananda stated that any religion that separates man from man or promotes privilege, exploitation, and war could not endorse itself. He further created the concept of 'Daridra Narayan' in which he raised the service of the poor to the level of worship and at that level harmony between different faiths automatically becomes a prerequisite, i.e. reconciliation of human beings of different cultures. Jawaharlal Nehru argued in the post-independence era that the policy of the state is not to interfere in tribal affairs but to offer as much autonomy as possible.

It is noteworthy that various ancient kings including Emperor Ashoka imbibed the idea of mutual respect and treated people of other cultures cordially. But most importantly, the Mughal emperor Akbar inculcated a policy of religious tolerance and built an *Ibadatkhana* dedicated to interfaith discourse rather than embracing Islamic fundamentalism and encouraging only religious conversion to Islam. Moreover, after the promulgation of the Indian Council Act of 1909, the British colonizers later ensured adequate representation for Muslims and all other vulnerable classes. Thus, despite the many prevailing adverse ambitions of the colonizer, this move displayed the inherent multicultural spirit of the Indian political system of the time.

India is the most magnificent country following Africa in respect of class, terminology, accomplishment, persuasion, and ethnicity. The practice of multiculturalism in Indian society is primarily distinct from the practice in America and other western countries. The difference is that while western countries have to

adopt their multicultural policies for the justice of nonnative or internal immigrant and culturally minority communities, Indian cultural diversity is inherited. Indian society is postulated on the notion of "unity amid diversity". In its elongate account, India has welcomed many people from all over humanity. They came here as entrepreneurs, migrants, invaders, and travelers and commenced to settle here forever. So even though India has a massive number of people, each with their food habits, languages, clothes, religions, castes, and regions, they live here as part of the single federal culture. The land has been dwelt on by foreigners for many centuries. It was ambushed by Muslim forces as early as the 7th century AD. In addition, the European settler landed in Kollam Kerala in the 16th century. At present we can see that there is a diversity of religious belief systems in India. Enlightenment and social accumulation of religions were prompted to the region by traders, travelers, migrants, and even invaders and conquerors.

The early 1970s marked the beginning of the multicultural movement, in Canada and Australia, and then in the US, Great Britain, Germany, and elsewhere. India has historically been a multicultural society. India has around 1632 different languages and terminologies. There are 22 official languages in the Constitution of India and the 2011 census report states that about 79.80% of the population is Hindu, 14.23% Muslim, 2.3% Christian, 1.72% Sikh, 0.7% Buddhist, 0.37% Jains, and 0.66% other religions. Society even though the Indian constitution declares the state to be secular; religion, language, and other such factors persist in the public sphere. Within the great Indian society, the distinct characteristics of each culture are still as recognizable as the ingredients in a salad bowl that contribute to the overall composition of the salad bowl.

Cultural elements of India include ideologies like Sarva Dharma Sam bhava, Unity in Diversity, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. These segments are spotted somewhere in the principles of multiculturalism. Indian constitution followed multiculturalism by providing provisions regarding the protection of minorities and the prevention of discrimination based on caste, religion, and race.

However, it is truly tragic that in the recent past, multiculturalism has become a battleground in India. Different social movements are responsible for sowing the seeds of a multicultural society. Different forms of identity politics submerge based on religion and caste. Identity politics has created an "us and them" culture. Repeated incidents of terror attacks widen the chasm between Hindus and Muslims. Bigotry is growing in other spheres as well. Multiculturalism in India prioritizes the good of particular groups over the good of the whole and undermines the common good in favor of a minority interest. It creates tension between people from different backgrounds. Multiculturalism can lead to radical movements in Indian societies. It

creates tension between different groups of people belonging to different cultures and religions. There is no doubt that multiculturalism accepts all cultures equally, but every time citizens are under pressure, they fear that they may lose their cultural identity because of multicultural societies.

Conclusion

In short, it would not be unfair to assert that multiculturalism prevailed in India, even much before the initiation of multicultural strategy in Canada and the ratification and assertion of the 1988 Act of Multiculturalism in the aspects of the ancient Indian king's strategies, the notions of freedom fighters, and even miscellaneous strategies of British India. In contemporary India, the main incentives for multiculturalism are diverse affirmative provisions that have been laid down in the Constitution of India and Acts of Parliament; the reservation process to enrich the ethical manifestation, the national delegation for the safety of cultures, and the welfare of the related group. Extensively, the mosaic of Indian multiculturalism is remarkable in the sense that a distinct cultural society cannot be precisely separated into its distinct cultural horizons; thus only empowering cultural groups cannot be hazardous to the harmony and territorial integrity of the nation because its members are being closely and emotionally bounded to many cultural groups due to the possession of many cultural facets by an individual in India.

However, hate speeches, religious extremist practices, religious appeasement, and polarization, are regularly endangering communal harmony in India which ought to be averted adequately to make India a deep-rooted multicultural nation with national integration i.e. a perfect illustration of a "salad bowl prototype of Multiculturalism" instead of being a "melting pot model" It is the duty that every citizen must build public opinion against communalism, religious fundamentalism, cultural and religious prejudices.

What India needs today is not just a 'Culture of Democracy but a 'Democracy of Cultures'. Peoples of India must have the right to have and express diverse identities of language, region, and religion within common citizenship. It is our duty not to allow 'Multicultural India' to become a 'Monochromatic India'.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: AHMED, Jabbar and TIWARI, I.D. Indian culture: A melting pot of faiths. *International Journal of Multiculturalism*. Volume 4(1), 2023, pp. 39-48. DOI: 10.30546/2523-4331.2023.4.1.39