AN INTRODUCTION TO MULTICULTURALISM IN THE 21st CENTURY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

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Abstract

Multiculturalism is one of the most widely read contemporary political ideologies at present. It means multiplicity of cultures or a wide variety of cultures. In this age of the 21st century, our society has generally become a multicultural society where we can find people generally speaking different languages, following different religions, practising different cultures and so on. We have seen that the process of Globalisation is leading to a multicultural society. Today as a result of Globalisation, all parts of the globe are very well connected to each other. We can see different groups of people who are speaking different languages, practising different cultures and so on be it in television, radio or other media.

In the contemporary world, there can be no state with only one language, religion, culture and so on. India and Pakistan were divided in 1947 on grounds of religious differences. Again Pakistan and Bangladesh were divided in 1971 on grounds of language differences. So India has adopted a multicultural society at present. India stands united on the principles of Unity in Diversity. In India, we find people speaking different languages, practising different cultures, following different religions and so on. Canada is the best example of a multicultural state in the world today where we find people from different social groups.

Multiculturalism has its impacts in different parts of the globe in different aspects be it in education, economic, political and so on. It has impacted the language, culture and identity of millions of the people in the globe today. Apart from their culture, people today in the world are influenced by other cultures. The world has been transforming from a monocultural to a bicultural and a multicultural society.

Keywords:- Multiculturalism, India, Globe, Political, World.

Introduction

Multiculturalism is very important for all of us in the present world scenario. In a garden, where there is only one variety of flower, it does not make the garden look beautiful. In order to make the garden attractive, there must be a mixture of wide variety of flowers. Similarly, in a state, there must be the blooming of a wide variety of cultures.

The term 'multiculturalism' emerged in the 1960s in the Anglo-phone countries in relation to the cultural needs of the non-European migrants. At present, multiculturalism means the political accomodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race or ethnicity; and also by reference to nationality, aboriginality or religion. The latter groups tend to make larger claims; however, claims of national minorities now enjoy considerable legitimacy, whereas post-immigration claims have suffered a 'backlash' in the last decade.

Central to multiculturalism and the politics of difference is the rejection of the idea that political concepts such as equality and citizenship can be colour-blind and culture-neutral and the argument that that ethnicity and culture cannot be confined to some so-called private sphere but shape political and opportunity structures in all societies. It is the basis for the conclusion that allegedly 'neutral' liberal democracies are part of hegemonic cultures that systematically de-ethnicize or marginalize minorities-and thus for the claim that minority cultures, norms and symbols have as much right as their hegemonic counterparts to state provision and to be in the public space, to be 'recognised' as groups and not just as culturally neutered individuals.

The term multiculturalism is used to signify the presence of cultural diversity of a nation. It refers to the existence of two or several cultural or ethnic groups each of which has its own traditions, beliefs

and a distinct way of life in the nation. Together, all these groups form a collectivity with a common identity as the members of the nation. In other words, multiculturalism signifies the existing of ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic and cultural diversities within a nation. For example, India is a multicultural nation and so is the case of Switzerland, the USA and several other states.

As a concept, Multiculturalism supports the common collective identity of a nation which has within her fold several or some distinct cultural or ethnic groups with their respective traditions, beliefs and ways of life. It advocates the case of equality in the rights and freedoms of all cultural or ethnic groups (the majority group as well as all minority groups) of the nation. It upholds the case of a multi-national nation-state whose people represent a unity or collectivity in diversity.

Multiculturalism supports the principle of equality of all nationalities living in a state as equal groups of people who are free from every kinds of discrimination based on caste, colour, creed, race, religion, language, place of birth, residence and sex. Each nationality group enjoys equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for living and following its own nationality traditions and beliefs and to live along with the other nationalities or groups as one integrated and united nation.

Multiculturalism in the contemporary world

Culture generally means an way of life. It generally includes our languages, religions, faith, belief, worship and so on. Culture is generally regarded as a dynamic and an ever changing process. It is not static. The globe today has been transforming from a monocultural to bicultural to multicultural society. Because of the Globalisation process, the changes in culture has generally become more faster. Culture has been defined in a number of ways. The most accepted meaning of a culture is that it is the total way of life. In its broad meaning, it includes man's material civilisation like tools, weapons, clothing, shelter, machines, buildings, industrial products, as well as non-material civilization like language, literature, art, morality, law and government. Culture means 'the sum total of the attainments or activities of any race, of people, of any specific period and civilization.' It means "good manners and good task." It is related to the inner and external behaviour of man, his mode of living, thinking, talking and attitude.

In anthropological literature, the term culture is used in many senses, but in general writings, it is used to indicate social charm and intellectual superiority. Even some sociologist believe cultured individuals to be the leaders of the society. Culture includes all those elements for which ceremonies and their consequent impressions are required. It is the process of purification. Culture is simply regarded as etiquettes by some thinkers.

There are the different types of culture like Material Culture, Non-Material Culture, Primitive Culture and Modern Culture.

Material Culture means the things and objects which are man made, visible objects as tools, implements, furniture, automobiles, buildings, dams, roads, bridges and infact the physical substance which has been changed and used by man. It includes technical equipments like a printing press, a telephone, a television, a tractor, a machine gun etc. It includes our banks, insurance scheme, parliaments, currency systems etc.

The term "culture" which used in the ordinary sense, means "Non-Material Culture." Non-Material Culture is intangible, immaterial, internal, intrinsically valuable. It consists of the thoughts, ideas, religion, custom, faith, belief, knowledge, language, habits, rituals, practices etc. It thus includes our ways of acting, feeling and thinking.

Primitive Culture is nothing but simple culture. It is simply living in gathering, hunting, fishing type of culture. Human Culture first appeared on earth about one million years ago. A culture can be called primitive when there is no technology, literature, industry and commerce. This type of culture is more based on environment which determines the way of life.

Modern Culture is very complex. It is dominated by modern science and technology, art and literature, industry and work specialization. It is largely dependent upon verbal symbols and transmitted by formal educational institutions.

Multiculturalism is now considered as a contemporary ideology. In a political context, the term 'multiculturalism' is used for a wide range of meanings, ranging from the advocacy of equal respect to various cultures in a society to the policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity. In general sense, multiculturalism is the appreciation, acceptance or promotion of multiple cultures, applied to the demographic set-up of a specific place. Culture develops through social interaction. It is a product of the society and every society has a culture of its own. The culture of every society is unique to itself. Sometimes a society consists of people belonging to different cultures. The existence of different cultures in a society has led to the rise of the concept of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism in the most literal sense means 'a multiplicity of cultures'. On a basic level, multiculturalism is a recognition and affirmation of the diversity of our society. It denotes that several different cultures can co-exist peacefully and equitably in a single country. In simple words, multiculturalism is a system which rests on respect for and promotion of ethnic diversity in a society. As a concept, multiculturalism first emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s during the civil rights movement in the multiethnic societies such as U.S.A., Canada and Sweden.

It can be noted that the term 'multiculturalism' is used to denote different things in different countries. For example, in Canada and Australia, multiculturalism is used in the context of the immigrant groups and not the indigenous people. While in Latin America, it has been used to refer almost exclusively to the indigenous people and not to the immigrant groups. Again in some other countries, multiculturalism is used as umbrella term to cover all forms of ethno cultural diversity. In general, it can be defined as a system of beliefs and behaviours which recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organisation or society, acknowledge their socio-cultural differences and encourages their contribution within an inclusive cultural contexts. The term 'multiculturalism' is basically used to describe the demographic set up of a country's population as well as the expressions of an ideal of cross cultural and inter-community harmony.

It can be noted that various ethnic groups maintain their own subcultures; even some of their members are assimilated into the larger society and it gave support to the concept of multiculturalism. In fact, a multicultural society is one in which different ethnic and social groups are able to maintain their own unique cultures even as they gain equally in the interest of the larger society. In this respect, we may cite the example of Switzerland. In Switzerland four ethnic groups speaking German, French, Italian and Roman retain a sense of group identity while living together amicably in the society as a whole.

In recent years, multiculturalism has emerged as a distinct and varied political theory. However it is often confused with the term cosmopolitanism. But there are some differences between the two terms. Multiculturalism intends to preserve the culture of the community. On the other hand, cosmopolitanism believed that everyone is free to choose his or her own culture. In fact, multiculturalism seeks to preserve the inherent differences in society and cosmopolitanism believes in bridging their differences.

India and Multiculturalism

India is a big country comprising many racial groups with a great number of spoken languages and dialects. There are several religions and sects. These are reflected in their customs, rituals, dresses and festivals. Indian is the cradle of many cultures. Inspite of the diversities, the people are united. Though several foreign invaders attacked India, none succeeded in destroying the basic Indian culture. On the contrary, it absorbed the good qualities of the new cultures and emerged as a richer culture after these invasions.

The Indian society is a composite cultural society where world religions like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, etc. have co-existed along with Hindu and Sikh religions. There are certain common cultural links and bonds that unite the people of different religious groups. India is a secular country and the Preamble to the Constitution of India justifies the fact. The Constitution guarantees each individual the freedom to profess, practice and propagate his religion. We believe in the theory of dharma and karma. The theory of rebirth and purification of soul as well as the philosophy of hell and heaven holds good everywhere. Our scriptures are the store-houses of spiritual wisdom. The Indians are rooted to spiritual values inspite of the material progress. The West is fast inclining towards

our spiritual values which includes meditation, charity, love, universal brotherhood, fear of God, control of passions and so on.

During the British rule in India, the people from all sections and communities stood for a common cause which resulted in the revolt of 1857 against the British. It was the first time in the Indian history that people from all walks of life, irrespective of their caste, religion and region stood together against a common enemy. Though the revolt didn't succeed, the British realized that unity in diversity was a threat to the British Indian Empire. With the passage of time, the resentment against the British rule picked up momentum. Gandhiji worked to develop harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims. This was a grave threat to the British rule. They then followed the policy of divide and rule which led to the feeling of intolerance between the two communities of religious groups. This in turn led to the partition of India, though India gained independence in 1947.

At times, we have witnessed many conflicts and disturbances. Certain anti-national and external forces try to disrupt the unity of the country by encouraging communal feelings and sentiments. It leads to intolerance, disharmony and lawlessness among the masses. There has also been an increase in the riots, violence and killings of the innocent people. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, Mumbai blasts of 1993, massacre of innocent Sikhs in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Gujarat riots of 2002, blasts in the capital of the country, terror attack in Mumbai in 2008 resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and massive internal migration. The militancy problem in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast have further weakened the secular fabric of India. Terrorism should not be allowed to raise in ugly head and destroy our basic unity. We can overcome this problem if we bury our feelings of differences for one another and work unitedly.

The Indian culture has always been tolerant to different cultures. It is for this reason that it has remained alive though many ancient civilizations decayed. Influence of various cultures have made it rich and vibrant. Significant contribution have been made to it by the Aryans, Dravidians, Mongolians, Greeks, Persians, Arabs, Mughals and Europeans. The Persian and Western influence on our art, literature, painting and dress have now become an integral part of our own culture.

If a person travels from one part of the country to another, he faces a totally different environment, where people talk, dress and worship differently. But he will not feel as a stranger. Everywhere, he will recognize a common thread in some aspect of life which makes him feel at home. This is because the Indian culture has preserved its fundamental character through the ages.

The people of India has a rich cultural heritage. India is a treasure-house of music, fine arts, dance, drama, theatre, literature and sculptures. The temples of the south, the caves of Khajuraho, Ajanta and Ellora are the shining examples of the Indian sculptures and architecture. The Taj Mahal, Red Fort, Jama Masjid, etc. shows a blend of Indian and Mughal architecture. The variety, colour and the emotional richness of dances is a feature of India's cultural unity. The country abounds in tribal dances, folk dances as well as classical dances of great skills. The festivals of India are held in various parts of the world. It projects the cultural unity of Indian in the eyes of the world. Our cultural heritage serves as a bond of unity between people of different faiths and creeds.

In recent time, there has been a cultural awakening of the educated youth who have become aware of the beauty of our forms and crafts. They have started taking interest in educating themselves about their rich cultural traditions. The government has also started organising big cultural events to promote national integration. It has set up four regional cultural centres in different parts of the country. It is the effort of the government to strengthen the common bond of unity that ties the people together inspite of the diversity in their religions and beliefs. The heart of the Indian is one. We are all heirs to a common and rich culture. We should not be influenced by superficial prosperity or by the Western ideologies. We should strive to maintain the relationship of common brotherhood. We should uphold the torch of unity irrespective of the different faiths and creeds.

The Western Education was introduced to us by the British people who conquered the Indian sub-continent which consisted of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma (now Myanmar).

From 1608 to around 1708, the British people continued as traders and studied the Indian sub-continent. Slowly and gradually with the passage of time, the British managed to conquer all the Indian sub-continent around 1847.

After the British people conquered the Indian sub-continent, they destroyed the ancient Indian Gurukul education system where education was given in Sanskrit and translation were done into the local languages. The only communities who did not get education were the Schedule Caste involved in cleaning work and Schedule Tribes people who live in the forest areas.

Sanskrit was the common language for communication among the Indian people who were speaking more than 350 different local regional languages in the Indian sub-continent during that time.

Gradually Sanskrit language began to lost its importance and English medium education schools and colleges were started in India.

The main purpose of the British policy of education in India was not for educating the Indians. Its main aim was to produce educated clerks who can work for the British Government in India.

Instead of being limited to some section of the society, education had played an important role in the independence movement. It was the education which had introduced the concept of Republic in India. India is the cradle of many cultures. In this ancient land, the people belonging to the different cultural groups are living together preserving their own culture and cultural identity. Inspite of the fact that there is an apparent disunity in the country, basically there is cultural unity which is visible in every walk of life. It is on this account that it is said that in India there is Unity in Diversity.

India is a very big and vast country. Even its one State (Province) is larger in size than many of the countries of Europe. But still there is a geographical unity. The whole of India is bounded by the natural boundaries. On the one side is the Himalayas, whereas on the other, there are the Bay of Bengal to the East, to the South is the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea to the West. These natural boundaries have given geographical unity to the country. When we talk and think of India, we think of one great country which is geographically a well-knit country.

India is a land of many religions. In this country Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity have spread out in large groups of people. But the vast majority of the Indian population consists of the Hindus. There might be different factions and sub-sections from the main streamline and that might prima facie give an idea of religious disunity, but on the whole there is unity in so far as each religion is concerned. We basically believe in the theory of dharma and karma. The theory of rebirth and purification of soul, salvation and the philosophy of hell and heaven holds good everywhere. Respect for mosques, temples, churches, gurudwaras and religious gods and goddesses is prevalent.

A multitude of gods and religious practices, the existence of hundreds of groups called castes, variety of foods and clothing and different types of kinship organisation, which one finds in India, create an impression of a bewildering variety impossible to classify, and of a society divided into innumerable tiny compartments. Many anthropologists, specially those dealing with the phenomenon of castes, have described this as illustrating the fissiparous tendency of the Indian society, while others have called it horizontal segmentation of the society.

Indian philosophy is a product of the Indian society and reflects the various cultures which have blended together after the time the Aryans entered India. The developed and elaborate ritual on the one hand, and the monstic philosophy on the other, are not an evolution of purely Aryan tradition, but a product of the fusion of the Aryan and the non-Aryan. While the region west of Punjab and including the present Delhi region seemed to be the region of the development of early Aryan thought, the central and the eastern Gangetic plain to the north of the river Ganga was the reign of the rise of new spectra, culture-contact, culture-conflict and final fusion.

Changes have occured in the overall conception of the gods and modes of worship, and ideas of purity. There are also in existence different modes in the different regions. These changes are not due merely to internal evolution. Neither are they due to continuous fission of religious bodies. Independent groups living in the same continent were practising different modes of religion. The overall changes are due to gradual ascendancy of new, non-Vedic ideas, and the existing differences are due to interaction of

independent groups who kept their separateness and reached to each other's cultural capital in different ways.

The early Aryans themselves were racially mixed and showed a certain catholicity in taste, but the later conquerors, like the Mughals and the fairer British, have made public preference to fairness of complexion in women, though extreme fairness of skin in men is not valued much, at least in the south. Details of formal art forms, like rhyming, are different for different regions. In classical poetry there was no end-rhyming. In Prakrit poetry, specially in Marathi and sometimes in Ardhanagadhi, one finds the end-rhyme. Apparently this practice influenced Marathi poetry too. In the neighbouring Karnataka, however, we have lines which have a rhyme in the beginning and not at the end. All these differences, and also those in dress, ornaments, decoration of house, and food are partly regional, and partly found also in different castes of the same region. It is necessary to study this multiplicity region by region, and it will unfold a tale of cultural conservation as also cultural borrowings, and changes due to cultural adjustments between separate ethnic groups.

The peculiarity of Indian social life is that ethnic groups have lived separately from one another. They have devised a mode of inter-group behaviour which avoids mutual interference or mergings that the identity of the original groups is not lost. There has been fusion. There has also been fission within large groups, but the main cultural feature is the retention of group integrity. This type of social organisation made it possible for certain groups to progress while certain other groups became progressively primitive.

Although India's present Constitution has many flaws like separate provision for different castes and creeds, particularly those who are backward and are scheduled in the Constitution, the recent industrialization processes and agrarian reforms have brought about a new secular outlook which has given rise to the promotion of a new culture. The new generations of all castes, communities, religions and sects are getting a chance to come together in farms, factories, educational institutions, universities and government bodies for employment. This coming together has caused a blending of different cultures, emanating from different communities or tribes, under the impact of modernization. Traditional rituals of the older generation are no more in vogue in the new secular communities which are coming up. The unity of interests and attitudes in economic, social and political fields is helping to accelerate the social processes which are giving common values, cultural traits, art forms, architecture, music and dramatics. All modern art activity is assimilating the basic cultural values of all the tribes and giving rise to what may be called national culture. However, our national problems lie in inability to distinguish between cultural imperatives and administrative and economic necessities to find out how a nation be built up from the foundation of cultural multiplicity. Each religion preaches purity of character, benevolence and piety along with honesty. Religious books are shown respect and honour by all. The people go on pilgrimage with respect and reverence. There is always devotion in prayers and so on. Basically all religions believe in religious toleration. In this way, there is religious unity in the country.

In India, there is now a great cultural unity. Indian philosophy of life, literature, customs and traditions are basically the same. The institutions like those of marriage are found throughout the country. There are certain rituals and sanskaras which are observed throughout the country. Similarly, there are many festivals which are celebrated with great zeal and vigour throughout India.

Multiculturalism and Social Justice
Multiculturalism and Social Justice are inter-related concepts. Both are supplementary and complimentary to each other. Multiculturalism recognises the value and fact of cultural diversity and value pluralism which characterizes every contemporary civilized society. It upholds the principle of Unity in Diversity which alone can provide broad and sound foundations to the objective of national unity and integration.

Multiculturalism supports the common collective identity of a nation which has within its fold several or some distinct cultural or ethnic groups with their respective traditions, beliefs and ways of life. It advocates the case of equality in the rights and freedoms of the people belonging to all cultural or

ethnic groups (the majority group as well as all minority groups) living in the society. It upholds the principle of equality of all the nationalities (ethnic and cultural groups) living in the country as equal groups of people free from every form of discrimination. In a society, all cultural groups (majority as well as minority groups) are entitled to enjoy equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for living and following their respective traditions and beliefs and yet living as equal members of one integrated and united nation. This view of Multiculturalism, which has been the accepted contemporary view, is very near to the contemporary conception of Social Justice.

In contemporary times, Social Justice is taken to mean that all the people in a society are to be treated as equal and there is to be no discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, creed, colour, sex or status. It stands for equality of rights and opportunities for all the people without any discrimination. Only merit is the criteria for the distribution of all rewards benefits and priviledges. It upholds the principle of just and proportionate fair distribution of all advantages, benefits, rewards and responsibilities among all the people on merit and irrespective of their castes, religions, creeds, languages, genders, places of residences or any other such factor.

In fact, absence of priviledged classes in society, absence of discrimination and absence of widespread economic inequalities among the people are the imperative conditions of Social Justice. Equality of social status, rights, freedoms and opportunities for development, special protections for the people belonging to weaker and disadvantaged sections of the society and fair and equitable distribution of income, rewards and benefits among all are the hallmarks of Social Justice. In the words of Barker, "Social Justice aims to provide equal opportunities to each and every individual to develop his or her inherent qualities."

Conclusion

Multiculturalism has become very popular now-a-days. It is an inter-disciplinary concept or ideology. In the present context, we meet people from different backgrounds who are speaking different languages, following different religions, practising different cultures and so on. As a result of the advancement in the process of Globalisation, our world today has become a multi-cultural society, where we meet people from different social groups in our day to day live. Human societies across the globe have established progressively closer contacts over many centuries, but recently the pace has dramatically increased. Globalisation refers to all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society.

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