

MULTICULTURISM IN INDIA AT CROSSROADS

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ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism or cultural pluralism is a term describing the coexistence of many cultures in a locality, without anyone cultural dominating the region by making the broadest range of human differences acceptable to the largest number of the people. It seeks to overcome racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. In fact it seems the ultimate failure of multiculturalism in India as it has become the land of intolerance and chauvinism. Who does care about backward people? Who does make solution for their problems? The recent events and debates concerning about beef ban, lynching of Akhlaq, Ghar Vapsi, where intolerance is the best example to understand how much it is frightening the existence of minorities in India. If truth be told the country has rather distanced herself from being the hard earned democratic setup. Another phenomenon we are facing the academic alienation throughout the country where brahmanical concepts take over, very recently the institutional murder of Rohit Vemula is the finest example. The word multiculturalism is therefore a mere word for debate, discussion, discourses and speech. Being a democratic country it is highly condemnable to witness violence, gender discrimination, sexual assault and rape cases against women which otherwise is these days a prominent topic for discussion in India recent years.

On the whole, the paper will focus mainly whether the multiculturalism is failure or successful in India? Also it will shed light upon the concerns and worries of minorities they are facing especially it will put some lines to discuss about prevalent intolerance and other rampant laws which put forward by government to distract backward people.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Intolerance, Minorities, Discrimination, Violence;

1.INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is an indisputable fact of life in today's world. The management of cultural diversity within state has become an increasingly prominent issue in recent times not only in developed countries but also in developing countries like India. Diversity has become the defining characteristic of our social and cultural worlds. We are now constantly confronted with a multitude of ways in which we can define ourselves, and categorize others. In fact, in itself India is a multi-ethnic and multi lingual society.

II. MULTICULTURALISM IN INDIA

Presently there are around 122 languages and 234 mother tongues (some mother tongues have been mapped to a single language on the basis of their similarity) in India. Given this multitude diversity, India provides an interesting context to study Multiculturalism. Most of the major religions of the world such as Hinduism and Buddhism, originated in this land while others, such as Christianity and Islam, though came from outside has remained and grown in it for a thousand years and more. This great profusion of linguistic, religious and other customs and usages was associated with a multitude of castes, communities and tribes each of which was bearer of a particular sub-culture or even subsub-culture which is transmitted from generation to generation. In the debates in Western democracies, the term, minority rights, largely referred to the cultural rights of minorities, which they lay claim to on the basis of their separate ethnic, racial, religio-cultural, or national identity. In Indian context, it encompasses other factors such as language, caste, community, religion, and socio-economic factors. As India is a multi-ethnic, multi-language, multi-caste, multi-religion country, the inclusive growth of the country depends on the development on these different minority groups and this inclusive growth demands all social groups to get equal access to services and opportunities for economic and social development. Marginalization of these groups or perceived lack of advantage of these groups is a threat to India. It may result in conflict only which does not set well with the idea of India. India is among the most diverse societies in the world. It has people from all the major religions in the world—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians (Parsis). Even though Hindus constitute about 82% of the population, there are more than 149 million Muslims in the country, making it the second-largest population of Muslims in the world.

Religious diversity is coupled with enormous linguistic and cultural diversity. There is therefore religious and cultural diversity of enormous dimensions in the country. When India gained independence in 1947, the political leadership and the framers of the constitution took note of this diversity, and they deliberated on a framework that would provide for a unified but culturally diverse nation state. As far as India is concerned, multiculturalism is not a new reality, unlike many other countries in the world. In fact, the concept is very much familiar to Indian society. With diverse cultures, languages, religions and communities, multiculturalism have its reflections in every sphere of social life in the country. The idea of India as given in Indian constitution is as ‘an egalitarian, multi-cultural society which is established by rule of law, human dignity and harmonious co-existence of diversity in all good forms, hues and shades’. The question of multicultural societies with their inherent diversities moving forward as a nation is just the tip of the iceberg, the integration of different groups as cardinal question.

It was therefore argued that, while the principle of equality before the law was extremely important, it was not enough. If equality was to be actualized in practice, then members of minority communities should have the liberty to lead a life in accordance with their cultural practices. In concrete terms this meant that minority religious communities needed religious liberty and protection against the threat of cultural homogenization. Similarly, different cultural communities needed opportunities to promote their culture and identity; and the lower castes had to be assured access to social and public goods. Over the years this orientation has been suitably encapsulated in the slogan of Unity in Diversity and/or Unity and Diversity.

Unity in Diversity articulates the sentiment that India can be a strong and unified country while simultaneously affirming its cultural diversity. Cultural homogeneity is not, in other words, seen as a necessary condition for forging a political identity as a nation state. The commitment to this norm has been put to test at

various moments in the country's history, and the experience of the past years has highlighted by the complexities involved in keeping this pledge. The route India embarked upon at the time of independence has been a difficult and arduous journey, but it seems to have been a step in the right direction. In the challenges that have confronted the Indian state, what stands out is that the willingness to experiment with different ways of accommodating diversity has enabled the country to remain a strong and unified whole. Many political analysts had predicted the fragmentation of India. If they have been proved wrong it is primarily because the existing framework of democracy makes room for diversities of various kinds—religious, linguistic and ethnic—in many different ways.

III. CHALLENGES TO MULTICULTURALISM IN INDIA

India has its own diverse culture, uniqueness, simplicity and beguiling in nature. With 29 states of its own and with more than 29 different cultures along with other cultures, India is becoming one of the major emerging power with label of '*unity and diversity*'. It is often referred as the land of cultural polarity and diversity. The co-existing of multiverse religions and equal treatment of all the existent religions is called plurism. Social justice, economic progress and political democracy can be achieved in a pluralist society only through the accommodation of diverse interest and identities of its people. Also, in a country like India, pluralism integrates culture with the spirits of liberal democracy. But what about today? India is threatened by intolerance, shown by some fringe elements of the society. Religious tensions, social disputes and cultural disparities are few among them. During last 10 years the lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri, murder of three rationalist thinkers, writers returning their national literary awards- given by the government- sponsored Sahitya Academy or National Academy Letters, the statements of BJP leaders about everything from Hindu reassertion to the "cleansing" of western cultural influences from India's ethos are the most apparent threats to our society. The impression has gained ground that India is now governed by obscurantist's and intolerant forces determine to put minorities, rationalists and liberals in their place in turn have been pushed to the wall side. This calls for critical analysis of India, questioning its ability to run a tolerant, harmonious and peaceful nation with a sense of brotherhood and many examples about the same can be cited.

The commitment to cultural diversity has been challenged very fundamentally by episodes of communal violence, where members of one community are systematically targeted by another. Multiculturalism seeks to overcome racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. In fact it seems the ultimate failure of Multiculturalism in India as it has become the land of intolerance and chauvism. The recent events and debates concerning about beef ban, lynching of Akhlaq, Ghar Vapsi, and intolerance is the best example to understand how much it is frightening the existence of minorities India. In fact the country is being driven towards not the so called democratic but something beyond definition. Another phenomenon we are facing in academic alienation throughout the country where Brahminical concepts take over, very recently the institutional murder of Rohit Vemula is the finest example.

IV. CONCLUSION

The word Multiculturalism is a mere word for debate, discussion, discourses and speech. Be in a democratic country it is highly condemnable to witness violence, gender discrimination, sexual assault and rape cases against women has become a prominent topic for discussion in India in recent years. Even though incidents of

communal violence have decreased over the years but they remain a permanent reminder of the vulnerability of the minority communities. Communal violence not only vitiates existing bonds but also generates a feeling of mistrust among communities. It thrives by systematically demonizing the 'Other', and this undermines even existing structures of interaction. What is strengthened, on the one hand, is intra-community rather than inter-community bonds and, on the other, a traditional and more orthodox leadership, which is more insular and hostile to the expression of differences within the community. The paradox then is that, while cultural diversity finds space in the public arena, inter-cultural dialogue and interactions have diminished. The majority community sees the accommodation of diversity as 'appeasement' of the minority and the minority remains vulnerable and diffident, unable to contribute significantly to the public and political life of the country. The point that must be emphasized up on here is that policies that promote cultural diversity are not in themselves sufficient to check communal violence. Ignorance about the "Other" certainly provides a fertile ground for breeding sentiments of hatred and animosity. But the presence of diversity in the public arena is not a sufficient deterrent against systematic victimization of the "Other". In situations of communal violence, what victims require is strong and quick action by the state to protect the life and property of the targeted community; while simultaneously punishing the guilty. In seeking this, the victims are not asking for special treatment; rather they wish to be treated like all other citizens. They want their basic rights as citizens to be protected. Communal violence suggests that they are not being treated like others; they are being singled out on account of their identity. In sharp contrast to this, to protect cultural diversity, sameness is deemphasized. The reference usually is to the predicament and special needs of a minority community. The latter seeks recognition for the difference it embodies. Peaceful coexistence of different communities therefore requires both a vigorous defence of the basic rights of individuals as citizens and an institutional and normative framework that acknowledges and values diverse ways of life. The latter often entails special consideration for members of a community, in the form of exemptions from existing legal codes or recognition for specific cultural institutions and practices. If individual rights by themselves provide little protection against forces of cultural homogenization, then accommodating diversity through special consideration for vulnerable groups also neglects the primary concerns of individuals as citizens. It is only when both sets of concerns are suitably addressed that democracy is deepened and multicultural polities are nurtured and made more sustainable.

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