Multiculturalism In India: The Present Senario And Contemporary Challenges

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ABSTRACT:

Multiculturalism is an amalgamation of different races, nationalities, languages, religions, classes, gender, etc. It's a view that people from different cultures have equal rights. It's geared toward assuming a common political culture that all can participate in. It supports cultural coexistence. Multiculturalism is a philosophy of evidence, acceptance of Different culture under a same jurisdiction. India is a land of diversity. It is a blend of multi religious and ethnic group. Every state has not only their language but they have their different food habits, dress code, religion, culture etc. The cultural diversity of India has been saved by its long history it's geography and diverse demography. India has historically been a multicultural society. North-East is one of the most Culturally diverse areas of the world. It is the home to about 200 tribes. The term unity in diversity fits perfectly with the regional landscape. Since every linguistic community irrespective of their size and population in northeast nurture idiosyncrasies their cultures. This Article is an effort to look at the multiculturalism in Indian society, ethnic groups' and its contemporary challenges.

(**Keywords-** Multiculturalism, Amalgamation, Indian Society, Diversity, Contemporary Challenges, Ethnic Groups)

INTRODUCTION:

The term Multiculturalism is one of the important contemporary concepts to political science. Multiculturalism is closely related to culture. By culture we mean the shared ways of life, shared beliefs, ways of thinking an understanding of the world around us in which we situate others and ourselves on different grounds. Culture is one of the unique characteristics of human society. Every society has its own culture. But in this present day society, it is also seen that a society consists of people belonging to different cultures. The existence of different cultures in a society has led to the rise of multiculturalism. It tries to restore a sense of wholeness in a post modern era that fragments human life and thought. It encourages the minority communities to participate fully in society by enhancing their level of economic, social and cultural integration into the host culture. As a descriptive term multiculturalism has been taken to refer to cultural diversity. As a normative term it implies a positive endorsement even elaboration of communal diversity typically based on respect and recognition to different groups.

MULTICULTURALISM AS A CONCEPT:

The concept 'Multiculturalism' in its literal sense means "multiplicity of cultures". It is the concept that several different cultures can coexist peacefully and equitably in a single country. In a society or country, we find people of different religions, languages, races and cultures. They have their different religious beliefs, speak different languages and they have different cultures. Multiculturalism recognizes and affirms this plurality and diversity of cultures, traditions, religions and so on. It attaches equal respect to these different cultural

diversities of the society. The term 'multiculturalism' has been first used by the Swiss in 1957 to identify their country with four spoken languages and different religions. It was again developed in the New York of USA during 1960's. In the 70's the concept reached in Australia and Canada who officially declared themselves as multicultural states. Then after it had reached to Western Europe. But as a whole the concept of multiculturalism got its first legal implementation through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988.

The main characteristic features of multiculturalism are as under:

1) Multiculturalism believes on Multiplicity of cultures.

2) It is a concept that denotes that several different cultures can co-exist peacefully and equitably in a single country.

3) It recognises and accepts all cultures of the society as equal .

4) A multicultural society grants equitable status to distinct cultural and religious groups.

5) It gives equal respect to all kinds of people in a society.

6) Multiculturalism helps people to acquire a sense of tolerance and peace towards other cultures.

7) It also helps us to connect with people of other cultures and know how to co-operate with them.

MULTICULTURALISM AND DEMOCRACY:

The issue of ethnicity group identity, and cultural plurality with states or politics is one of the significant issues in contemporary politics. More specifically multi-ethnic and linguistic or cultural differences are the contemporary problems which has posed a threat to democratic norms and rules. These differences grow stronger and sometimes differences become the very substances of political strife. As a result of the changing contemporary social system of the state the cultural differences have become a source of various political and social clashes. For various reasons the multi-ethnic and cultural communities have moved towards socio-political movements. In fact, the most important reasons for these movements is their identity crisis. As a result various ethnic

movements organised by the multi ethnic minority people have to be seen. These movements have posed and are posing a serious threat to the democratic governments of contemporary states.

Multiculturalism is closely related to democracy. Generally in modern democratic system the culture of the majorities can be identified and the minority cultures are regarded as separate from the culture of the majorities. Multiculturalism generally laid stress on giving the minorities equal status and position in a state system. According to the concept of multiculturalism no individual or community can be looked down upon only for their separate language and culture. Multiculturalism denotes that all cultures should give equal respect and recognition. Here we can take an example of granting turban wearing Sikh people in Canada. Legally in that country , the government declared that wearing of helmet by both motorcycle drivers and passengers was compulsory. But the Sikh people living in Canada demanded that they couldn't use helmet at the time of driving and the Canadian Govt accepted their demand only for the respect of their traditional cultures. Besides, the Indian constitution also has given cultural rights to every cultural communities of India. In Article 29, the constitution lays down that "any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language script or cultures of its own shall have the right to conserve the same." In contemporary times, it is seen that liberal democracy (especially the democracy of the third worlds) has been facing a problem and that is the politicization of culture. Various political parties have made culture as their political issue for winning elections. They even don't hesitate to create cultural clashes among various multicultural communities. Again as have already said that many ethnic movements have arisen as a result of cultural differences among the people. So, in such a situation multiculturalism can play a vital role because it gives equal status and recognition to these diverse cultures. Here, we can say that the governments of various liberal democratic countries have become successful to some extent, to give equal rights to these multi-ethnic and cultural communities. For example, modern democratic states have granted various freedom to these communities like freedom to move independently, rights to form organizations, freedom of speech and

expressions and so on. But the Govt should do more for these communities and then only the fruits of democracy will be eaten by all without any discrimination and real democracy will be established.

MULTICULTURALISM IN INDIA:

India is the most wonderful country after Africa in respect of language, caste, religion, culture and ethnicity. The practice of multiculturalism in India is quite different to that of America and other Western countries. The difference is here that where as the Western developed countries have to adopt their multicultural policy for giving justice to the foreigners or internally migrated cultural minority communities but the Indian cultural diversity is the natural or hereditary cultural diversity. Indian society is based on the concept of "unity amidst diversity". In its long history India has received many people from all over the world . They came here as traders migrants, invaders travellers and began to be settled here permanently. So, even though India has a vast array of people each with its own food habits, languages, dresses, religions, castes and regions they live here as a part of a single civic culture. Now, India has more than 1800 languages (among them over 400 are spoken languages) and over a hundred different communities based on language religion and caste so, multiculturalism is present in Indian society. The country has been a home to foreigners for many centuries. It had been invaded by the Muslim forces as early as the 7th century A.D. Besides the European settlers landed in Kollam Kerala as early as the 16th Century. According to 2008 census the total Hindu population is 80.5%, Islam 13.4%, Christianity 2.3% and Sikhs accounted for 19%. Thus we see that the diversity of religious belief system existing in India today. The assimilation and social integration of religions brought to the region by traders, travellers, migrants and even invaders and conquerors. Here, a debate arises whether this multicultural system is advantageous or not in Indian society. India has had her fair share of communal indifferences with innumerable riots and violences. Perhaps the most infamous being the 'Godhra incident of 2002 &Babri Masjid case'. The Godhra incident broke out by the Godhra burning and resulting communal violence between Hindus and Muslims on 27 February 2002 at Godhra city of Gujarat state. At that day a train named Sabarmati Express was forcibly stopped and attacked by a large

muslim mob. As a result, 58 Hindu pilgrims including women and children were burnt alive. This attack prompted retaliatory massacres against Muslims on a large scale. Again, we can take the example of Shiv Sena - a regional political party of Maharashtra. It is a far right political party which was founded by Bal Thackeray on 19th June, 1966. This party favoured an increase in influence and power of Maharashtrian people in Maharashtra. It propagated the agenda that Maharashtra belonged to the Maharashtrians and thus they should be given preference over immigrant or outsiders. For this purpose, this party often resorts to violence against people belonging to other communities. It's followers have gone so far as to burn cricket pitch where an Indo-pak cricket match was scheduled to be held. Another communal violence which India faced is Babri Masjid case. During the 16th century, the chief commander of the Mughal Emperor Babar built a mosque in Ayodhya of UP. It is said that before building mosque there was a temple of Lord Rama and the mosque was built by demolishing the temple. As a result, a clash started between the Hindus and Muslims since that time. After independence of India this issue became political issue. In Feb 1980, the Faizabad district court ordered that the Babri Masjid premises be unlocked so that Hindus could pray at the site which they considered as the birth place of Lord Rama. In Dec 1992 the supporting organizations of the construction of Ram Mandir had organised a Karseva. For that purpose lacs of people reached Ayodhya and a tense situation arose on Dec 6 of the same year. The demolition of Babri Masjid again showed the failure of secularism & multiculturalism. Thus we see that the advantages of multicultural society are not present currently in the Indian society. As of now, the horrors of communalities and religious differences have torn a part a country rich in culture & heritage. But it can be said that with the advent of modern education and globalization of the younger generations we could move towards a utopian world where cultural differences would not exist.

THE CHALLENGES OF MULTICULTURALISM IN INDIA:

The early 1970s marked the beginning of multicultural movement first in Canada and Australia then in USA , UK ,Germany and elsewhere. India has historically been a multicultural society. India has about 1,632

different languages and dialects. There are 22 official languages in the Indian Constitution and 2011 census report declares that about 79.80% of the population is Hindus, 14.23% Muslims, 2.3% Christians, 1.72% Sikhs, 0.7% Buddhists, 0.37% Jains and 0.66% of other religions. Society despite the fact that the Indian Constitution declares the state to be secular; religion, language and other such factors persist in the public sphere. Within the large Indian society, each culture's distinct characteristics are still recognizable just like the ingredients in a salad bowl, which contribute to the overall composition of the salad bowl.

Among the cultural elements of India the ideologies like Sarva Dharma Sam bhava, Unity in diversity, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam present. This elements are seen somewhere in the principles of multiculturalism. The constitution of India has followed multiculturalism by providing the provisions related to minority protection and preventing discrimination based on race, religion, caste.

However it is indeed tragic that in the recent past, multiculturalism in India has become a battleground. A variety of societal movements were responsible for sowing the seeds of multicultural society. Various forms of identity politics immerse on the basis of religion, caste. Identity politics has created the culture of "us and them". Repeated incidents of terror attacks have widens the charms between the Hindus and Muslims. There is growing bigotry in other spheres as well. Multiculturalism in India priorities the good of the specific groups over the good of the whole, undermining the common good in favour of a minority interest. It creates the tensions between the people belonging to different backgrounds. Multiculturalism may lead to a radical movements in the Indian societies. It creates the tensions between the different groups of people who belongs to the different cultures different cast and different religions. There is no doubt that multiculturalism accept all the cultures equally but every time the citizens are under the pressure, they have the fear that they may losing their cultural identity due to the multicultural societies.

CONCLUSION:

India is known for unity in diversity and a thriving democracy from the past 75 years. This is because the Indian multiculturalism accepts this diversity and thus strengthened democracy by giving variety and equal status to all communities. Threat to multiculturalism Comes when a group starts thinking in a narrow way considering themselves the superior to others and show discrimination and animosity to other groups. Against this discrimination posed by multiculturalism , every Indian should uphold that unity and integrity of nation, maintain the peace and harmony, observed the fundamental duties ,respect the fundamental rights and the freedoms guaranteed under the constitution to all sections of the people. Everyone should promote the Right understandings of religions ,stress the Common Core of all religions. It is the duty of every citizen to build up the public opinions against Communalism, religious fundamentalism, religious and cultural discrimination.

Today India need not just a "Culture of Democracy" but a "Democracy of Cultures." The Indian people must the right to have and to express the multiple identities of language, of region ,of religion within the framework of common citizenship .It's our duty that we must not allow " Multicultural India" to become a "Monochromatic India".

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