



## UNDERSTANDING MULTICULTURALISM: REFRACTION ON POLITICAL CULTURE OF MODERN INDIA

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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In the history of evolution of state system in India, multicultural characteristic is found as a significant element in the policy of political administration. Since time immemorial, diverse social groups constituted on traditional institutions like, race, caste, linguistic, religious, ethnicity, cultural, regional and sub-regional etc. have been living in Indian territory. The geographical location, history, and the evolution of social structures in greater Indian society have contributed to the emergence of a unique multi-cultural identity that have produced its diversity. The diversity is later integrated by political administration. Even though India is having diverse nationality with dissimilar social lives of people, it has been surviving as a Indian nation state. So, in the academic study it is very significant to understand how the political practitioners have been maintaining to retain India as a multicultural state. The present paper has made an attempt to rediscover on how multiculturalism have become the legacy of Indian state. It also tries to make an exploration about challenges, opportunity and the future of Indian multicultural state.

**Keywords:** *Multiculturalism, Race, Language, Caste, Ethnicity, Religion, Secularism*

### Introduction

Multiculturalism is an amalgamation of respecting cultural values of different social groups based on race, language, religion, caste, ethnicity, nationalities, languages, religions, ethnicity, gender, class and region. The sovereign state who respects and protects the value of cultural rights of different social groups living in its territory is called multicultural state. In a multicultural state, a common political culture is evolved through political socialization where every social group is participant in socio-political contribution. In the history of evolution of state system in India, multicultural characteristic is found as a indispensable element. Since time immemorial, India is having a diverse sub-cultural groups constituted based on traditional institutions like, race, language, religion, caste, ethnicity, region, gender and class. The geographical location, history, and the evolution of social structures in greater Indian society have contributed to the emergence of a unique multi-cultural identity that have produced its diversity. The diversity is later integrated by political administration. Even though India is having diverse nationality with dissimilar social values and lives of people, it has been surviving as a nation state. So, in the academic study it is very significant to understand how the political practitioners have been maintaining to retain India as a multicultural state. The present paper has made an attempt to rediscover on how multiculturalism have become the legacy of Indian state. It also tries to make an exploration about challenges, opportunities and the future of Indian as a multicultural state.

### Objectives

- Understanding Indian multiculturalism through three theoretical established classifications.
- Exploring the challenges and opportunities of Indian multiculturalism.

**Methodology:** For the present study, data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are derived from both indirect non participatory observations and intellectual views. Secondary data are derived from related literary works, articles and documentary films. Descriptive and analytical approaches have been applied to analyse the data findings from both the primary and secondary sources. The study is limited to understand the positive and negative impact of multiculturalism constituted by the cultural value of race, language, religion, caste and ethnicity on Indian nation-state.

## **Multiculturalism**

The term, multiculturalism has been used in the discipline of humanities and social sciences by humanities, social scientists, analysts, authors and academicians. Among the social sciences, the idea is found to be used extensively in Sociology and Political Science. In sociology, the term is used as a synonym for ethnic pluralism. It is also used to denote cultural pluralism in which various ethnic and cultural groups exist in a single society. The word is also used to describe a mixed ethnic community region or state where multiple cultural traditions exist. The term, multiculturalism is defined in the discipline of Political Science as the capacity of the state to deal with cultural plurality within its sovereign borders effectively and efficiently. So, it can be defined as a political ideology that involves the multiple policies for the for the achievement of unity in diversity . John Burgess, an American Political Scientist describes it as a "salad bowl" and as a "cultural mosaic", in contrast to a "melting pot". So, the present paper describes it as an idea of having a integrated socio-political culture by synthesizing cultural values of different races, languages, religions, castes, ethnicity, classes and genders.

Political theorists classify multiculturalism it into three categories, i.e. liberal multiculturalism , pluralist multiculturalism and cosmopolitan multiculturalism.

### **Liberal Multiculturalism**

Liberal multiculturalism refers to the political culture where individuals are free to exercise their individual choices. They are entitled freedom in leading their private lives without any interference from the state agencies. In addition to that, individuals are free to express their racial, language, religious, ethnic, caste and class identities.

### **Pluralist Multiculturalism**

The term pluralist multiculturalism refers to the synthesis of cultural values that other communities possess. In pluralist multiculturalism, all the values of various sub-cultures is respected and tolerated, regardless of how different they are.

### **Cosmopolitan Multiculturalism**

Cosmopolitan multiculturalism is the latest classification of multiculturalism which is found in the contemporary liberal democratic states. It is the result of the cultural impact of globalization. Cosmopolitan multicultural states recognizes the dynamics of the culture.

## **Discussion and Findings**

### **Multi-culturalism in India**

The term multi-culture has a broad meaning. It incorporates the cultural values of the people belonging to different races, languages, religions, castes, ethnicity, classes, genders. At the same time, it also socialize the people to get adjusting themselves in multi-cultural platform. The multicultural state provides equal rights to all the different cultural or racial groups in a society. India is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the globe. The fundamental law of Indian state defines that India is a multicultural state. The preamble to the constitution of India speaks about secularism and justice by providing cultural and religions rights. Article 29(1) of the Indian Constitution protects the interests of the minority groups by providing them the right to conserve their culture, language and script.

### **Linguistic Diversity**

According to the data recorded in 2011 linguistic census that released in 2018, 19,500 languages and dialects are spoken as mother tongue in India. Out of the total number of language spoken by the people of various communities, only 22 languages have been recognized as official languages which are listed in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The 22 official languages of India are Assamese which is spoken in Assam got recognition in 1950, Bengali which is spoken in West Bengal got recognition in 1950, Gujarati which is spoken in Gujarati got recognition in 1950, Hindi which is spoken in the states of North India got recognition in 1950, Kashmiri which is spoken in Jammu & Kashmir got recognition in 1950, Kannada which is spoken in Karnataka got recognition in 1950, Malayalam which is spoken in Kerala got recognition in 1950, Marathi which is spoken in Maharashtra got recognition in 1950, Odia which is spoken in Odisha got recognition in 1950, Punjabi which is spoken in Punjab got recognition in 1950, Sanskrit which is spoken in Karnataka (Shivamogga District) got recognition in 1950, Tamil which is spoken in Tamil Nadu got recognition in 1950, Telugu which is spoken in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana got recognition in 1950, Urdu which is spoken in Jammu & Kashmir, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh got recognition in 1950, Sindhi which is spoken in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh got recognition in 1967, Konkani which is spoken in Goa got recognition in 1992, Manipuri which is spoken in Manipur got recognition in 1992, Nepali which is spoken in Sikkim, North Bengal got recommission in 1992, Bodo which is spoken in Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and North Bengal got recognition in 2004, Dogri which is spoken in Jammu and Himachal Pradesh got recognition in 2004, Maithili which is spoken in Bihar and Jharkhand got recognition in 2004, Santhali which is spoken in West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha got recognition in 2004.

### **Religious Diversity**

Religion is one of the constituents of multiculturalism. According to the data recorded in 2011 religious census that released in 2018, India has 79.80% of Hindu population, 14.23% of Muslims, 2.3% of Christians, 1.72% of Sikhs, 0.7 % of Buddhists, 0.37% of Jains, 0.66% of other minor religions. The data reveals that majority of India is Hindus, but religious minorities are sizable in numbers. India does not have state religion. The preamble to the Indian constitution echos to have India as a secular state. Therefore, the Indian state upholds religious integration and tolerance by entitling religious rights.

### **Ethnic Diversity**

India is a home of multi ethnic social groups having diverse and distinct culture. India has more than 2,000 different ethnic groups. Significant diversity within in almost every regions of India is found. In those regions, the own distinct mixture of ethnicity, traditions and culture is also observed. Among those ethnic groups tribes are recognized as indigenous social group. As per the provision of Article 342 of Indian constitution, tribes who have distinct tribal identity and who are socioeconomically backward are enlisted as Scheduled Tribes (STs). The Article 342 provides for enlisting tribes as STs State and Union Territory wise. The 2011 Census of India has accounted 104 million STs population representing 8.6% of the country's population. The tribes of India are found throughout the country largely in forest and hilly regions. There are 734 tribes are enlisted in Article 342.

### **Racial Diversity**

The migration history of human civilization in the present territory of Indian states tells that the Negritos were the first racial groups that came to India. They are now found in Kerala and the Andaman Islands. Kadar, Irula and Puliyan tribes of Kerala are the decedents of this race. The Porto-Australoids arrived to India just after the Negritos. They came from Australian continent. They are now found in the central India from the Rajmahal hills to the Aravalis. Santhal, Bhil, Gond, Munda, Oraon tribes belong to this race. The Mongoloids who came from Mongolia. These people are found concentrated in the nearby areas of the Himalayas, e.g. Ladakh, Sikkim and in entire North-eastern states of India. Almost all the Mongoloid groups are found to be tribes. The Mediterraneans came to India from the south-west Asia. Now they are mostly found in South Indian states and few population in the north India. The Nordics are the last of the racial groups that came to India. They came from Taiga and Baltic regions. They are Aryan speaking families who are found now in every states of India except in the tribal states of North East India. This racial diversity constitutes the Indian multiculturalism.

### **Caste Diversity**

With view to have ordered society in ancient India, Verna system was introduced. In that system peoples were grouped based on responsibilities. They were identified as Brahmin, who had the responsibility to perform the duty of priest and imparting knowledge, Kshatriya, who performed the duty of rulers, administrators and soldiers, Vanish, who performed the duty of artisans, merchants, tradesmen and farmers, Shudders, who performed the duty of manual labour. Later on, the people who born in line of Verna is called Jat. In the literary works of re-known writers in place of the tern Verna or Jat the word Caste is used popularly. During later and post Vedic period, the system got its rigidity characteristic due to establishment of caste hierarchy. As a result of that many sub-castes emerged which contributed in emerging new caste groups. At present, there are 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes in India, each related to a specific occupation.

### **Findings of Objective 2.1**

The first objective of the study is understanding Indian multiculturalism through three theoretical established classifications. Here, the present study identifies the existence of three categories of multiculturalism in Indian state, i.e. liberal, pluralist and cosmopolitan multiculturalism. The citizen of India are free to exercise their individual choices and lead their private lives without any interference from the state till affecting the cultural life of others. In addition to that, all are free to express their language and religious identities which indicates the existence of liberal multiculturalism.

The Indian socio-political culture is the multiplicities of values of different sub socio-political cultures that the people of the different social group oriented and behaved. The Indian state encourages it's people to respect all the values of various cultures, regardless of how different they are. This indicates the existence of pluralist multiculturalism in India.

In the age of globalization, the impact of different culture from outside the sovereign territorial boundary has been taking place. Indian culture is also no exception from that. As a liberal state, India is adjusting in recognizing the dynamic culture which are the impact of globalization. This characteristic of Indian state reveals that Indian is now adjusting with cosmopolitan multi-culturalism. The social groups of India living in different regions with their diverse way of life in racial, religious, linguistic and ethnic communities are politically integrated and the so called Indian, the common identity of peoples in different social groups is achieved. Relating to the need for sense of belonging and secured identity, it is important to recognize the differences and to balance the multi-polar relations.

## **Finding of Objective 2.2**

The second objective of the study is exploring the challenges and opportunities of Indian multiculturalism. Here, the study reveals that one of the biggest problems that India have been facing is establishing single national official language. Establishment of single national language is recognized as a sophisticated instrument to communicate and to integrate the diverse people. The government of India have been trying to establish Hindi as the national official language. But, on the way of execution of the project, the Indian government faced restriction from many linguist groups who are not familiar to that language which is spoken by the people of North Indian states. On the other hand, semi-federal characteristic of Indian constitution permits to have own state official official language to its federating units, but that move also sometimes faces opposition from minor ethnic linguistic groups results in demanding reintegration of Indian states based on language and recalling State Reorganization Act of 1956.

The constitution of post independent India sets objective to be achieved a society where followers of many religions can live and practice freely. In interns of majority and minority, India is a majority of Hindus and other religious groups are found to be sizable. The constitution of India makes the nation democratic where it indirectly legitimizes the rule of Hindu majority with entitling protective rights to the minority religious group. The present study reveals that due to the majority rule of Hindus who makes the legislation unanimously and executes the policy formulated by them leads to the feeling of deprivation, domination and negligence by the religious minorities. As a result communal tensions occurs which stands obstacle on the way of national integration. One of the biggest issue that Indian multicultural nation has been facing is that politicization of religion. The present study explores that the political practitioners deploys the policy of religious vote bank politics as a winning politics during election. This policy of vested interest of politicians results in moulding of conflicting interest among the religious groups.

The finding of present study derives that usually without the influence of politics and self vested interest, the people of different ethnic groups in different regions respect each other's cultures and traditions. The finding of data from local sources reveals that the people belief in co-existence. The intellectual views reveals that the unity in diversity has been growing in India. The feeling of co-existence is making the country more tolerant.

The World Values Survey of 2013 reported 43.5% of Indians would prefer not to have neighbors of a different race. The most recent survey, however, in 2016, conducted by the World Values Survey, found that 25.6% of the people living in India would not want a person of a different race to be their neighbour or dominant over the sociolect-cultural life of them. So, it has been found that even though the percentage of people who like to live in isolation, but this liking also leads to ethnic conflict. Since North East is the hub of multi--ethnic groups, so, the cases of ethnic conflicts in there have been reported more than other states of India.

The communities constituted by language, religion, ethnicity, caste, class, gender are evolved within the races that migrated in ancient India. So, the origin of today's social groups n be trace back in ancient Indian races. Throughout the evolution of Indian society, racial interactions took place where all the racial groups claimed themselves superior over the others. Still this feeling of superiority and assuming inferiority over others can be observed in the orientation and attitude of people in groups. The present study explores that every racial groups in India nick names other with corrupted and neglected meaning of names which undermines the social relations among them. The feeling of active opposition towards other racial group leads to the opportunity grabbing to discriminate, subjugate and to neglect other racial groups.

The caste system got its hierarchical rigidity characteristic during later and post Vedic period. This characteristics of rigidity still found as a legacy in the social relations among the people belong to different caste groups. The practice of claiming higher identity, social position and privilege results in discrimination and marginalization of the lower caste groups. It creates disadvantage caste by putting restriction in having access to education and employment. It restricts in having upward social mobility and in having equal political representation based on communities. It creates inequality, As a result, it develops the complex sentiment of superiority and inferior among the caste groups who are placed in hierarchical order. The extreme feeling of inferiority and superiority internalizes through the process of socialization which produce the violence among the caste groups and posses threat to the existence of multiculturalism. Despite constitutional provisions and legal protections, discrimination and inequality based on caste still active in various manifestations.

## **Conclusion**

Multiculturalism in India has many opportunities, but at the same time, it can also be perceived as a threat to the nation. It enriches the Indian greater society and broaden its horizons. The people of India recognizes the existence of large amount of sub-cultures. They respects each other's differences of cultural values. They also learn to acknowledge that all cultural expressions are valid. The multicultural society of India provides common platform where the different social groups are

empowered to contribute in its nation building. The people of India have not only developed cultural tolerance but also celebrate the sub-cultural differences. Along with that opportunity, the multiculturalism of India also faces challenges from the point of conflicting and competing interest of majority and minority cultural values where the cultural minority groups has developed a fear-psychosis of losing their cultural identities on the shadow of majority groups' culture. The issue is further added by politicization of cultural differences for electoral gains. Therefore, the study suggests that avoidance of politicization and maintenance of cultural biodiversity is the greatest responsibility of each and every member of civilized society and adopting the ideology of human sustainable development put forward by tribal leader Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma "Live and Let Live".

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