



CONVERSION FROM CULTURAL ASSORTMENT TO MULTICULTURALISM

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Introduction

The ongoing process of globalization continues to dismantle barriers that previously separated cultures, and in the process has facilitated mobility of cross-border population. Globalization is not just an economic phenomenon. Economic transactions cannot take place without parallel flows of ideas, cultural products and people. In fact, the international migration of people lies at the core of the ongoing process of globalization. Migration, development and international relations are thus closely linked. Sociological explanations of migration focus on the importance of both cultural and social capital. Cultural capital refers to knowledge of other societies and the opportunities they offer, as well as information about how to actually go about moving and seeking work elsewhere. Members of a society entertain different beliefs and practices concerning certain significant areas of human life. In fact, most societies today are internally diverse (Mahajan 1999). The management of cultural diversity within the state has become an increasingly prominent issue in recent times both for political actors and the scholars.

Intellectual Variety and Multiculturalism

Culture can never be absent or neutral. Human society necessarily creates and continually modifies cultural norms, goods and associations. All human beings are born into a culture and lead their lives within a cultural context, whatever it may be. Cultural neutrality is impossible, since any development of societal norms will necessarily privilege one conception over all others. Even the establishment of a minimalist libertarian state with the goal of fostering as much cultural freedom as possible would fail to achieve true neutrality, since this political philosophy must make a number of assumptions that not all cultures would accept. Culture should be properly seen as both a prerequisite for individual autonomy and a logical and inevitable consequence of the exercise of that prerogative (Jan.2001). When cultural practices seem to restrict autonomy of individuals and communities, it becomes a problem.

Pluralism permeates our lives. The pluralist world recognizes that there can be many diverse and incompatible conceptual and moral frameworks, many belief systems and ultimate values. Pluralist world gives many answers to one question without any pressure to choose one truth among many. After the collapse of certainties of religion, ethical and scientific arenas, intellectuals tried to spread the concept of pluralism in the world of ideas. Increasing awareness of the extent of the diversity of beliefs, practices and customs of different cultures and different historical epochs has cast doubt on the universality and objectivity of our judgments. Plural, diversity and multiculturalism are very commonly used terms to deal with different ethical, philosophical, religious and cultural beliefs. In our day-to-day life, these words are used interchangeably. The presence of 'many' and different communities are common in these terms but dissimilar in significant ways. Plurality talks about 'many' but is silent on the nature of 'many'; silent about how the multiple forms are structured and how they relate to one another.

Diversity can be defined as the existence of 'many' that are different, heterogeneous and are not commensurable. The concept of multiculturalism endorses the idea of difference and heterogeneity that is embodied in the concept of diversity. Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy which propagates the ways to respond to cultural and religious diversity. Though the term multiculturalism is quite old and complicated, it is still developing and has been quite dynamic. In the recent years, the term is used in two ways that are all too rarely distinguished. One is our lived experience of diversity. The second is multiculturalism as a political process, the aim of which is to manage diversity. The experience of living in a society that is less insular, more vibrant and more cosmopolitan is something to welcome and cherish. It is a case for cultural diversity, mass immigration, open borders and open minds. As a political process, however, multiculturalism means something very different.

It describes a set of policies, the aim of which is to manage and institutionalize needs and rights to shape public policy. The last four decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a cluster of intellectual and political movements led by such diverse groups as the indigenous people, national minorities, ethno-cultural nations, old and new immigrants, and feminists. They represent and practice lifestyles, (PP.235-45) views and ways of life that are different, which are disapproved of in varying degree and discouraged by the dominant culture of the wider society. They want the wider society to treat them equally by respecting their differences rather than showing any discrimination. They cannot realize their identities without necessary freedom and environment conducive to diversity, opportunities and suitable legal arrangements. All these call for profound changes in all aspects of life.

Most modern societies are now multicultural societies. So, the question of whether a society should be culturally plural or multicultural is not really an issue. The issue is the challenges the societies are facing in these multicultural worlds. The varied cultures of society leading to cultural diversity or multiculturalism have brought many conflicts or wars among cultures. Some



movements have now become more international than national. Moreover, nations are getting global status gradually. Culture is playing more ambitious role on the world political stage. Cultures are now becoming the basis of nation-state. Various public institutions and public agencies fail to recognize and respect the particular cultural identity of its disadvantaged minorities. Now the multicultural societies are facing identity crises.

The concern with cultural recognition and rights perniciously diverts attention away from genuine cases of social injustice concerning need of inequalities of opportunity. In this context, Barry argues that multiculturalists often end up in hurting people most in need for assistance. The proposition that all groups are free to pursue their cultural objectives on the same terms remains ill founded. Another concern of multiculturalism is the accommodation of minorities. Now, in most societies, the practices endanger the interests of the minority groups. It is very difficult to find a multicultural society which is not going through this controversy of identities, recognition, justice, citizenship and group differentiated rights of cultural disadvantaged minorities. Multicultural societies face many challenges which make the study of multiculturalism important. Another important aspect of multiculturalism is that it is a continuous process. (Singer 285) articulates this by stating, ‘multiculturalism is still a “perspective in the making” and I don’t think will ever be a “finished product.”’

The Perspective of India

When we talk about India as a multicultural society, the perspective is different from the western form of multicultural societies; India is multicultural within the county. There are different states in India with different languages, caste, religion etc. The 2001 Census of India reports 122 languages and 234 mother tongues (some mother tongues have been mapped to a single language on the basis of their similarity). Given this multitude diversity, India faces many conflicts which are mostly based on religion, caste or language. If you ask them which country you belong to, they will mention the name of their state first.

In addition to cultural diversity across different states/regions, the migration across the states/regions in India is very high. In India, the migration of people is from rural areas to urban areas, which brings cultural diversity within the nation-state of India. Inter-regional migration has also played a crucial role in the process of industrialization and urbanization of India (Chaudhuri 2009). In fact, India in itself is a multiethnic and multilingual society. Further, long-distance migration such as interstate migration is more economic motivated (mainly for better work or employment opportunities in urban areas of developed states of India).

According to the (Census of India 2001) results, in long-distance migration stream, the work/employment is the primary cause of rural to urban migration (that accounts for 31.8 % of total migration). The work/employment amounts to 27.5 % of the total migration and 49.0 % of the male migration. Apart from the economy motivated migration, social factors such as marriage constitutes a major percentage of urban to rural migration (20.7 % of the total migration and 41.3 % of the female migration) (Census of India 2001). Hence, the diversity is within the nation. The next section highlights multiculturalism across nations especially in the context of India. If we talk about the migration of people to other countries in the Indian context, mostly Indians migrate to different countries but the vice versa is limited.

The people of India have accommodated in all walks of life; changed their lifestyle, food habits, language, dress patterns, educational system, working hours etc. This might be due to the technological developments. One of the outcomes of technological developments which have impacted Indian society is offshore industries. Despite the geographic boundaries between nations, technology has seeped in and blurred all distinctions. In fact, it has made all countries boundaryless, and India is no exception.

The industry has more focus on English language. Hence, employees are trained to adapt themselves to the way their clients speak. This industry in a way has enabled the study of English as a language. There is not only mushrooming of English medium schools but also the schools in local languages are depleting rapidly. Most of the respondents agree that the local languages are losing their importance as the society is moving toward English language. While the large number of languages spoken in India does make it a truly diverse nation in terms of linguistic diversity, there is a gradual shift toward the use of English.

Employees organized their lives in terms of the time zone, festival celebrations, styles of communication and language of the clients. To mitigate cultural shock and to facilitate employees to adapt to offshore culture, organizations provide a perfectly simulated environment. After the night’s work, they go to their houses, take rest and get prepared for next day’s work. Thus, the communication with parents, relatives and friends reduces drastically. Whatever interaction they would have is with the colleagues in the same occupation (Edw 2006). Over time, they get isolated from their own community and get accustomed to their colleagues. This increases a positive feeling toward the colleagues and encourages acceptance of their cultural beliefs.

Since the offshore industry is dependent on clients, every activity revolves around customers, including getting holidays. For example, most of the employees are Hindu in their religion and have certain festivals and celebrations. However, a majority of the



respondents reported that it is difficult to get leave during Hindu festivals compared with the festivals on the clients' side such as Christmas or Eid. As a result, the employees in this industry are getting closer to other festivals, and this increased awareness helps in acceptance of foreign cultures.

India has strong values and cultural norms. Respect for seniors is one of them. To acclimatize the employees to offshore culture, the organizational practices are tuned to western culture, such as calling the seniors by their name which is against the Indian culture. Being at their early stage of career, these employees get accustomed to the offshore culture and try to imbibe it. For example, there is a gradual change in the food habits of the employees. The GM of Organization 1 reported that, 'the number of McDonalds in the city has gone up to about 27 after its entry in 1990s.'

Similarly, there are changes in the dressing patterns. Overtly, these employees have shifted their identification from their culture of origin to those preferred in the workplace for task accomplishment. As discussed above, the offshore workers portray the disruptions of their cultural and social lives because of various conditions in which they work, including night shifts, altered social lives and adaptation to different cultural expectations. Theoretical approaches to understanding cultural adaptation are premised on the process triggered by the need to achieve harmony between individuals' perceptual frames of reference, their behavior and their sociocultural environments (Ward et al 2001). In fact, earlier researchers have documented work environmental inputs that can influence cultural adaptation outcomes.

Conclusion

Offshore work has impacted the local culture. The offshore industry is on a growth march, and it has a significant contribution on Indian economy. It is generating employment opportunity for the local people. As observed by Tracy and Trethewey (2005), these employees with different names and languages interact with people of special cultures; the continued disconnection from home culture exemplifies the global-local, multicultural and public-private self-conflicts in which identity and emotional performances are bought and sold as commodities. On the other hand, the industry provides the opportunity to know about the global culture, and hence the mindset of people is becoming global. This increases the acceptance of other cultures and the tolerance toward other cultures. (According to Beck 2008), the blurring of boundaries influences human identity construction which is no longer shaped by the opposition to others; in the negative, confrontational dichotomy of 'we' and 'them.' He argued that tolerance is not defensive, not passive but active, opening toward the others, embracing them, enjoying the difference as enriching and seeing the other as fundamentally the same as ourselves. In this context, multiculturalism is interpreted as "...a political, social, and cultural movement which is aimed to respect a multiplicity of diverging perspectives outside of dominant traditions". As the practices of other countries are migrating to the local country, the local country is gradually transforming from a culturally diverse society to a multicultural society. This adaptation of cultural norms of their clients in their daily lives leads to burgeoning of other industries such as fast food and pubs in the local markets. All these developments are gradually acclimatizing the local people about the western way of life. Finally, these workers portrayed the disruptions of their cultural and social lives because of various conditions in which they work, including night shifts, altered social lives and adaptation to different cultural expectations. All this increases the familiarity with the other culture, and as a result, the acceptability of those cultures in the local country increases and in turn it increases the tolerance for these cultures.

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